

Ideological State Apparatuses and Its Oppositions in Matt Reeves' Film *The Batman*

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ABSTRACT

This article describes how the article tries to explore the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and its oppositions in Matt Reeves' Film *The Batman*. The film of *The Batman*, directed by Matt Reeves, is a 2022 superhero film based on the DC Comics character, Batman. The writers of this article employ a qualitative method, which allows the reader to learn more about the object's background. This movie has deep ideological themes, especially when it comes to Althusser's ideology theory, which underlines how the movie shows the complicated connection between justice, class, and power. The analysis looks at how different political issues are involved since it could demonstrate actions taken by the power structure against those under them. In conclusion, *The Batman* not only explores such superhero aspect in a film, but also how the characters must face various dominations by opposing such ISAs.

Keywords: Ideological State Apparatuses, Louis Althusser, Matt Reeves, *The Batman*

INTRODUCTION

The film of *The Batman*, directed by Matt Reeves, is a 2022 superhero film based on the DC Comics character Batman. It marks a reboot of the Batman film franchise and presents a darker, more grounded interpretation of the iconic character. In this film, Batman is closely related to the Gotham City Police Department (GCPD), especially Gordon as the Inspector. Later being helped by Selina Kyle, Batman tried to stop evil plans of The Riddler to flood Gotham City by destroying its seawalls. The climax of this film then underscores the film's exploration of vigilantism versus justice and raises questions about morality in a corrupt society (Althusser, 2024; Mustopa & Sudarisman, 2022; Ramadhan, 2023). *The Batman* stands out not only for its thrilling narrative but also for its deep psychological exploration of its characters. It involves its focus on realism and character-driven storytelling, making it a significant entry into the superhero genre while challenging viewers to reflect on broader societal issues.

In *The Batman*, Gotham serves as a symbolic space where these ideological structures are both portrayed and critiqued. The film centers around Batman's journey as he navigates a city rife with corruption, injustice, and moral ambiguity. As he seeks to bring justice to Gotham, the film raises questions about the effectiveness and ethical implications of vigilante justice versus institutionalized systems of power, and the way these systems are ideologically structured (Althusser, 2024; Mustopa & Sudarisman, 2022; Ramadhan, 2023).

This film is thick with deep ideological underpinnings especially in Althusserian ideology theory that highlights how the film presents the complex relationship between power, class, and justice. Marxist theory, particularly the Althusserian concept of ideology, provides a useful framework for understanding the way the film constructs and critiques the ideological structures of Gotham City. According to Althusser, ideology is the "imaginary relationship of

individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser, 2024; Hafsa, 2023; Ruuska, 2023). Then, it operates through what he calls Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) such as education, media, religion, and the police. These institutions serve to reinforce the dominant ideology, perpetuating the interests of the ruling class by presenting the world as it is and preventing individuals from recognizing their real social and material conditions.

This is also the aim of this article, that is to bring forward the idea of ISAs regarding the film of *The Batman*. That perspective underlines that every aspect in this world is nothing but always related to power. It also involves various kinds of political issues as it may indicate the dominant's deeds against the subordinate ones.

METHOD

The writers of this article use a qualitative method to examine certain concepts and written data which lead to understand the object of the study. This article explains Ideological State Apparatuses and its oppositions in Matt Reeves' Film *The Batman*. The data of this article is obtained by watching the whole content of the film and the story. This article serves quotations from the film and the sources in order to support the analysis of this article. Content analysis of this article is used as the technique of data analysis to understand the senses of Ideological State Apparatuses and its oppositions in Matt Reeves' Film *The Batman*.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Ideology and Its Ideological State Apparatuses

According to Althusser, ideology plays an important part in maintaining social order and acquiring the power of the ruling class (Althusser, 2024; Eslami & Valizadeh, 2022; Lampert, 2021). Althusser's study focuses on how ideology is a complex structure of beliefs that forms and structures people's consciousness, enabling the capitalist system's reproduction. It is not just a collection of ideas. Ideology "interpellated" people, such as it transforms their identity and ideology according to the goals of the established class. There are three kinds of characteristics that the writers take. First, Ideology is the imaginary relationship that exists between people and their actual situations. Second, Ideology is part of the material reality. And the last, people as subjects are Connected by ideology (Althusser, 2024; Hafsa, 2023; Ruuska, 2023).

