

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Problem

Media has been developing throughout the years and it has a crucial role in today's society. These days, in modern mass communication media, Paul du Gay (1997) stated that "the means of global communication through complex technologies has circulate meanings between different cultures on a massive scale, and with a speed that remains unknown in history" (Hall, 1997). In the production of cultural representations, there exists the mass production of fictional stories in a variety of forms displayed through the mass communication media, including films.

Film is a form of art that functions as a medium for mass communication. "Other than for the purpose of entertainment, films have the ability to cultivate and instill values and perspectives on any issues" (Arsi & Sobur, 2019). Each attempts to convey and explore something larger than itself. With a deeper purpose than just for commercials, a film is more concerned on emotionally engaging and intellectually stimulating its audience, as it is characterized by the personalities, beliefs, and artistic ambition of the creators behind it (Hardy, n.d.). Conflict illustrated throughout the motion picture may be openly shown in the storyline, yet also has hidden meanings and ideologies behind it, including the presence of satire.

The combination of satire being presented in films would create such a powerful effect on its audience. Satire itself is a form of art that portrays social issues in such a way that they become absurd, yet entertaining. It critiques specific human behaviors and provides some degree of social critique as a whole, packaged in a sense of dark humor. However, satire has the ability to “protect its creator from culpability for criticism, because it is implied rather than overtly stated” (LeBoeuf, 2007), thus becoming a powerful tool to address stances in oppressive social periods, which include the inequality of income distribution that exploit the labor work for the sake of profit.

“With its inequalities of power and wealth, capitalism nurtures economic inequality alongside equality under the law” (Hodgson, 2016). In 2016, the United States of America’s richest one percent (1%) owns thirty-four percent (34%) of the wealth in the country, and the richest ten percent (10%) owns up to seventy-four percent (74%) of the wealth in the country. In the United Kingdom, each richest one percent (1%) and richest ten percent (10%) respectively owns twelve percent (12%) and up to forty-four percent (44%) of the wealth in the country. In France, each richest one percent (1%) and richest ten percent (10%) respectively owns twenty-four percent (24%) and up to sixty-two percent (62%) of the wealth in the country. While in Switzerland, Sweden and Canada, the richest one percent (1%) respectively owns thirty-five percent (35%), twenty-four percent (24%) and fifteen percent (15%) of the wealth in the country. The number has significantly developed over the course of time.

In 2017, according to a report by an investment banking company Credit Suisse, “the wealthiest 1 percent of the world’s population now owns more than half of the world’s wealth.” The total wealth grew by six percent (6%) worldwide over the past twelve (12) months reaching up to \$280 trillion and recorded as the fastest wealth creation since 2012 (Frank, 2017). In 2018, according to a report by a charity group Oxfam, “the 26 richest people on earth in 2018 had the same net worth as the poorest half of the world’s population, some 3.8 billion people” (Matthews, 2019).

As for the past year of 2019 up to early 2020, according to a report by Oxfam presented in World Economic Forum in Switzerland, “the world’s 2,153 billionaires have more wealth than the 4.6 billion people who make up 60 percent of the planet’s population” (“World’s billionaires have more wealth than 4.6 billion people”, 2020). The rapid growing gap of specially economic inequality has reached a point where class-conscious individuals are questioning the cause of it; capitalism.

Capitalism in the modern era is defined as “an economic system based in the pursuit of private profits” (Livesey, 2014, p.3). “Private actors are allowed to own and control the use of property in accord with their own interests, and where the invisible hand of the pricing mechanism coordinates supply and demand in markets in a way that is automatically in the best interests of society.” (Scott, 2006). It integrates individuals in a model of consumerism, where they work and consume more than they need for the sake of profit. As a result, there is social stratification based on social class and economic inequality.



Picture 1.1 Pyramid of Capitalist System

Source: <https://medium.com/@dashthered/marxism-for-normal-people-capitalism-f239ae99d9df>

In the capitalism system, the pyramid position of power from top to bottom includes the *bourgeoisie* and the *proletariat*. The bourgeoisie refers to the minority and more powerful group of people in the society, who own the *means of production*— the building, equipment, software, licenses, etc. Earning their position from wealth, power and influence “primarily from economic ownership”. As for the proletariat, it refers to the majority and less powerful group of people in the society, who do the labour work in order to earn income at a fixed rate of salary for a specific amount of time spent

working. This system gives the upper hand of the ruling class who control the economic resources to be also “powerful across all areas of society, from politics to religion to the media.” (Livesey, 2014, p.3).

