

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Movie is a favoured form of entertainment because of its ability to capture movement and tell stories. Along with the development of technological advances, films take on a more profound role and transform into the most powerful medium in conveying social and political messages in this modern era. Movies have moral and educational values that can be applied in everyday life, because films are able to provide a stimulus to the audience, especially both children and adults (Maliki, et al, 2023). Their ability to provide awareness of social reality and provide criticism of various phenomena that occur in society through visuals, narratives and cinematography allows them to discuss relevant issues, encourage reflection and discussion and even influence the perspective of the community.

Movie also shows social reality through the cinematography, social reality focuses how people build and understand norms, values, roles, and relationships in their daily lives, visualising social conditions in a film, with the director's ability to incorporate social, so the storyline created, the director provides the audience with a diverse experience that often highlights social issues such as class, inequality, and the basic structures that shape social life (Wartenberg, 1999). That way, film as a medium becomes a powerful storyteller in reflecting social reality by displaying characters, situations, and settings that reflect the dynamics of society through the physical and environmental details depicted, the idea that when social criticism is presented or conveyed through film media, we can directly see the environment,

characters, culture, and objects that exist in the representation of social criticism made (Bordieu, 1990).

Cinematography is one of the main elements in the visualisation of a film to bring the audience deeper into the world created by the director. It is not only about beautiful images, but also about how the images can tell a story and help the audience fully immerse themselves in the story or plot of the film. Cinematography is the art of visual storytelling (Heiderich, 2012), a visual language that helps clarify narratives and characters without having to be spoken explicitly, therefore the role of cinematography is crucial when the director has a desire to create a compelling and immersive viewing experience.

Movies with a good visual experience will certainly be beneficial for both the audience and the director, with the capture of beautiful scenes making the film worth remembering. The important role of good shooting angles, lighting, and camera movements can strengthen the visual beauty and build atmosphere and emotion in the story. With the successful capture of the previous elements coupled with the selection of colours, contrast, and intensity of lighting can make the audience feel various feelings or atmosphere such as tense, comfortable, moved or happy according to the scene shown. Effective cinematography will be able to develop the story visually, so that the audience can easily understand the feelings, atmosphere, and journey faced by the characters in the film (Brown, 2016).

Since films are portraying social reality, it is also used to convey social critiques such as inequality, capitalism, patriarchy, and environmental degradation has become a trend for filmmakers, encouraging audiences to question the norms and structures that exist within society. However, it is not uncommon to see

criticism about social criticism delivered through films being too superficial and only using controversial issues to attract the audience's attention without really highlighting the complexity of the issue. There is also criticism that films that address social criticism over-dramatise the plight of characters within a group or class, giving the impression of a film without insight or motivation to seek change to the audience.

Presenting a message of social criticism in a film requires cinematography to build atmosphere and strengthen the delivery of the message in order to have an emotional impact on the audience. Cinematography can accentuate elements related to social criticism through visuals, settings, camera angles, and camera movements can also increase the intensity of emotions felt by the audience (Brown, 2016). Good cinematography can be used to provide realism or even distortion in the story, often the message of social criticism is conveyed through visual symbols as a metaphor for the feelings or atmosphere that the characters are experiencing in a film. Movies that raise the theme of social criticism that have good and appropriate cinematography are not only able to entertain the audience, but will also succeed in encouraging the audience to reflect on the real conditions around them, one example of a drama series that has succeeded in attracting the attention and awareness of the audience about social criticism in society is *Money Heist* (2019).

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that cinematography has a role in films that can create meaning through visual elements that are often not conveyed directly. In each scene in the film, of course, cinematography such as elements of camera movement, use of colour, highlighting certain objects can become signs or symbols that convey implied messages. The use of signs in

cinematography can certainly strengthen the semiotic aspects in the film that make visual elements not just a regular background but as a sign that gives a certain meaning or meaning in its function.