First, Ideology is the imaginary relationship that exists between people and their actual situations. People frequently believe they have a clear and logical understanding of the social structure or their place in it, but in reality, they are viewing it through an ideological perspective that simplifies or distorts the complexity of their actual circumstances (Althusser, 2024; Eslami & Valizadeh, 2022; Lampert, 2021). Ideology is not always purely imaginary or a creation of the imagination. Instead, it describes how people view their social reality, which is influenced by ideological systems. The "imaginary" aspect arises from the fact that these points of view and beliefs are often distorted representations rather than true reflections of the real state of reality. What is referred to by "real conditions" are the social structures which influence people's lives (Althusser, 2024; Hafsa, 2023; Ruuska, 2023). The word "real" implies that social structures are founded on true social structures which are present in addition to people's perspectives and result in objective of the ideology.

Second, Ideology is part of the material reality. Ideology has a material existence, meaning that it is present in the practice organizations, and social structures that influence everyday life rather than just existing as a collection of ideas in people's minds (Althusser,

2024; Eslami & Valizadeh, 2022; Lampert, 2021). Many ideological state apparatuses (ISAs), including political groups, the media, churches, schools, and cultural institutions, are symbols of ideology. These institutions are apparent material structures that have a direct impact on people's attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs. Althusser in Rivkin et al., (2015) demonstrates that ideology is not only theorized but also put into practice in the real world (Althusser, 2024; Eslami & Valizadeh, 2022; Lampert, 2021). For instance, schools teach in their students the ideological values of discipline and consideration to authority. Ideological views are spread and reinforced, for example, by family roles, ceremonies related to religion, educational practices, and even common language.

And the last, people as subjects are Connected by ideology. To demonstrate interpellation, there is a case of a police officer yelling, "Hey, you there!" in the street. The person becomes aware that they are a subject of the law when they hear this call. The call instantly places the person being commended in a specific role or position (a subject of the law). Ideological processes create subjects of society, such as law, academy, and family (Althusser, 2024; Eslami & Valizadeh, 2022; Lampert, 2021). Identities and responsibilities of the people are created by the ideologies that surround them. People are not born with Ideologies. The perceptions of people, their duties, and appropriate behavior are formed by the systems Althusser's mention. People's perceptions of themselves and their role in society are shaped by this recognition, which is not passive.

Batman and The Riddler's Conflicting Ideologies in Corrupted Gotham

The Batman is full of perspectives in ideology. It involves what Batman does as proofs of his ideological identity to cope with the wreck of Gotham caused by the evil actions of vigilantes and inabilities of GCPD to deal with it. This condition also underlines the points that this film is telling stories about conflicting ideologies in which various ISAs confronting each other (Althusser, 2024; Mustopa & Sudarisman, 2022; Ramadhan, 2023).

Batman's role is actually ambiguous in this film. It opens with a voiceover from Bruce Wayne, reflecting on his mission to fight crime in Gotham. This introduction immediately establishes Batman's ideological position. He is not just a superhero, but an outsider challenging the city's corrupt political and legal structures (Althusser, 2024; Mustopa & Sudarisman, 2022; Ramadhan, 2023). He describes his efforts to instill fear in criminals, positioning himself as both a symbol of justice and a force of retribution. In this sense, he is a superhero for the people that wants to free them, but he is a vigilante to the police and the evil people.

Batman speaks of "*I am the shadows. I am vengeance.*" at the 10:30 minute mark. He reveals his identity and the philosophy underlying his role as a hero in Gotham City, emphasizing that he is a symbol of fear for criminals. This declaration illustrates Batman's ideological stance as a vigilante outside the law, positioned in contrast to the state institutions he sees as ineffective. From Althusserian's perspective, Batman is challenging the ISAs of law enforcement and the legal system, which he believes are complicit in maintaining the status quo of social inequality and corruption (Althusser, 2024; Cantas & Can, 2022; Perez, 2023; Proctor, 2023). His mission, however, is complicated by the very nature of his methods. As a vigilante, Batman exists outside the ideological and institutional frameworks that typically govern justice. This outsider status highlights the tension between justice as a social contract and justice as his individual's moral choice and obligation.

