

THE GREED AND CLASS CONFLICT IN PARASITE FILM: A MARXIST THEORY

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis representasi keserakahan dan konflik kelas dalam film Parasite menggunakan teori Marxis. Film ini merefleksikan ketimpangan sosial antara keluarga Park sebagai kelas borjuis dan keluarga Kim sebagai proletariat dalam sistem kapitalisme modern. Penelitian bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi bentuk keserakahan dan konflik kelas, menjelaskan penyebab munculnya konflik berdasarkan perspektif Marxis, serta menganalisis dampaknya terhadap kehidupan sosial dalam film. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dengan sumber data berupa dialog, adegan, dan simbol visual dalam film. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, dokumentasi, pencatatan, dan studi pustaka, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model Miles dan Huberman yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keserakahan dalam film bukan sekadar kelemahan moral individu, melainkan konsekuensi struktural dari ketimpangan ekonomi kapitalis. Konflik kelas muncul akibat kemiskinan, keterbatasan mobilitas sosial, diskriminasi, dan persaingan ekonomi antarkelas maupun dalam kelas bawah itu sendiri. Dampak dari konflik tersebut terlihat melalui manipulasi, dehumanisasi, hingga kekerasan tragis di akhir cerita. Dengan demikian, film Parasite berfungsi sebagai kritik sosial terhadap eksploitasi, ketimpangan, dan alienasi dalam masyarakat kapitalis kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: keserakahan, konflik kelas, Marxisme, kapitalisme, Parasite.

Abstract

This study analyzes the representation of greed and class conflict in Parasite through a Marxist perspective. The film reflects social inequality between the wealthy Park family as the bourgeoisie and the impoverished Kim family as the proletariat within modern capitalist society. The objectives of this research are to identify the forms of greed and class conflict, explain the causes of these conflicts based on Marxist theory, and analyze their impacts on society as represented in the film. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method using dialogues, scenes, and visual symbols from the film as the primary data. The data were collected through observation, documentation, note-taking, and library research, then analyzed using Miles and Huberman's qualitative analysis model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that greed in the film is not merely portrayed as an individual moral flaw, but as a structural consequence of capitalist inequality. Class conflict emerges due to poverty, limited social mobility, discrimination, and economic competition both between and within social classes. The impacts of these conflicts are reflected through manipulation, dehumanization, and tragic violence at the climax of the story. Therefore, Parasite functions not only as entertainment but also as a social critique of exploitation, inequality, and alienation in contemporary capitalist society.

Keywords: greed, class conflict, Marxism, capitalism, Parasite.

1. INTRODUCTION

Film is not only a form of entertainment but also a cultural medium through which social realities, values, and conflicts can be represented and critically examined. Through narrative, visual elements, and characterization, films can portray social issues such as inequality, discrimination, poverty, and power relations. Cinema can therefore function as a reflection of society, allowing audiences to recognize and critically engage with social problems represented through fictional narratives (Gao, 2024). One of the social issues frequently represented in contemporary cinema is social inequality, particularly the unequal distribution of wealth, resources, and social power. Such inequality can create tensions between social groups and reveal the conflicts underlying a stratified society.

One film that strongly represents these issues is *Parasite* (2019), directed by Bong Joon-ho. The film portrays the contrasting lives of the Kim family, who live in economic hardship, and the wealthy Park family. Through their interactions, the film illustrates differences in living conditions, economic resources, social status, and power. These differences gradually create tensions that develop into manipulation, exploitation, resentment, and violence. The film therefore provides a relevant cultural text for examining the relationship between social class, economic inequality, and human behavior within a capitalist society.

Marxist theory provides an appropriate framework for examining these representations because it emphasizes the relationship between economic structure, social class, power, and conflict. Marx distinguishes society into dominant and subordinate classes based on their relationship to the means of production. The bourgeoisie possess economic resources and capital, while the proletariat depend primarily on their labor to survive. The unequal distribution of economic resources creates unequal power relations and can produce exploitation and class conflict. From this perspective, social inequality is not simply the result of individual differences but is connected to structural relations within capitalism (Kumar, 2025). Applying a Marxist perspective to *Parasite* therefore makes it possible to examine how economic inequality and class relations influence the characters' behavior and contribute to the conflicts portrayed in the film.