Semiotics is the study of signs and sign systems, encompassing elements such as language, images, gestures, and media (Chandler, 1994). He further elucidates that the seminal objective of semiotics is to comprehend the process through which meaning is generated by signs within a system, a concept that finds its genesis in Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of the signifier and the signified. This concept is further elaborated upon by Chandler, who asserts that semiotics facilitates the comprehension of the latent or connotative meanings of signs in media, thereby rendering it an instrumental tool for the analysis and revelation of the latent structures and ideologies that underpin representations. In the context of cinema, the pertinence of semiotics as an analytical instrument is particularly salient, given the prevalence of visual, auditory, and narrative signs in films. Employing a semiotic framework enables the unravelling of symbols in films, thus facilitating the discernment of how they reflect or shape cultural values, ideologies, and emotional experiences.

Not only through visual elements, semiotics in films are also often displayed in the form of objects, symbols or signifiers that have special meanings where these elements are often used to describe characters, situations, or even the main themes in the film. The role of semiotic in the film can be in the form of symbols of personality or internal conflicts of characters, symbols in the form of objects that appear repeatedly can symbolise the main theme of the film, symbols that foreshadow performances or things that will happen next, symbols that appear in

the form of objects or things that represent culture or religion such as rosaries in the film *The Nun* (2018). Through these semiotic elements, the audience can get the experience of conveying hidden or layered meanings that successfully connect deeper emotional and intellectual thoughts.

Great cinematography not only enhances the artistic quality and production value of a film, but also strengthens its commercial appeal. One of the films that successfully combines visual power and social criticism is a film by South Korean director Bo Joon Ho entitled *Parasite* (2019). The film tells the story of the poor Kim family consisting of father (Ki Tek), mother (Chun sook), son (Ki woo), and daughter (Ki jung) who live in a cramped, dirty and smelly underground house in Seoul, South Korea. They struggle to find work until one day their son (Ki woo) receives an opportunity to become a private tutor in a wealthy family (the Park family). Not wasting the opportunity, the Kim family one by one infiltrated the Park family home as unrelated professionals and took important positions in the house. After much manipulation, a social class conflict emerges that provides unexpected events in the film. The film blends dark humour, suspense and tragedy in a story that explores the bitter realities of life in the modern world.

Parasite (2019) with its unique storyline is not only able to attract the attention of audiences around the world, but also managed to win various prestigious awards in the world of cinema. *Parasite* film received a total of 316 wins, and 266 nominations with 4 Oscar trophies (IMDb, n.d.) in the category of International Feature film (Foreign Language film) beating famous films such as *Pain and Glory* (Spain), *Les Misérables* (France), *Honeyland* (Republic of North Macedonia), and *Corpus Christi* (Poland), Best Director, Best Original Screenplay

which made *Parasite* the first South Korean filmmaker in history to win the category, Best Picture, Best film Editing, and Best Production Design (*Internet Movie Database*). The success is a result of Bo Joon Ho's skill in inserting a deep and relevant message about social class that is delivered sharply, giving the impression of how economic inequality creates a big hole between those who enjoy life in the upper class and those who struggle in the lower class.

This film not only reflects South Korean society but also resonates globally, addressing universal themes of poverty and inequality. The film's portrayal of class antagonism prompts critical discussions about societal structures and the often-overlooked struggles of the lower class. The emotional engagement evoked by the film's narrative drives home the message that true class consciousness involves recognizing systemic inequalities and fostering solidarity among the oppressed. Ultimately, *Parasite* (2019) provides a rich tapestry for examining class consciousness through its intricate storytelling, character dynamics, and socio-political commentary, making it an essential topic for study in relation to social inequality and class divides.

Bong Joon Ho in his work managed to combine cinematography and semiotics into a film with visual narratives and interesting symbols in the story elements, *Parasite* managed to convey a strong message about social inequality and the impact of class hierarchy by raising social criticism of social issues rooted in class inequality between the rich family (Park family) and the poor family (Kim family). The role of cinematography in *Parasite* is key in separating the lives of upper-class and lower-class families, one of which is the play of camera angles when highlighting the two families. The role of semiotics in the form of objects and

symbols in the film *Parasite* strengthens the meaning behind the visual narrative, thus making social criticism and messages about the upper class sharper.