What Batman does is nothing but his effort to fight the corruption of Gotham's elites. Throughout *The Batman*, the theme of systemic corruption is pervasive. The city's political elites, including the Mayor Don Mitchell Jr., are depicted as being deeply entrenched in

criminal activities. However, The Riddler's revelations about Gotham's leaders, specifically the dark secrets of the Wayne family, expose the deeply embedded ties between the ruling class and organized crime. One of the Riddler's key messages, delivered through a series of riddles and revelations, suggests that Gotham's elite have exploited the city's working class for generations (Althusser, 2024; Cantas & Can, 2022; Perez, 2023; Proctor, 2023). He even accuses Batman or Bruce Wayne for doing the same corruption like other elites. He says, "*You're a part of this too, Wayne. You're just like your father. You're a liar!*" to show The Riddler attempts to implicate Batman in the chaos he has orchestrated.

The Riddler's statement directly critiques the Wayne family's role in perpetuating Gotham's corruption. From Althusserian perspective, the Riddler's accusation highlights how the capitalist elites, including Gotham's political and business leaders, maintain power through deception and exploitation, ensuring the city remains divided along class lines. The Wayne family, as a symbol of wealth and power, is implicated in this system. The film suggests that Gotham's supposed moral decay is not simply a result of individual wrongdoing but rather a structural issue ingrained in the city's fabric—one that extends all the way to its most respected families.

In the above case, Batman does his effort to deal with the evil power in Gotham, but he also must face the Riddler as his enemy. Meanwhile, The Riddler himself is not wrong either because he is also a corruption fighter like Batman. He hates Wayne family and commits crimes to break Wayne's supremacy. Then, the existence of The Riddler is actually an ideological critic to Wayne family that is Batman himself (Althusser, 2024; Cantas & Can, 2022; Perez, 2023; Proctor, 2023).

The Riddler, the film's antagonist, serves as a radical critic of Gotham's corrupt power structures. His actions throughout the film are motivated by a desire to expose the truth behind the city's elite, especially the Wayne family. His final plan is to flood Gotham with water, symbolizing a reckoning for the city's moral decay. The Riddler speaks directly to his followers, "*The truth is... you've been living in a lie. Gotham's rotted from the inside.*" to directly accuses his motivations behind the chaos he has unleashed in Gotham City.

Here, the Riddler positions himself as the truth-teller who exposes the corruption and lies that underpin the city's institutions. From Althusserian perspective, the Riddler functions to awaken Gotham's citizen according to their class consciousness (Althusser, 2024; Cantas & Can, 2022; Perez, 2023; Proctor, 2023). He pushes forward to awaken Gotham's people to the realities of their social and political conditions. His radical actions can be seen as a rejection of the dominant ideology that seeks to maintain the status quo. He is the one that opposes ISAs by showing his ideological method of being violent and extreme to show that liberation must be done so that people may be free from any ideological sleep that actually destroys them inside.

Though Batman and The Riddler have two different ideologies and methods, both of them are fighting for the better Gotham in order to free the citizens from the failure of Gotham's justice system. Throughout *The Batman*, it becomes clear that Gotham's police force, led by Commissioner Gordon, is largely ineffective in combating crime. Despite their best efforts, the police are often shown as either complicit in corruption or overwhelmed by the scale of the criminal activities in the city (Althusser, 2024; Bratter, 2022; Olson, 2023; Lardizabal, 2022). However, Batman still believes in the capabilities of the police, especially Commissioner Gordon, to deal with the evil aspects of the city. Batman chooses to reenact the roles of the police by enforcing the law rather than being violent like what The Riddler does.

Batman's choice to evade violence is because he knows that Gotham is not a simple city, but a complex one. Gotham is a symbol of people's class struggle as this city serves as a

reflection of broader social dynamics, with its stark class divisions and deep-seated inequalities. The film draws attention to the suffering of Gotham's lower class, especially in scenes that depict the widespread poverty and crime in the city's districts (Althusser, 2024; Cantas & Can, 2022; Perez, 2023; Proctor, 2023). This is emphasized in a moment when Batman encounters a group of criminals who openly exploit the city's lower-income areas.

