

## **Class Struggle In Bong Joon-Ho's Film Parasite: An Analysis by Using Marxist Theory**

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### **Abstract**

*Class Struggle in Bong Joon-ho's Film Parasite: An Analysis by Using Marxist Theory.* Class struggle is the continual conflict between the capitalist and working classes for economic and political power. In this study, the researcher will analyze the class struggle in Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite* by using Marxist theory. This study will be using descriptive qualitative research as its design. The purposes of this study are: 1) to find out the portrayal of social condition of the lower class in Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite*; 2) to find out the classification of social class in Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite*; 3) to find out the impacts of the class struggle toward the upper class and lower class in Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite*; 4) to find out if there is any specific behavior that the upper class frequently do to the lower class in the Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite*. The data in this study will be analyzed by using Miles and Huberman's theory, which consists of three flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The result of this study shows that Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite* portrays the social condition of the lower class as the working class for the proletariat. In this film, the classification of social class is divided into two classes: the lower class, which is the Kim family and the upper class, which is the Park family. The impacts of class struggle that happened in this film are the Kim family's jealousy and desire to infiltrate and creep into the Park family's house, which resulted greed and violence. There is also a specific behavior that the upper class frequently do to the lower class in this film, which is the upper class' act of being annoyed by the lower class' smell.

**Keywords:** Class Struggle, Marxist Theory, Film, Bong Joon-ho

### **1. Introduction**

#### **Background of the Study**

According to Kennedy (1995:47), literature is a kind of art which offers illumination and pressure. It gives the event, imagination, beauty, fact, event that are born from the process of contemplation or observation of social phenomena as living the impact of the reality and the restlessness of human being. The purpose of literature itself is to give entertainment and pleasure to people who read it. But, literature does not only give us pleasure and entertainment, it also teaches us philosophy to educate.

Related to the teaching and learning English, it is important for literature to be taught to the students. In literature, there are some basic knowledge that can be learned by students,

such as: vocabulary or structures. According to Collie and Slater (1990:3), there are four purposes of using literature in the classroom for a language teacher, which are: language enrichment, cultural enrichment, valuable authentic material, and personal involvement. Literature is the representation of human's creativity that tries to describe and retell the reality that happens in a society. There is a close connection between literature and society, because the social function of literature is how it involves itself in the middle of social life (Semi, 1989:56).

In every society, there are many problems that should be faced. One of those problems is class conflict, which is a term that can be found in Marxist theory. This term defines a conflict situation between different classes in a society. This term also called as class struggle and usually pointed to struggle of lower class or proletariat (lower class) class to fight higher class or bourgeoisie (upper class) class. According to Karl Max, mostly class conflict occurs because of the economic status in the most societies.

In this era of technology, film can be used as a medium to tell an idea in form of story, added with act and scoring like drama in literature. Film has much characterization like another literary work. Like the poetry, film communicates through metaphor, imagery, and symbol. Like the drama, film communicates visually and verbally; visually, through action and gesture and verbally, through dialogue. Finally, like the novel, film compresses or expands time and space, travelling back and forth freely within their wide borders. (Boggs and Petrie, 2008:3)

Just like the films on previous studies, Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite* also raises issues that often occur in the society. As Marx and Engels (2008:7) said, the class struggle will always in the history of all societies. In Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite*, there are much complicated social problems which are very interesting to be discussed, those problems are class struggle issue and the conflict between social classes.

The researcher chooses this film because it reflects the social condition about class struggle that happens in South Korea. South Korea is one of the countries among developed nations that has the largest gaps between rich and poor. This condition makes several problems and struggles that can be found in South Korea, such as: decaying job markets, rocketing house prices, and a record of low birth rate as couples in South Korea put off having babies since they are struggling with harsh work and living conditions and low pay. The large gaps between rich and poor make the large difference in the living of upper and lower class, too. The upper class in South Korea usually lives in fancy residences, which are free from smell, rubbish, and dirt, with most houses are hidden behind spiked fences, high walls, and security cameras. Meanwhile, the lower class in South Korea usually lives in a sub-basement near the train station, in a narrow street, where they have to walk in long staircases to reach their house. They usually don't even get the phone signal there.