Marxist criticism brings to the forefront the idea of class struggle, and the awareness of one's place in a class system (Barry, 1995). It explains that Marxist criticism focuses on class conflict and the importance of class consciousness which refers to the importance of awareness of one's position in the class hierarchy that is often the source of injustice and oppression in society. When Marx's class theory is applied to films as a critique of social inequality, the characters and conflicts in the film often show the injustices that exist between the classes. Through the conflicts, narratives, symbols highlighted in the story and depicting economic oppression and encouraging the audience to question the social structure around them. Class consciousness is the understanding that individuals or groups have of the position they are situated in the social and economic structure, referring to an awareness of the common interests shared by the same social class as well as the conditions and relationships that bind them in the element or context of struggle against oppression.

The application of Marx's class theory to this film as a critique of social inequality reveals the presence of injustice between the classes, as evidenced by the characters and conflicts depicted in the film. The story's conflicts, narratives and symbols highlight economic oppression and encourage the audience to question the social structure around them. Class consciousness can be defined as the understanding that individuals or groups have of their position within the social and economic structure. It refers to an awareness of the common interests shared by the same social class and an understanding of the conditions and relationships that bind them in the context of struggle against oppression. Marxist criticism emphasises the

concept of class struggle and the extent to which individuals are aware of their position within a class system. Marxist criticism focuses on class conflict and the significance of class consciousness, which can be defined as the awareness of one's position within the class hierarchy (Barry, 1995).

This awareness is often the key to understanding the underlying causes of social injustice and oppression. From this, class consciousness can be defined as an awareness of the common interests shared by members of a given social class, as well as an understanding of the conditions and relationships that bind them in the context of struggles against oppression or oppression. This awareness fosters the understanding that their struggle is part of a larger, broader movement. When individuals or groups of the same class begin to develop class consciousness, they engage in collective action to fight for their rights and against the ruling class. Thus, class consciousness is an important step towards revolutionary action capable of changing the existing social structure through class struggle (Barry, 1995).

By utilizing Marxist theory, the film illustrates class consciousness as a mechanism for the Kims to challenge their oppressive circumstances. Their infiltration into the Park household symbolizes a rebellion against established social hierarchies, showcasing how class awareness can lead to both empowerment and conflict. The physical spaces occupied by each family serve as powerful symbols of their respective social statuses. The Kims live in a cramped basement, while the Parks reside in a spacious home atop a hill, visually reinforcing the social stratification and the barriers that exist between classes.

Reality level portrays social stratification in capitalist societies and suggests that social inequality can lead to crime and potentially rebellion (Nari, 2024). It

emphasized how social inequality in capitalist societies can lead to crime and, in extreme cases, rebellion within capitalist systems, where resources and opportunities are unequally distributed, lower-class individuals may turn to crime as a means of survival or protest. This inequality fosters frustration and tension, which can culminate in rebellion if the gap between social classes becomes too large. The article explains the film using John Fiske's semiotic method, analyzing inequality at three levels: representation, reality, and ideology.

At the representation level, cinematic techniques like lighting and set design contrast the affluent and the poor, with the front carriages showing opulence and the rear carriages depicting harsh, deprived conditions. The reality level emphasizes the film's critique of social stratification, showcasing how inequality fuels criminal behavior and rebellion among the lower class, such as Curtis' revolt. Finally, the ideology level portrays class conflict as inevitable in capitalist systems, symbolized by the train's rigid hierarchy. The revolution led by Curtis represents the lower class's uprising, which, despite their efforts, ultimately fails, symbolizing the difficulty of overcoming entrenched inequality. In summary, the article argues that social inequality is portrayed as a driver of crime and conflict, with the lower class resorting to violence and revolution due to their disenfranchisement. The film criticizes the capitalist system's inherent inequality and shows how it perpetuates cycles of poverty, crime, and failed revolutions.