Moreover, Batman knows that there are many people who cannot deal with bigger power than themselves. This saying speaks to the socio-economic divide in Gotham, where the poor are forced into criminality as a means of survival in a system that privileges the rich. The film presents Althusserian critique of capitalist systems that exacerbate class inequality (Althusser, 2024; Bratter, 2022; Olson, 2023; Lardizabal, 2022). The capitalists through their ISAs are always forcing individuals to make moral compromises based on their economic survival. The cycle of crime and poverty in Gotham is shown as an inevitable result of the capitalist system, where the ruling elite perpetuate their dominance while the marginalized struggle to survive.

Morality and Ideologies in *The Batman*

The Batman shows deeper connections of justice, vengeance, morality, and societal corruption. These themes intertwine with complex character dynamics, particularly those of Bruce Wayne or Batman, The Riddler, and Cat Woman, who all challenge traditional moral boundaries. The film's narrative and character arcs offer profound insights into how morality is constructed, questioned, and redefined in a modern context (Althusser, 2024; Cantas & Can, 2022; Perez, 2023; Proctor, 2023).

This film contains various issues of morality regarding Althusserian and Marxian perspectives. In those sense, morality is not merely about the definition of good and bad and to apply goodness deontologically like what Kant says. It is actually about the ambiguous concept of definition of morality in question. Morality is not neutral but power-related. It goes on to the power of who is defining being good and bad. Therefore, it is also about ISAs speaking of defining moral values (Althusser, 2024; Bratter, 2022; Olson, 2023; Lardizabal, 2022). In this film, the characters do not merely follow the definitions of morality, but somehow, they oppose them and underlines their own versions. This is what makes this film interesting to be analyzed as it shows crucial indications of showing morality from the contexts of power.

In the sense of morality of justice, One of the most compelling themes in *The Batman* is Bruce Wayne's struggle between vengeance and justice. Throughout the film, Bruce grapples with his moral compass, seeking to differentiate between right and wrong in the chaotic environment of Gotham City. When Bruce Wayne is giving his voiceover narration at the start of the movie, he reflects on Gotham's moral decay, stating, "*I am vengeance. I am the night.*". This line reveals his interpretation of justice through his eyes as Gotham's protector (Althusser, 2024; Bratter, 2022; Olson, 2023; Lardizabal, 2022). Here, Bruce justifies his actions based on his belief that Gotham's crime cannot be stopped through traditional means. Kantian ethics would argue that Bruce's actions are morally questionable because he is choosing violence and vengeance, rather than acting on a universally accepted moral law. His focus on vengeance rather than law undermines the moral authority that Kantian ethics demands.

What Batman does is actually such opposition to existing ideologies in Gotham. By saying that he is the vengeance, he insists to apply his method to define his own self different from other vigilantes. He is not the evil one, but he is the one that will fight anyone that is corrupted (Althusser, 2024; Bratter, 2022; Olson, 2023; Lardizabal, 2022). By saying that he is the night, he will move silently to deal with the corrupted morality of Gotham. He hates living

under the light like what the elites do. He states himself as the one that has ideology of resistance confronting with the elites with their defined moralities understood in their ISAs.

Indeed, what Batman does is such morality of vengeance that shows his moral dilemma as well. In his own sense, he is the one that wants to show his ideological power by saying that he is the one who has such right to take revenge against Gotham. Meanwhile, what he desires is also senses of subjective indications that are acted out of self-interest and desire for dominance, often challenging societal morals (Althusser, 2024; Bratter, 2022; Olson, 2023; Lardizabal, 2022). In this dilemma, he does such subjective deeds, but what he does is also to oppose such universal moral laws that tend to corrupt his city. Batman then chooses to focus on his own moral code, focusing on personal strength and self-assertion, against his enemies of corrupted vigilantes and elites of Gotham.