Previous studies have examined *Parasite* from various Marxist and social perspectives. Octavia (2021) discussed social immobility and identity construction, while Herman (2021) examined class conflict between the proletarian and bourgeois families. Fabrianne et al. (2022) analyzed class struggle and found that inequality generates jealousy, infiltration, greed, and violence. Mishra (2022) focused on class consciousness and exploitation, while Mutiara et al.

(2022) examined class conflict and the working class's aspirations within capitalism. Other studies have investigated manipulation for social mobility (Novitasari & Prastiwi, 2023), symbolic representations of social class (Azzahra et al., 2024), capitalist exploitation and false consciousness (Kumar, 2025), and poverty in South Korea (Iqbal et al., 2025). These studies demonstrate the strong relationship between *Parasite* and issues of class inequality and capitalist society.

Although previous studies have provided valuable interpretations of class conflict and inequality in *Parasite*, greed has generally received less systematic attention as a phenomenon connected to class relations. Greed is often discussed as an individual characteristic or as a consequence of economic inequality rather than as a phenomenon that can be connected to the structural logic of capitalism. This creates a gap in understanding how greed and class conflict interact with each other in the film. In particular, limited attention has been given to the forms, causes, and impacts of greed and class conflict when examined simultaneously through a Marxist perspective.

Therefore, this study focuses on the representation of greed and class conflict in *Parasite* (2019) through Marxist theory. The study aims to identify the forms of greed and class conflict represented in the film, analyze the causes of these phenomena based on Marxist concepts of class relations and economic inequality, and examine their impacts on the characters and the development of the story. By connecting greed with class conflict within a single analytical framework, this study is expected to contribute to Marxist film criticism and provide a deeper understanding of how *Parasite* represents the contradictions, inequalities, and tensions embedded in contemporary capitalist society.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research approach to analyze the representation of greed and class conflict in Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* (2019). A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on interpreting meanings, social relations, and ideological representations contained in the film rather than measuring numerical variables. Qualitative research enables researchers to examine social phenomena through descriptive and interpretive data (Oranga & Matere, 2023). In this study, the analysis focused on dialogues, scenes, character interactions, settings, and visual elements that represented greed and class conflict.

The subject of the study was *Parasite* (2019), directed by Bong Joon-ho, while the object of the study was the representation of greed and class conflict in the film. The analysis examined

how the characters' behaviors, interactions, living conditions, and relationships reflected economic inequality, unequal power relations, exploitation, class consciousness, and the pursuit of material wealth. These representations were interpreted using Marxist theory.

The data consisted of primary and secondary data. The primary data were obtained directly from *Parasite* through repeated viewing and identification of relevant dialogues, scenes, character interactions, and visual representations related to greed and class conflict. Secondary data were obtained from books, journal articles, and other credible academic sources concerning Marxist theory, social class, capitalism, greed, class conflict, and previous studies of *Parasite*. Secondary sources were used to support the interpretation and strengthen the theoretical basis of the analysis (Ajayi, 2023).

Data were collected through observation, documentation, note-taking, and library research. The researcher repeatedly watched *Parasite* to identify scenes relevant to the research questions. Relevant dialogues, time codes, characters, actions, and visual elements were documented and recorded in systematic notes. The researcher then classified the selected data according to the forms, causes, and impacts of greed and class conflict. Library research was conducted to obtain relevant theoretical concepts and previous studies that supported the interpretation of the film.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model of qualitative data analysis proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. First, the researcher condensed the data by selecting and classifying scenes, dialogues, and visual elements relevant to greed and class conflict. Second, the selected data were displayed descriptively and organized into analytical categories based on the research questions and Marxist concepts. Finally, conclusions were drawn by interpreting the patterns found in the data and verifying them through comparison with Marxist theory and relevant previous studies.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, the study applied the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was maintained through repeated observation of the film and comparison of interpretations with relevant theoretical concepts and previous studies. Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the selected scenes, dialogues, and social contexts. Dependability was maintained through systematic documentation of the data collection and analysis procedures. Confirmability was achieved by grounding interpretations

in direct evidence from the film and maintaining consistency between the research questions, data, theoretical framework, and conclusions. These procedures helped ensure that the findings were systematic, transparent, and grounded in the research data.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Forms of Greed and Class Conflict

a. The Beginning of Fake Identity (10.25 – 10.31)

Min-Hyuk convinces Ki-Woo that he can work as an English tutor for the Park family despite lacking formal qualifications. This moment marks the beginning of the Kim family's deceptive strategy to gain access to upper-class economic opportunities.