In analysing the portrayal of poverty and hardship in children's films, Streib and her colleague (2017) illustrates how such issues are frequently underestimated. An illustrative example is the scene in *Aladdin* where the protagonist, Aladdin, and his love interest, Jasmine, discuss their respective lives. In this scene, the characters

equate the struggles of a lower-class individual with those of a princess, demonstrating that they both experience a sense of being 'trapped'. Streib posits that lower-class characters are frequently depicted as morally upright, industrious, and benevolent, whereas upper-class characters are portrayed as compassionate in maintaining their status.

This reflects the notion that social hierarchy is the result of personal achievement rather than structural inequality. Streib posits that lower-class characters are frequently depicted as morally upright, industrious, and benevolent, whereas upper-class characters are portrayed as compassionate and committed to maintaining their status. This suggests that social hierarchy is the result of personal achievement rather than structural inequality. In addition, Streib's analysis suggests that these films reinforce the American Dream narrative, whereby upward social mobility can be achieved through virtues such as hard work and compassion. This presents social class mobility as an achievable and deserved goal for anyone. Although some films offer brief portrayals of the class system as having limitations, the majority of children's films present the possibility of transcending class boundaries and providing a sense of respite from structural oppression. In conclusion, the researchers posit that by portraying social class inequality as a norm, children's films reinforce the notion that social inequality is a natural phenomenon (Streib et al., 2017).

In their research, Novianta & Simanjuntak (2022) analyse the depiction of social inequality in the film *Parasite* and its implications for moral values. This analysis examines the themes of social inequality, economics and moral consequences in the film, with a particular focus on the class struggle depicted in

the film and illustrated through the contrasting lives of the Park family and the Kim family. The division of their residence serves as a visual representation of the social gap between classes. This is made evident when the film presents examples of inequality, such as housing and social mobility. The film's social critique is evident in the portrayal of certain elements, such as behavioural signs and body odour, which serve as indicators of class and socioeconomic barriers. In this case, the odor associated with the Kim family functions as a symbol of poverty, indicating that they are unable to transcend their social class. *Parasite* underscores the notion that the Kim family is born into a lower social class and that any attempt they make to escape poverty is ultimately futile, despite their efforts. This analysis demonstrates that *Parasite* critiques the inflexible structure of the class system in Korea, which reflects and perpetuates social class and its associated consequences.

Hussain & Ahmed (2022) examines the portrayal of environmental degradation in the film, with Puspha Raj, the film's protagonist, depicted engaging in the burning of false wood and the smuggling of rare species of wood in Andhra Pradesh, India. The narrative structure of the film provides insight into how capitalism prioritises profit over environmental sustainability, ultimately leading to ecological damage and contributing to the climate crisis. The researchers employ eco-Marxism to convey their perspective on capitalism, which they view as a system that oppresses nature and regards it as a resource for profit. Through textual analysis, this study highlights the capitalist system's disregard for environmental ethics, enabling criminal networks to oppress human and natural resources, ultimately harming biodiversity and accelerating environmental degradation. The researchers conclude by presenting an Eco-Marxist critique of the

capitalist structure, which they argue endangers ecological and human health by reducing quality of life.

Dharejo and his colleague (2023) provide an overview of the complex relationship between class imagery and family dynamics in contemporary Iranian society. The research reveals that the film contrasts social classes into two: the conservative lower class and the more modern middle class. This is set against the background of Iran's legal and cultural framework. The plot revolves around Simin, who is striving to improve her daughter and her husband Nader's quality of life. Nader is compelled by familial responsibilities to remain in Iran and care for his ailing father. The film's narrative is centered on the character of Razieh, a lower-class woman who is employed to care for Nader's father. This highlights the economic constraints that force her to accept roles or jobs that are uncomfortable or unsuitable. The experience presents a number of socio-economic challenges and moral dilemmas for Razieh, who is forced to grapple with religious beliefs and financial vulnerabilities. This emphasises that those belonging to the lower class face increasingly difficult and greater struggles due to economic instability.