In his brutal fight with the criminals in the subway, where he violently dispatches his enemies and seemingly revels in his power, Batman engages in a fight sequence with a group of thugs in a dark tunnel. The scene demonstrates Batman's adoption of vengeance as his primary moral tool. Throughout this film, Batman is an example of an individual who is using his own moral will to assert his dominance, shaping justice according to his own vision of what is right (Althusser, 2024; Cantas & Can, 2022; Perez, 2023; Proctor, 2023). This demonstrates how Batman's actions, while not adhering to conventional morality, are rooted in a Nietzschean desire to overcome weakness and assert control over Gotham (Althusser, 2024; Bratter, 2022; Olson, 2023; Lardizabal, 2022). In Nietzsche's view, Batman's actions may not be intrinsically wrong, but they highlight the tension between traditional moral boundaries and the individual's ability to transcend them. Batman's use of vengeance is driven by personal power and not by societal law enforcement. What he does is solely to defend himself and his city from the corrupted ISAs.

What Batman and The Riddler do are quite the same in revealing the truth in Gotham. Both of them are presented as attempts to uncover the truth about corruption, while also questioning whether exposing the truth justifies the destruction he causes. Their pursuit of truth justifies their actions by claiming that revealing the bad truth about Gotham's leadership will ultimately benefit the people, even if it means causing harm in the short term (Althusser, 2024; Bratter, 2022; Olson, 2023; Lardizabal, 2022). However, the justification of the effects is different from each other because The Riddler tends to destroy compares to Batman who still believes in law enforcement.

Moreover, another dilemma is shown in how Batman deals with his own identity. He is Bruce Wayne who is a millionaire that indirectly also shapes Gotham's corrupted condition. Meanwhile, he is also the vengeance of what the elites and the vigilantes do. He knows that he lives dual identities, but still, he must underline his own individual freedom, choice, and responsibility. In *The Batman*, Bruce Wayne's internal conflict with his dual identity his public persona as Bruce Wayne and his hidden identity as Batman raises important existential questions about authenticity (Althusser, 2024; Bratter, 2022; Olson, 2023; Lardizabal, 2022). Batman's actions, rooted in a desire to avenge his parents' death, can be seen as an attempt to find meaning in a chaotic world. His journey toward authenticity is a major moral theme, as he strives to reconcile his need for vengeance with his desire for a more meaningful existence.

Bruce Wayne's private moment in the Batcave, reflecting on his role as Gotham's protector. He wrestles with whether his actions as Batman are making a difference. He is caught between his desire for vengeance and his responsibility as a symbol of hope for Gotham. Batman's desire to fight for justice, despite the personal cost, highlights his search for authenticity in a world that constantly demands him to conform to the expectations of his alter ego. He later chooses to redeem himself to take him out of ISAs and become the one that

opposes them (Althusser, 2024; Bratter, 2022; Olson, 2023; Lardizabal, 2022). By choosing that way, he emphasizes his hope for forgiveness and the possibility of transformation. He cannot avoid being haunted by his past reality, but he can choose to be the right one with the choices he takes in the present. By choosing to underline vengeance and focus on a more hopeful future, he demonstrates the possibility of moral transformation. Bruce's eventual realization that he must focus on hope and justice, rather than vengeance, also reflects ideals of redemption, showing that it is never too late to change and make amends.

Selina Kyle's Deeds in Opposing ISAs in *The Batman*

Selina Kyle or Catwoman subverts traditional gender roles and challenge power structures. Her effort to defy patriarchal expectations is her choice to oppose ISAs in Gotham. Her actions then also portray ideas of feminism, especially in dealing with male-dominated definitions prolonged by ISAs (Althusser, 2024; Dewangga et al., 2024; Ibrahim & Pasopati, 2024). She is the symbol of a fight for gender equality and autonomy as she fights for justice on her own terms, pursuing personal goals independent of male authority. Selina Kyle is not defined by her relationship to Batman. Rather, she is a complex individual with her own goals, motives, and desires. She fights for justice on her own terms, refusing to be just a side character in Batman's journey.

In a crucial scene where Selina confronts Batman about her missing friend, she states, "*My friend was in the wrong place at the wrong time. He trusted the wrong person... I'm going to get him back*". This line exemplifies her independence and determination to seek justice without Batman's intervention. She is not depicted as a mere love interest or victim but as an active participant in her own narrative, demonstrating her personal agency (Althusser, 2024; Dewangga et al., 2024; Ibrahim & Pasopati, 2024). She is the one who promotes the idea that women can transcend traditional gender roles and societal expectations. In this film, she is shown in choosing to empower herself without relying on others for validation. Selina Kyle's portrayal in *The Batman* reflects post-structuralism values against ISAs as she navigates Gotham's dangerous world without letting herself become a victim of her circumstances.