The reality of the social condition in South Korea and its relation to the social distinctions that cause class struggle in this film intends the researcher interest to analyze the struggle between haves and have-nots described in Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite*. Based on the

background of the study above, there are four research questions in this research: How does Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite* portray the social condition of the lower class?, How is the classification of social class in Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite* explained?, How does the class struggle impact the upper class and lower class in Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite*?, Is there any specific behavior that the upper class frequently do to the lower class in the Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite*?

## 2. Literature Review

### Marxist Theory

Abcarian (1998) stated that Marxist theory analyzes literary works to show how people contribute to the struggle against oppression and exploitation or how people support the dominant social class, wittingly or unwittingly. But, it focuses more on the themes and content of the literature than its form. It also often look at literature for the "hidden" messages, such as: reflecting class struggle and reinforcing ideas of a dominant class and illusions about reality. It shows that literary works are either challenge or support economic oppression of the dominant social class, so they are essentially political. On the other hand, literary work also criticizes the practice of human exploitation in the producing, distributing, and exchanging mode which gives a big motivation to the working class to struggle against the exploitation.

The main point of Marxist theory of class is the distinction between classes, which causes class struggle or class conflict, classification of social class, and class consciousness. According to Eagleton (2002), Marxist is a scientific theory about society and action to change it (society or the system). It believes that class are produced by economy conflict (rich, middle, poor) and class produces conflict. Marx thought that society would like to be divided into 3 classes or we can say two main classes. Harold (1959) stated that society is splitted up into two great classes that directly face each other, which are: bourgeoisie (upper class) and proletariat (lower class). Maclver (1937) stated that by a social class, any portion of a community which is marked off from the rest, primarily to social status, not by limitations arising out of language, locality, function, or specialization. This class distinction makes a conflict where there are limitations of contact between those two classes that live in different world.

## 3. Methods

The researcher will use Marxist theory to analyze Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite*. Marxist theory has some roles in analyzing this research, which will be explained below:

### Class Struggle

According to Marx in Martha (2011:20), class struggle is the continual conflict between the capitalist and working classes for economic and political power. It can also be called as

class war. Wilczynski (1984) stated that there are many ways of class struggle to reach higher social class, which is practiced by people of lower class. The most common ways are through violence, proletarian revolution, and dictatorship of proletariat (lower class).

### **Classification of Social Class**

Giddens (1991) stated that class is a community of people who stand in a common relationship to the means of production - the means by which they gain a livelihood. The researcher will use the theory of classification of social class based on Marxist as a concept to answer the second research question, which is: How is the classification of social class in Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite* explained?

#### **Bourgeoisie (Upper Class)**

Rossiter (1960) stated that bourgeoisie (upper class) is a class that rules in order to exploit, and exploits in order to rule so it is in the dominant position. Furthermore, according to Suseno (1999), the bourgeoisie (upper class) is the upper class that dominates production, they are not necessary to work because they can live by the work of proletariat (lower class). This class is the one who stands above the proletariat (lower class).

#### **Proletariat (Lower Class)**

The proletariat (lower class) is the class who is weaker in this social structure. In every such society there is an oppressed class, a class that is both exploited and ruled, and in Marx's age this was the proletariat (lower class). (Rossiter, 1960) They are the owners of their labor power (the ability to work), with no resource than the ability to work with their physics and minds. In other word, they are exploited to make a profit from bourgeoisie (upper class)'s property.