Aristotle once said that “every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good: for mankind always act in order to obtain that which they think is good,” “for that some rule, and others should be ruled is a thing not only necessary but expedient: from the hour of their birth, some are marked for subjection, others for rule.” Given the division of labor and its classifications for certain roles in the society, it is argued that “complex societies are always stratified.” (“The Origin of Stratification and States”, n.d.). The capitalist system in fact “embodies and sustains an enlightenment agenda of freedom and equality ... under the law, meaning that most adults - rich or poor - are formally subject to the same legal rules.” However, “due to the inequalities of power and wealth, capitalism nurtures economic inequality alongside equality under the law.” (Hodgson, 2016).

According to the 2017 Economic Freedom of the World Index, the top ten capitalist countries include Hong Kong, Singapore, New Zealand, Switzerland, Australia, Ireland, Estonia, United Kingdom, Canada, and the United Arab Emirates. Despite South Korea not being one of them, it still has capitalism, socialism and communism coexist in the society. “Our economic system is capitalist, our social structure is socialist, and our mindsets are communist. We adopt capitalism for our

economic development, but strive for socialist welfare and demand equal distribution of wealth.” With its advanced economic growth, well-known massive business corporations such as Samsung, LG and Hyundai are condemned as “the root of all social evil and corruption.” (Seong-kon, 2014). This is where the dominating powerful minority have more authority to control the resources, including labor of the lower class, in order to benefit them to gain more profit. Therefore, the rich become richer while the poor remain poor— widening the social class stratification gap.

The social status of an individual based on their social class is not just about the materials owned, but also “how we feel, think and act, psychology researchers say” (Deangelis, 2015). As social class itself is “shaped by an individual’s material resources as well as perceptions of rank vis-a’-vis others in society”, it becomes a “social context that individuals inhabit in enduring and pervasive ways over time”— where their behaviors are influenced by the way one sees themselves compared to others (Kraus & Piff et al., 2012).

With the more prevalent idea of capitalism and its social class stratification, 2017 Metacritic’s 13th ranked out of 25 best film directors of the 21st century, Bong Joon-ho from South Korea, stated that he has always been class conscious (Paiella, 2019):

*“I think all creators, all artists, and even just everyone were always interested in class, 24/7. I think it would actually be strange if we’re not ... because we live in the era of capitalism. I think we all have a very sensitive antennae to class, in general.” – Bong Joon-ho*

During an interview specifically for the film *Parasite* in 2019, Bong Joon-ho mentioned that he tried to express a sentiment specific to only Korean culture, which made him unsure of the perspective of foreigners on the film. Although, “upon screening the film after completion, all the responses from different audiences were pretty much the same, which made me realize that the topic was universal,” he said. Continuously, he strongly quotes that “we all live in the same country called capitalism, which explains the universality of their responses” (Birth.Movies.Death., 2019).

Even more so, the three other films that he wrote and directed, *The Host* in 2006, *Snowpiercer* in 2013 and *Okja* in 2017, “each use similar tropes to express more fully what Marx said about capitalist society, which ‘does not consist of individuals, but expresses the relations within which these individuals stand.’ Or, to put it even more simply: capitalism can’t be found in the individual but in the social relations that shape us.” (Hassler-Forest, 2020).

Consequently, the film *Parasite* (2019) was released; “combining an examination of capitalism’s system of social power with the political potential of love” (Hassler-Forest, 2020) and “displays the world of the impoverished and the hypocrisy of capitalist ‘laws’” (Brain & Wallace, 2020). The film is able to represent the social class stratification relation between the rich and the poor, the social classes struggles,

as well as the harsh reality of the capitalist system in the society, packaged in a satire manner.