In the film, Selina's character refuses to accept the role of the helpless woman or the love interest. Instead, she uses her intelligence, skills, and resourcefulness to navigate a dangerous world. She is self-sufficient and makes her own decisions, rejecting victimhood and embracing her ability to act independently (Althusser, 2024; Doe, 2024; Ibrahim & Pasopati, 2024). When Selina speaks to Batman in a tense moment on the rooftop, she says, "*You don't know what it's like, living in this city. I don't want to end up like my mother.*". This line reveals Selina's determination to control her own fate and reject the tragic narrative that could have been imposed on her (Althusser, 2024; Ibrahim & Pasopati, 2024; Smith, 2023). Selina's empowerment and choice in the film, from taking control of her own investigation to confronting powerful men, demonstrate her autonomy and rejection of traditional gender roles.

Moreover, Selina Kyle's story in *The Batman* indicates how women are restrained by different forms of oppression such as race, gender, class, and sexuality intersect and impact individuals in complex ways. Indeed, women in this film are represented as the victims of the male-dominated ISAs. The character of Selina proves this issue by highlighting how her identity is shaped not only by her gender but also by her background as a woman living in a patriarchal society (Althusser, 2024; Doe, 2024; Ibrahim & Pasopati, 2024). Her experiences are informed by the intersection of these identities, which complicates her struggle for justice. Selina's character is not just oppressed by her gender but also by her class background. She is an orphan who was raised in the gritty, violent underworld of Gotham, and her struggles are compounded by both her gender and her social status.

When Selina confronts Falcone about her father's criminal actions (minute 1:59:10), it is clear that she is not just a victim of patriarchal oppression but also of the systemic inequalities present in Gotham's class structures. In *The Batman*, Selina's struggle is shaped by her identity as both a woman and a person from a marginalized socioeconomic background, adding depth to her character's fight for justice (Althusser, 2024; Ibrahim & Pasopati, 2024; Smith, 2023). This situation is such clear indication of the cruelty of ISAs in oppressing women. Selina is not presented with many choices, but she knows that she must fight against what is forced to her situations.

Selina's relationship with Batman is also quite problematic since she is quite allergic to males who tend to dominate women. In *The Batman*, the relationship between Batman and Selina Kyle is charged with tension, desire, and unconscious desires that shape their interactions and their respective identities (Althusser, 2024; Ibrahim & Pasopati, 2024; Smith, 2023). Their dynamic reflects the psychoanalytic struggle for recognition, self-definition, and the complexities of gendered identities. The relationship between Batman and Selina is not just one of mutual attraction but also a psychological struggle for identity and recognition. Both characters are defined by their trauma, and their connection is fueled by an unconscious desire for validation and understanding.

At last, in the final confrontation at the end of the film, Batman and Selina stand on the rooftop, both confronting their internal struggles. This scene highlights the tension between them and the unconscious forces that drive their actions. They have the same intentions to fight the injustice, but they are also ensnared with backgrounds of being an oppressor as a male and a victim as a woman (Althusser, 2024; Doe, 2024; Ibrahim & Pasopati, 2024). In *The Batman*, the relationship between Batman and Selina is a reflection of infinite struggle, as they both seek recognition and understanding in a world defined by trauma and repression.

CONCLUSION

Using Althusser's theory of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), the movie shows how elite institutions, the media, and the police influence society's moral and social structures. In Gotham, the ISAs are presented as tools that uphold and reinforce the dominant ideology, maintaining the stability of the existing power structures while also encouraging opposition. The police, who are meant to enforce the rule of law, are shown as being closely connected with Gotham's criminal class, symbolizing the weaknesses of standard authority figures. By manipulating public opinion and hiding the city's deeper corruption, the media in the movie strengthens the power of the ruling class. Despite breaking the law, Batman comes to represent opposition to the status system. His action of violence and criminal justice exposes the limitations of disagreement inside a system that is difficult to reform, even as his actions deal with the corruption.

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