### **Class Consciousness**

Based on Marxist theory, class consciousness is an understanding of social and/or economic class relation of one to others, as well as an awareness of the class to which people belong in the context of the larger society based on economic rank. Class consciousness also involves an awareness of defining economic and social characteristics of the society's own class. Class consciousness is also one of the main points of Marxist theory, which focuses on the relation between workers and owners within a capitalist economy based on the economic, social, and political aspects. The theory of class consciousness based on Marxist will be used by the researcher as a concept to answer the first research question, which is: How does Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite* portray the social condition of lower class?

In addition, Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam (1990) stated that in self-consciousness, people tend to see themselves as individuals who are isolated, and they work individually rather than collectively. Žižek (2010) also stated that the idea of class consciousness is a state where individuals acknowledge their (typically lower) status within class relations where revolutionary change might be possible. But, Marx claims that when this lower

class/proletariat acknowledge themselves as a class and collect their strength, they will rise up in revolution and overthrow their bourgeoisie masters.

What makes this film different from the other films on the previous studies is how Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite* presents its themes, which is something we have all seen in our daily life and it is completely undeniable. Whatever was happening to the all of the Kim's family as the protagonist family is also happening to millions or even billions of people or families all around the world. So, it is not hard to imagine to meet people or family like them in our real life since Bong Joon-ho definitely managed to portray this part successfully.

Another reason why Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite* is such an amazing and a masterful film is its twists and turns in the plot. Not many directors can successfully combine and mix a film which consists of many different genres. But, Boong Joon-ho successfully combines horror, thriller, drama, and black comedy in this film. It makes this film became a huge topic in the worldwide's film industry because it has numerous oscar nominations: *Best Picture, Best Director, Best Foreign Language Film, Best Original Screenplay, Best Production Design, and Best Film Editing*.

This study entitled "Class Struggle in Bong Joon-ho's Film *Parasite*: An Analysis by Using Marxist Theory" will use descriptive qualitative research design, which is defined as a research method through verbal description rather than through number, which focuses on understanding and meaning. (McMillan in Yunus, 2014) Djunaidi and Fauzan (2012) stated that qualitative research uses expressions, words, and actions from the subject, not using statistic and quantification to analyze the data. Moleong (1989) also stated that a qualitative research does not need to use either enumerating or calculation. Peck (1993) stated that the literature's sociology explains literature as an important tool in conveying a message about the reality of those around society to them. In addition, Kennedy (1995) also stated that sociological approach is a sociological criticism which examines a written or received literature in the political, culturun, and economical context. In this research, the researcher wil use sociological approach to analyze the class struggle of the lower class in Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite* based on the Marxist theory. The findings were presented to answer the research questions of this study; 1) How does Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite* portray the social condition of lower class?; 2) How is the classification of social class in Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite*?; 3) How does the class struggle impact the upper class and lower class in Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite*?; 4) Is there any specific behavior that the upper class frequently do to the lower class in Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite*?

#### 4. Result

The findings of this study showed the portrayal of social condition of lower class, the classification of social class, the impacts of class struggle toward the upper class and lower class, and any specific behavior that the upper class frequently do to the lower class in Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite*, which are based on the dialogue and script of the film. The finding

of the portrayal of social condition of lower class in Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite* is based on Marxist theory. Rummel (1977) stated that a class is defined by the ownership of property. In this film, the portrayal of social condition of lower class is showed by the reflection of the Kim family, who was defined as the lower class, regarding to their ownership of property. They represent South Korea's so-called dirt spoons, the urban poor, who lived in a semi-basement in the congested city. The Kim family was described as a family from the lowest part of society. They lived in a apartment's basement where they could not even get a phone signal. They had to hunt for stray Wi-Fi which were not password-protected. The only way to get Wi-Fi signal was by crawling up next to their toilet. They didn't even have a proper job, they made little money for living only by folding pizza boxes. Since the Kim family lived in a dank apartment-basement, there were lots of bug in there, too. They had to live in a condition where they even leave their windows open to get a free bug-killing street fumigation. They had to desperately hold their breathing so that their house could be free from those bugs, at least. There were also drunk people who frequently urinates in front of their house's window. When it was raining, the alley to Kims' house would be covered with knee-deep water. Kims' basement house, was worse, would be filled with dirty water up to their chest.