Picture 4. 1 The Beginning of Ki-Woo's Idea to Fake His Identity as Teacher

Dialogue:

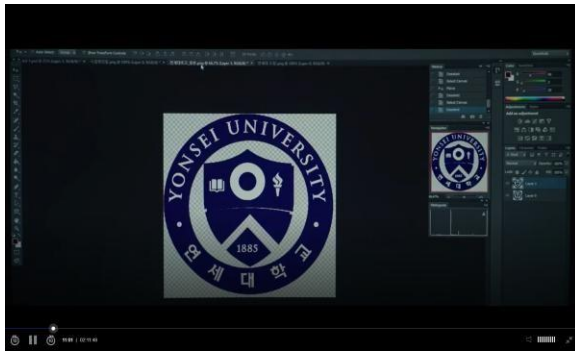
Ki-Woo: *"You think the family would accept me? I'm not even a college student."*

Min-Hyuk: *"We'll embellish a little. You'll be fine. You'll have my recommendation."*

The dialogue illustrates how the lower class is pressured to manipulate identity in order to survive within a capitalist system that prioritizes status and educational background.

b. The Fake Certificate (10.55 – 11.01)

Ki-Jung forges a fake certificate of enrollment for Ki-Woo using her computer skills. The forged document becomes a symbol of how the lower class constructs artificial identities to gain access to opportunities reserved for privileged groups.



Picture 4.2 Ki-Jung Create Dupe of The Certificate for Ki-Woo

c. Expanding the Infiltration into the Park Household (16.30 – 38.34)

After successfully entering the Park household, Ki-Woo gradually brings other family members into the house through manipulation and fabricated identities. Ki-Jung is introduced as “Jessica,” an art tutor educated abroad, while Ki-Tek is later recommended as a professional and trustworthy driver. These actions demonstrate how the Kim family strategically exploits the Park family’s trust in order to secure economic stability.



Picture 4. 3 Ki-Woo Recommending “Jessica” to Yeon-Kyo



Picture 4. 4 Ki-Jung Suggesting Her Father as a Driver

Dialogue:

Ki-Woo: “She studied applied arts at Illinois State and recently moved back to Korea.”

Ki-Jung: “Mr. Kim. A real gentleman. Such a kind man.”

The fabricated identities reveal how capitalist structures encourage the lower class to perform false professionalism and social status in order to access employment opportunities.

d. The Underwear Trap (31.56 – 33.56)

The Kim family deliberately plants women’s underwear inside Mr. Park’s car to frame Yoon, the previous driver, and force his dismissal. This manipulation creates another employment opportunity for Ki-Tek within the Park household.



Picture 4. 5 Mr. Park Finds An Underwear in His Car

Dialogue:

Dong-Ik: “You have to take care of this. Come up with some kind of bland, harmless reason. Let him go quietly.”

The scene demonstrates how competition among lower-class workers is intensified under capitalism, forcing individuals to sacrifice others in order to survive economically.

e. The Tuberculosis Trick (42.01 – 42.43)

The Kim family executes another scheme by framing Moon-Gwang, the longtime housekeeper, as a tuberculosis patient. By exploiting Yeon-Kyo’s fear, they successfully remove Moon-Gwang and replace her with Chung-Sook.



Picture 4. 6 Ki-Tek Convincing Yeon-Kyo that Moon-Gwang Has Tuberculosis

Dialogue:

Ki-Tek: "Korea still has the highest tuberculosis rate among OECD countries."

This scene reflects how fear and deception are used as tools for economic survival, further exposing the moral deterioration caused by structural inequality.

f. The Kim Family's Celebration (57.40 – 58.00)

While the Park family is away camping, the Kim family enjoys the luxurious house and celebrates their success in deceiving the Parks. Their behavior reflects how economic desperation gradually develops into greed and a desire for comfort and privilege.



Picture 4. 7 The Kim Family Celebrating Inside the Park Household

Dialogue:

Ki-Tek: "I was surprised that the family was so easy to trick."

g. Moon-Gwang's Return and the Secret in the Basement (01.06.14 – 01.06.38)

Moon-Gwang unexpectedly returns to the Park house to visit her husband, Geun-sae, who has been secretly living in the hidden basement for years. This revelation exposes

another layer of poverty hidden beneath the surface of the wealthy household.