In their analysis, Rashid et al. (2023) examine the manner in which foreign films represent a range of entities that exist within society, including, but not limited to, gender, religion, culture, discrimination, education, science, and knowledge. This analysis demonstrates that foreign cinema serves not only as a source of entertainment but also as an educational medium and a reflection of social and cultural values within a given society. The research also makes use of social criticism and class elements, with a particular focus on gender injustice. This is achieved by analysing the portrayal of female characters in the films used in the

research. Furthermore, This analysis addresses social and economic issues that prompt reflection on social problems in society. It follows the organisation by depicting the moral consequences and class struggle in Iranian society, which differs from the depiction of class in Western media, which is more straightforward due to its focus on the family unit. This analysis illustrates that foreign films or cinema are an effective tool for reflecting and addressing injustice. Social issues also influence perceptions of social, cultural, and economic issues.

Previous research in this field indicates that films are capable of portraying the multifaceted dimensions of social injustice, class conflict, and economic inequality through a diverse array of visuals and symbols. As a potent medium, films have the potential to elevate public consciousness, motivate viewers to engage in profound social critique, and even inspire narratives that elucidate the inherent injustices within social structures. From the studies that have been found above, it can be seen that there are several similar characteristics, such as the key theories or the corpus itself. However, there are only a few studies that focus on the exploration of class consciousness in films.

By recognising this gap, the writer has chosen to explore the representation of class consciousness in the film *Parasite* (2019), with a specific focus on how verbal and visual aspects symbolically construct and reinforce social hierarchy. The analysis is grounded in Marxist theory, as developed by Karl Marx in 1848, which serves as the overarching theoretical framework for examining the manner in which capitalism gives shape to and maintains class divisions. In order to support this analysis, Daniel Chandler's (1994) theory of semiotics is employed as an analytical

tool to interpret the signs and symbols embedded within the film. The central focus of this analysis is the recurrent motif of the "line" as a visual and spatial boundary that separates the upper and lower classes. This is achieved through the use of character blocking, spatial composition, lighting, and camera angles. The novelty and research gap of this study are marked by the specific use of Chandler's semiotic framework to decode the meaning of these visual "lines" as a means to reveal class consciousness through a Marxist lens. This integrated approach has not been explored in previous studies, thus offering a new perspective in film analysis, particularly in the context of *Parasite* (2019).

The choice to focus on class consciousness in Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite* (2019) stems from its profound exploration of social inequality and the dynamics between different social classes. The film starkly contrasts the lives of the impoverished Kim family and the affluent Park family, highlighting the class divide that permeates society. This contrast serves as a sharp critique of capitalism, illustrating how class struggles manifest in everyday life. The Kims' desperate attempts to improve their socioeconomic status while revealing the Parks' obliviousness to their privilege emphasize the alienation experienced by the working class.

1.2 Research Problem

The key issues to be examined and debated in the forthcoming analysis are as follows:

1. How does *Parasite* depict class consciousness through the interaction between families in the Movie *Parasite* (2019)?

2. How do symbols in *Parasite* (2019) represent class consciousness?

1.3 Purpose of the study

This analysis aims to examine how *Parasite* depict class consciousness through the interaction between families in the film *Parasite* (2019) and to explore how symbols in *Parasite* (2019) represent class consciousness. Therefore, This analysis provides insight into how *Parasite* reflects issues of class perception and consciousness, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of class dynamics in media and films.

1.4 Significant of the study

This analysis aims to make a significant contribution to the field of media criticism by applying Karl Marx's traditional marxist theory to understand how social inequality, class disparity in the film *Parasite* (2019) realise the importance of class consciousness in society. This analysis is useful for readers as a reference, especially in the field of cultural studies and media analysis literature. The results of this study are expected to be an input to highlight the importance of analyzing media intent or content in order to understand or understand social issues.