## 5. Discussion

The finding of the classification of social class in Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite* is based on Harold (1959) who stated that there was a class classification in which the characters are divided into two great classes that directly face each other: upper class, which is a class that is called as bourgeoisie (upper class), Park family; and lower class, which is the working class and called as proletariat (lower class), Kim family. One of the unique symbolism in this film was that the use of stairs. The Kims who lived in a dank apartment-basement, accessed their house by climbing down the stairs, whereas the Parks who lived in a mansion, on a top of the hill, accessed their house by climbing up the stairs.

The finding of the impacts of class struggle toward the upper class and the lower class in this film is based on Marxist theory. Marx in Martha's research (2011:20), class struggle is the continual conflict between the capitalist and working classes for economic and political power. In this film, it showed that the existence of different classes caused the happening of class struggle. The impacts of class struggle were the Kim family's jealousy and desire to infiltrate and creep into the Park family's house, which resulted greed and violence. After finding and analyzing the portrayal of social condition of lower class, the classification of social class, the impacts of class struggle toward the upper class and lower class, and a specific behavior that the upper class frequently do to the lower class in this film, the researcher gives some conclusions and suggestion to the readers.

## 6. Conclusion

*Parasite* is a black comedy thriller film directed by Bong Joon-ho which is premiered on 21 May 2019. It talks about The Kim family, including mother Chung-sook, father Ki-taek, son Ki-woo and daughter Ki-jung - are a poor family who lives in a half basement apartment in a busy lower class district of Seoul which is shabby and cramped. Without even knowing it, they, especially Mr. And Mrs. Kim, literally smell of poverty. Ki-woo is the one who dreams about getting out of poverty one day by going to university. Despite not having that university education, Ki-woo is chosen to take over his university student friend Min, to tutor Park Da-hye. The Parks are a wealthy family who have lived in their modernistic house for four years. While Mr. and Mrs. Park are all about status, Mrs. Park has a simpleminded mentality and temperament so it is easy for Ki-woo to lie about his education to get the job. After getting the job, Ki-woo learns that Mrs. Park is looking for an art therapist for her son, Da-song. Ki-woo quickly recommends his professional art therapist friend “Jessica”, who actually is his own sister, Ki-jung. Ki-woo begins to envision himself in that house, and thus the Kims start a plan to replace all the existing servants in the Parks by using fake identity. One of the unique symbolism in this film was that the use of stairs. The Kims who lived in a dank apartment-basement, accessed their house by climbing down the stairs, whereas the Parks who lived in a mansion, on a top of the hill, accessed their house by climbing up the stairs.

The researcher analyzed the class struggle and class conflict that happened in this movie, from the portrayal of social condition of the lower class in this film, to the classification of social class in this film, and the impacts of class struggle toward the upper class and the lower class in this film. Finally, the analysis ended when the researcher found out a specific behavior that the upper class frequently do to the lower class in this film.

## **7. Suggestions**

There are some suggestions that would be proposed concerning the conclusion above, which are:

1. The series of unfortunate things which happened because of the Kims’ desire to infiltrate and creep into the Park family’s house. The Kims envy the wealth that the Parks own, which brings them to reckless decisions and nothing but sorrow in the end.. Therefore, the readers could take a note that envy can make us blind. The idea of “having what someone else has and we don’t have will lead us to a happier life” is a fantasy. We all have our different circumstances. And each existence is unique.
2. The researcher hopes this study would be useful as the media of English teaching and learning, especially for teaching literature subject to the learners. This study could be used as an example in analyzing class struggle in literary works. The social class and class struggle which are discussed in this study would also improve the learners’ critical thinking skill.

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