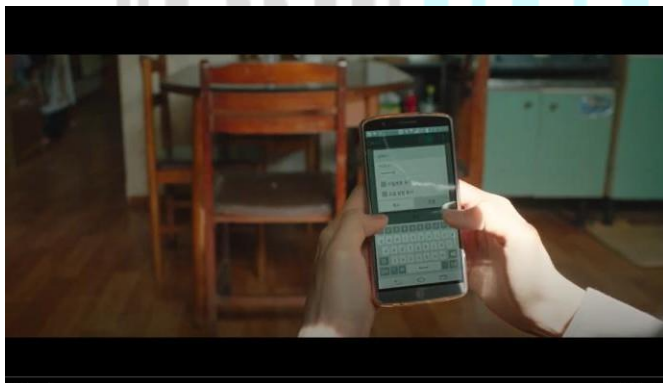
Picture 4. 8 Moon-Gwang Returning to the Basement

The hidden basement symbolizes the invisible lower class that survives beneath capitalist society, completely excluded from economic security and social recognition.

3.2 Cause of Greed and Class Conflict

a. Struggling for Internet Connection (01.30 – 01.52)

Ki-Woo and Ki-Jung struggle to connect to a neighbor's Wi-Fi because the family cannot afford internet access. This scene reflects the Kim family's financial instability and dependence on limited public resources.



Picture 4. 9 The Kim Siblings Searching for Wi-Fi Connection

Dialogue:

Chung-Sook: *"Our phones have been suspended for weeks, and now the neighbors have shut us out."*

The dialogue highlights the family's economic insecurity and lack of access to basic technological resources.

b. Living in the Semi-Basement (03.15 – 03.30)

During a street fumigation, insecticide smoke enters the Kim family's semi-basement home. Instead of closing the windows, Ki-Tek allows the fumes to enter in hopes of killing

the pests inside the house.



Picture 4. 10 Insecticide Smoke Filling the Semi-Basement Home

The semi-basement symbolizes the unstable social position of the lower class, existing between visibility and invisibility within capitalist society.

c. Disrespect from Society (05.58 – 06.09)

A drunk man urinates outside the Kim family's semi-basement home, reflecting the humiliation and lack of dignity experienced by impoverished communities.



Picture 4. 11 A Drunk Man Urinating Outside the Kim Family's Home

Dialogue:

Chung-Sook: "We need to put up a 'No Urinating' sign."

This moment symbolizes how the lower class is frequently treated without respect within urban social structures.

3.3 The Impacts of Greediness and Class Conflict

a. Violence Erupts (01.50.55 – 01.51.13)

Geun-sae violently attacks Ki-Woo in the basement using the scholar's stone before rushing toward the birthday party with a knife. The scene demonstrates how prolonged resentment and social inequality eventually erupt into violence.



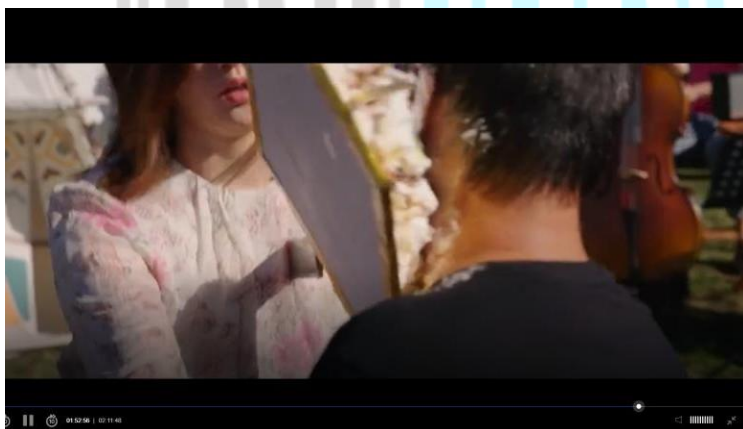
Picture 4. 12 Geun-sae Emerging from the Basement

Dialogue:

Geun-sae: *"You ruined everything!!"*

b. Chaos at the Birthday Party (01.52.50 – 01.52.56)

The birthday celebration suddenly turns into chaos when Geun-sae attacks the guests and stabs Ki-Jung. The violent disruption illustrates the collapse of social order caused by accumulated class resentment.