## **1.2 Identification of the Problem**

As mass communication developed over the years, mass communication media activities along with the advancement of technologies made films possible. With the creative mind of filmmakers, the medium is chosen to communicate their passion on certain topics, including Bong Joon-ho's of societal deficiencies through the dystopia of a capitalism system in his mind.

As the most important party to satisfy, the audience seems like they have caught on to what is aimed to be illustrated, despite the award-winning director Bong Joon-ho's distinctive way of conveying it. This is shown through news articles noticing the commonality that makes the film worth the watch. New York Times quoted "The Palme d'Or, the top prize at the Cannes Film Festival, was awarded Saturday to 'Parasite', a ferocious satire and critical favorite from the South Korean director Bong Joon-ho." (Dargis, 2019). Los Angeles Times quoted "'Parasite' is a savage social satire that goes further than anyone will be expecting, detailing the ways that a family of heartless manipulators mercilessly takes advantage of clueless rich folks. And that's only the beginning." (Chang, 2019). Time Out quoted "Bong Joon-ho's latest is the dazzling social-satire-cum-home-invasion-drama we need right now." (Calhoun, 2019). Film Comment quoted "A scathing social satire that fuses raucous comedy with deep despair, 'Parasite' is set in contemporary Seoul, where the enormous gap between the

very rich and the very poor has become as untenable as it is in many countries including our own.” (Taubin, 2019). The excerpts emphasize the same key words used to describe the film; social satire.

The term ‘satire’ itself refers to “elusive mode of representation that has been used to mock and ridicule society and culture for thousands of years” (Nilsson, 2013). With the aim to “bring about moral reform or social change”, implicit ideologies highlighting the flaws and exposing problems present in the society seen through the filmmaker’s point of view are represented in the *Parasite* film— thus, social satire. It is difficult to grasp, as the “responses can change depending on factors such as time and circumstances” (Gilmore, 2018). Although, as the news articles above suggested, director and screenwriter Bong Joon-ho, is proven to have successfully addressed his perspective on the society.

Bong Joon-ho expressed his perspective on the idea of the capitalist system and its social class stratification in this contemporary society using the specific genre of satire through the *Parasite* film. Thus, it has become one of the unique selling propositions of this film. The intriguing take of Bong Joon-ho implicitly criticising the social reality through the film has resulted in the 92nd Academy Award for Best Picture, Best Original Screenplay, International Feature Film, along with Best Director presented by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, also known as the Oscars, along with its 270 wins and 238 nominations worldwide in 2020.

As a result, this thesis is going to discuss how *Parasite* film represents social satire using semiotics by Roland Barthes as the theory and research method. The researcher will analyze the verbal and non verbal communication from the chosen scenes and sequences that stress on the topic.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

Based on the background and the problem identified elaborated above, the researcher came up with a research question:

1. How is the social satire being represented in ‘Parasite’ Film?

### **1.4 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to analyze the social satire being represented in “Parasite” film using the semiotics method by Roland Barthes.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

#### **1.5.1 Academic Purpose**

The academic purpose of this research is to provide the study regarding how the concept of social satire is represented in Parasite film, as well as further insight for researchers who wish to do research with similar topics.

#### **1.5.2 Practical Purpose**

The practical purpose of this research is to provide other screenwriters and directors with a source of information on how Bong Joon-ho represents

such social satire in *Parasite* film. As well as to expand the field of study, specifically in mass communication, in relation to communication sciences.

## **1.6 Organization of the Study**

This research consists of six chapters elaborated as follows:

### **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

Chapter one will elaborate the background of the problem, identification of the problem, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, and organization of the study.

### **CHAPTER II: RESEARCH OBJECT**

Chapter two will elaborate the object of the study, which is the *Parasite* film. It will give more detailed information regarding the film, the origin of the *Parasite* film, the production company, the director, the synopsis of the film, and the scenes and sequences to be analyzed.

### **CHAPTER III: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Chapter three will elaborate the concepts and theories used in analyzing and creating this research.

### **CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Chapter four will elaborate the research approach, data collection method, data validity test, research method, and unit of analysis.

### **CHAPTER V: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Chapter five will show the result of the findings and detailed data acquired during the data collection and analysis process.

## CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Chapter six is the final chapter that will state the conclusion of the research and give suggestions for further research with similar topics.

