

Analysis of Parasite (2019): A non-traditional Oscar award-winning movie depicting wealth inequalities with parasitic relationships in South Korea

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Parasite (Bong Joon Ho, 2019) - is the first Oscar award-winning movie not produced in English. Even though the mainstream Hollywood movie industry did not make *Parasite*, it is still well recognized as one of the most prestigious awards in the film entertainment industry. With extraordinary cinematography and theoretical lenses, audiences can experience the relevance of a capitalistic society through Bong Joon Ho's camera perspectives. In this paper, I will continue to analyze the movie *Parasite* with its social critique through Bong's perspectives.

In this movie, Bong presents class disparities amidst social conflicts to audiences, while most of the plot happens within Mr. and Mrs. Park's upper-class mansion. Bong sets up a normal world with a great socioeconomic gap between the rich and the poor, the upper class and the working class, the Parks and the Kims; the normal world is established through the first act, allowing the audiences to establish their experience in the movie (Barsam and Monahan, 2021). It is also common to have the working class fighting against each other for social mobility. Meanwhile, the upper class is often oblivious to their exploitation in competition by the working class. More importantly, audiences understand the story through an omniscient narration - unrestricted access to all aspects of the narrative, including any character's experiences, perceptions, and information that no character knows (Barsam and Monahan, 2021). As the story progresses, the rising action continues to increase - where the tension in the film provokes the audience's engagement with the ongoing narrative (Barsam and Monahan, 2021). The Kims have eventually conned their way, one by one, to work for the Parks family as a tutor, driver, housekeeper, and art therapist. The Kims have successfully removed all their previous employees to take over the Park's house. The story reaches its climax when the protagonist faces their major obstacles (Barsam and Monahan, 2021) - when the Kims and the previous housekeeper have to wrestle for their working positions. Rather than having one main antagonist as a character - one that actively opposes the protagonist, the main characters (Barsam and Monahan, 2021); Bong uses the deprivation of inequality to shape the victimized experience for all characters. As the story introduces the third "parasite," the movie signals through a powerful rainstorm that eventually leads to a catastrophic end - the massacre of the rich and the poor.

On the other hand, *Parasite* uses consistent elements of mise-en-scene and camera techniques to match its thematic critiques of capitalism. When the Kims escaped from the Parks' house, they ran downhill as the heavy rainstorm continued. The motion of running downhill was captured from seven different shots, where a long shot captures the entire subject from head to toe and places that subject in their surroundings (Barsam and Monahan, 2021), as well as using extreme long shots which capture from an even greater distance, and people would appear as small dots in the landscape (Barsam and Monahan, 2021). Such camera lenses further juxtapose the Kims as they run across the rich neighborhood. The extreme contrast in scale echoes their false success at the Park's house as they return to their reality. Each long take is intended to appear as a single, uninterrupted take (Barsam and Monahan, 2021), capturing the Kims as they run downstairs towards the flooded basement, signifying their temporary celebration with luxurious food and liquor at the Park's was nothing more than an illusion. The false aspiration for wealth was accompanied by non-diegetic and diegetic sounds - a source within the film's world and outside that world are heard only by audiences. The combination of a heavy rainstorm and dramatic orchestra composes an appalling foreshadowing of the destruction of Kim's basement. *Parasite* is one of the very few films that use verticality to symbolize social stratification, while Bong intended to match the metaphors to its literal segregation within the distinctive social status. Using stairs sig-

nifies social mobility, and the camera movement goes up and down according to the Kims' position in the social hierarchy at various movie stages.

Moreover, *Parasite* is an excellent demonstration of the Marxist theoretical lenses in the film - a political theory that involves a constant class struggle between the capitalist class and the working class that provides labor. (Barsam and Monahan, 2021) Even though the Parks and the Kims carry various roles in the social classes, they both interchangeably function as predatory and prey. Using the signature noodle dish "Ram-Don" in *Parasite* as an example, it is originally called "jjapaguri" in Korean. It combines two different packs of cheap instant noodles - a local dish known for its inexpensive cost. However, Mrs. Park specifically mentioned that Mrs. Kim should add the premium Korean beef to "Ram-don," which costs around \$30 per pound. This dish draws the line between the distinctive lifestyle from an upper-class perspective, demonstrating their socioeconomic status even when enjoying a supposedly cheap cuisine. Furthermore, this dish showcases the parasitic relationship between the upper and working classes. As much as the Kims are relying on the Parks for their income, the Parks are incapable of taking care of themselves without the Kims. Both parties are predatory and prey in various positions.

Parasite engaged in cultural theoretical lenses as a part of the cinematography experience for the audiences. I think Bong did an excellent job of echoing the metaphoric cinematography and its conceptual meaning. Moreover, it is a unique movie that uses camera movement of verticality to represent the social hierarchy in place. Being the first Asian movie to win the Oscar Writing Award, the movie highlights Bong's critique of the capitalistic society in South Korea.

Given Bong's viewpoints, it becomes challenging to solely attribute blame to either the affluent segment or the marginalized individuals in society. Ethical judgments about right or wrong become complicated in a society that consistently favors allocating resources to the privileged, perpetuating a generational wealth cycle. Through Bong's depiction, he continues questioning our current society, where laws are created to benefit those with authority and influence. Overall, I think *Parasite* would be a great fit for those eager to learn more about Marxism and the relevance of our capitalistic culture. It is also a good start for those who want to expand their movie exposure in the Hollywood industry.

Works Cited

Monahan, D., & Barsam, R. (2009). *Looking at Movies: Seventh Edition with Registration Card*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2021.

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