Picture 4. 13 Geun-sae Attacking During the Party

Dialogue:

Party Guest: *"Call the police! There's a madman with a knife!!"*

The scene emphasizes how unresolved class tensions can suddenly erupt and destroy the illusion of harmony between social classes.

c. The Breaking Point: Ki-Taek Stabs Mr. Park (01.54.50 – 01.54.59)

During the chaos, Mr. Park covers his nose in disgust at Geun-sae's smell while demanding the car keys from Ki-Taek. Feeling humiliated once again by the upper class's contempt toward poor people, Ki-Taek finally loses control and fatally stabs Mr. Park.



Picture 4. 14 Ki-Taek Stabbing Mr. Park

Dialogue:

Mr. Park: "Hurry, give me the keys!"

Ki-Taek: "...The smell... Is that all you care about?"

Mr. Park's gesture symbolizes the persistent stigma directed toward the lower class, while Ki-Taek's reaction reflects the emotional consequences of long-term humiliation and class discrimination.

3.4 Forms of Greed and Class Conflict

The findings reveal that greed in *Parasite* is not portrayed merely as an individual moral flaw, but as a survival strategy shaped by capitalist inequality. The Kim family's actions, including forging identities, manipulating situations, and replacing existing workers, emerge from economic pressures that restrict access to social mobility. This finding strongly reflects Marxist theory, which explains that the proletariat is forced to commodify its labor in order to survive within a capitalist structure dominated by the bourgeoisie (Azzahra et al., 2024). Because opportunities and economic resources are concentrated among the upper class, the lower class is often compelled to rely on unconventional methods to secure stability and income.

The infiltration of the Park household demonstrates how capitalist systems encourage individuals to perform artificial identities in order to gain access to employment opportunities. The fake certificate and fabricated professional backgrounds symbolize the importance of educational legitimacy and social status within capitalist society. This condition supports Wang et al. (2011) argument that greed should not be viewed solely as a personal moral

weakness, but also as a systemic consequence produced by unequal economic structures. Similarly, Valarthodi & Ekayanta (2024) explains that capitalist systems prioritize competition and material accumulation, forcing individuals to compete aggressively for limited opportunities.

The findings also reinforce the concept of class conflict discussed by Marx and elaborated by Henslin (2007), in which social classes pursue conflicting interests within unequal economic structures. Interestingly, *Parasite* portrays conflict not only between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, but also among members of the lower class themselves. The removal of Yoon and Moon-Gwang illustrates how capitalism intensifies competition between economically vulnerable individuals. Rather than developing solidarity, the lower class becomes trapped in survival-based rivalry due to limited access to employment and financial security.

In relation to film as a reflection of society, the findings support the arguments of Bujgoi (2025) and Lu (2023), who state that films function as representations of real social conditions and cultural tensions. Through the contrast between the luxurious Park household and the precarious Kim family, *Parasite* reflects contemporary social inequality and the widening gap between economic classes. Therefore, greed and class conflict in the film are portrayed not as isolated personal problems, but as structural outcomes produced by capitalist social systems.

3.5 Reasons Behind Greed and Class Conflict

The causes of greed and class conflict in *Parasite* are closely connected to structural inequality, economic insecurity, and social exclusion. The findings demonstrate that the Kim family's desperation originates from their marginalized living conditions and limited access to social resources. This supports the concept of film as a reflection of society proposed by Bujgoi (2025) and Lu (2023), who argue that cinema frequently represents the realities and struggles experienced by society. Through visual symbolism and environmental settings, *Parasite* portrays the harsh realities faced by the lower class in capitalist society.

One of the strongest symbols presented in the film is the Kim family's semi-basement home. Positioned between underground and street level, the semi-basement represents a liminal social condition in which the lower class exists between visibility and invisibility. Although the Kim family lives physically close to upper-class society, they remain socially excluded from it. This condition reflects Marxist theory, which argues that capitalist systems structurally maintain inequality by limiting upward mobility for the proletariat while preserving privilege for the bourgeoisie (Singh, 2024). The semi-basement therefore becomes

a visual representation of structural immobility and social marginalization.

The Wi-Fi scene further emphasizes the family's economic insecurity. Their dependence on a neighbor's internet connection symbolizes exclusion from modern technological and economic participation. Access to technology in contemporary society represents access to education, communication, and employment opportunities. Consequently, the inability to secure stable internet access reflects broader patterns of economic deprivation and social inequality. Similarly, the scene involving the drunk man urinating outside the Kim family's home symbolizes the normalization of disrespect toward impoverished communities. Their environment is treated without dignity, reinforcing the dehumanization often experienced by the lower class.

These findings support the arguments of Engels (1845), who explain that capitalist systems preserve the dominance of the bourgeoisie by restricting opportunities for the working class. The Kim family's actions therefore emerge not from excessive ambition or greed alone, but from structural pressures that limit economic security and upward mobility. This interpretation is also consistent with Fadillah (2023), Henslin (2007), and Mutiara et al. (2022), who describe class conflict as the inevitable consequence of unequal economic relations within capitalist society. Through these representations, *Parasite* critiques the structural conditions that perpetuate poverty, exclusion, and class tension.

3.6 Impacts of Greed and Class Conflict

The impacts of greed and class conflict reach their climax through the eruption of violence during the Park family's birthday party. The attack carried out by Geun-sae and the eventual murder of Mr. Park illustrate how long-term inequality, humiliation, and social alienation accumulate into destructive conflict. This finding strongly reflects Marxist theory, which argues that class antagonism intensifies as exploitation and oppression continue within capitalist society (Engels, 1845). In *Parasite*, violence emerges as the culmination of unresolved contradictions between social classes.

One of the most important symbols connected to this violence is the scholar's stone. At the beginning of the film, the stone symbolizes hope, prosperity, and upward mobility. Ki-Woo believes that it will improve his family's economic condition and bring them closer to social advancement. However, the stone ultimately becomes an instrument of violence when Geun-sae uses it to attack Ki-Woo. This transformation symbolizes the collapse of the capitalist dream and the illusion of social mobility promised to the lower class. Despite continuous effort and sacrifice, the proletariat remains trapped within structural inequality.

Another important symbol repeatedly emphasized in the film is smell. Mr. Park's disgust toward the smell associated with poverty reflects the symbolic boundaries separating the upper and lower classes. Although the Kim family attempts to imitate upper-class behavior through appearance and performance, they cannot completely erase the social markers of poverty. Mishra (2022) argues that symbols such as smell strengthen the characters' awareness of class difference and social exclusion. Therefore, smell in *Parasite* functions not merely as a physical condition, but as a representation of class stigma and symbolic humiliation.

The decisive moment occurs when Mr. Park covers his nose while demanding the car keys from Ki-Taek. Although the gesture appears simple, it represents accumulated class contempt that continuously dehumanizes the lower class. Ki-Taek's violent reaction is therefore not simply an impulsive emotional response, but the result of long-term humiliation and alienation. This condition reflects Epa (2025) explanation that capitalist domination operates not only through economic control, but also through ideological and symbolic forms of oppression that reinforce bourgeois superiority over the proletariat.

The violent conclusion of the film also reinforces the idea proposed by Bujgoi (2025) and Lu (2023) that films can function as reflections of social realities and social anxieties. Through its tragic ending, *Parasite* portrays violence as the ultimate consequence of unresolved inequality and entrenched class division. The film therefore presents greed and class conflict not as isolated incidents, but as structural outcomes produced by capitalist systems that continuously reproduce exploitation, humiliation, and social tension.

4. CLOSING

Based on the analysis of *Parasite* (2019) using Marxist theory, this research concludes that greed and class conflict are closely connected to capitalist inequality. The forms of greed and class conflict are represented through deception, manipulation, fabricated identities, and competition for employment and economic opportunities. These actions show how the struggle for material security can create conflict both between social classes and among members of the lower class.

The findings also show that greed and class conflict emerge from poverty, economic insecurity, limited social mobility, social exclusion, and class discrimination. The Kim family's living conditions and experiences of humiliation demonstrate how structural inequality influences individual behavior. Furthermore, greed and class conflict result in competition, dehumanization, resentment, and violence, culminating in Ki-Taek's murder of

Mr. Park.

This research contributes to Marxist literary and film studies by demonstrating that greed in *Parasite* can be understood not only as an individual moral problem but also in relation to capitalist inequality, class relations, and competition for limited economic opportunities. Thus, the film illustrates how individual actions can be influenced by broader social and economic structures.

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