

Analysis of Parasite Movie Poster Through Roland Barthes Semiotic Approach

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Abstract

Bong Joon Ho, the director of Parasite movie, stated that Parasite raises the issues of polarization and social gap, as well as Parasite posters. Those convey the movie's messages as its aims. This article aims to prove whether the meaning of the Parasite's poster matches what the director said, especially on signs related to social inequality. This research uses the qualitative method. Objects research, the posters sample, were selected using a purposive sampling method with the two criteria. Those were official posters that have different visual designs and come from different countries. The posters used in the samples were Parasite's posters from Indonesian, France, and UK. This analysis used Roland Barthes's semiotic. Barthes divides meaning into two levels. First, denotative is the first level. Second, connotative and mythical is the second level. These research results showed that the denotative meanings of three Parasite posters revealed basic information from the Parasite Movie content and the existence of the upper and lower classes. In connotative meaning, the three posters show the gap between the rich and the poor. Furthermore, three posters create the myth that social climbing in the wrong way is dangerous.

Keywords: poster, Parasite, Roland Barthes semiotics, social inequality, myth

1. INTRODUCTION

The poster analyzed in this article is the poster for the movie Parasite (Bong, 2019), directed by Bong Joon Ho. Movie poster intends to attract people's attention in a short time. In the transcript of the interview with Bong Joon Ho contained in the Parasite International Press Kit document, Bong Joon Ho said that Parasite Movie raised the issue of polarization and social inequality that occurred not only in South Korea but also in other countries.

As a poster representing the contents of the movie, the Parasite movie poster is designed to have a specific meaning that describes the contents of the Parasite movie as outlined in the form of design elements in the poster. This article aims to reveal the meaning of the Parasite movie poster, especially on signs related to social inequality, using Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis.

2. METHOD

Examining natural objects' conditions and obtaining deep meaning from data can use qualitative research methods (Sugiyono, 2013). Therefore, to know the meaning of the Parasite Movie poster in-depth, this article uses a qualitative research method.

Parasite movie posters are selected using purposive sampling. The criteria used in selecting the sample are official posters with different visual designs and different countries. Based on these criteria, three Parasite Movie posters were selected, namely the Indonesian

version of the Parasite movie main poster, the official alternative poster for Parasite movie in France, and the official alternative poster for Parasite movie in the UK.



Figure 1. The Indonesian version of the Parasite movie main poster (CGV Indonesia, 2019), the official alternative poster for Parasite movie in France (Bergeron, 2020), and the official alternative poster for Parasite movie in the UK (La Boca, 2020).

The analysis used in expressing meaning is Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis. Barthes divides meaning into two levels. First, denotative is the first level. Second, connotative and mythical is the second level. The analysis showed using the analysis table as follows:

Table 1. Analysis Table

Signifier	Signified
Denotative Sign	
Connotative Signifier	Connotative Signified
Connotative Sign	

(Cobley & Jansz, 1999 in Sobur, 2009, p. 69)

Based on the analysis table, three-level meanings get namely denotation, connotation, and myth.

2.1 Denotation

According to Barthes, denotation is the first level whose meaning is closed and produces an explicit, direct, and definite meaning (Vera, 2014). Denotation is obtained through the part signifier, signified, and denotative sign in the table above.

2.2 Connotation

Connotation is the second level of meaning where the new meaning given by the sign user is under the wishes of the background knowledge or new conventions that exist in the community (Hoed, 2014). The connotative meaning on the poster starts with looking for the untrue meaning related to the local community's culture. It depends on the denotative meaning. The level analysis is the connotative signifier, connotative signified, and connotative sign.

2.3 Myth

Myths appear in the second level of meaning. In Barthes's framework, the connotation is identical with the operation of ideology, which he calls 'myth.' It expresses and justifies dominant values that prevail in a certain period (Budiman, 2001, as cited in Sobur, 2009). Myth analysis emerges through signs on posters that have connotative meanings related to the local community's culture.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Denotation

The Indonesian version of the Parasite movie main poster shows the denotative meaning in Parasite movie information to provide information to the public. The meaning of the denotation is indicated by signified for the title of uses Gotham Sans-Serif Font with Serif old-style mixture, names of movies directed by Bong Joon Ho, tagline, and the movie cast.

Another denotation meaning is the existence of upper and lower classes. The denotative meaning of the upper class is shown by the signified of an excellent and spacious house and yard, a husband and wife sitting relaxed in bright colors clothes and enjoying red wine. White sensor bars are covering their eyes. Behind the glass of the house, there is a signified of the children of upper-class families wearing American Indian attributes. The lower class on the poster showed by two standing figures wearing dark to simple black clothes. Black sensor bars covered their eyes.

The second poster is an alternative Parasite movie poster in France. The denotation of this poster is information on the movie's content and the existence of the upper and lower classes. The title of the movie and the director used the Sans-Serif uppercase font. The illustration on the poster shows two families with different conditions. The upper-class family is depicted by the signified of being in a lovely grey two-story house.

In contrast, the lower-class family showed a signified for a semi-basement house submerged in greenish flood water with a broken red roof. Four members of the lower class family are climbing towards the top. The signs of the houses in the poster were showed vertically, showing the upper, middle, and lower levels.

The alternative Parasite movie poster in England also has movie information as the denotative meaning and the upper and lower classes' existence. Movie information showed with a signified of a tagline. The title of Parasite Movie uses the same font as the main poster, the director's name, the movie's release date, and the movie distributor. Three-level houses indicate the existence of the upper and lower class. Another denotative meaning is the movie's plot, which showed with denotative markers of 9 rooms with pictures of the clues in the movie.

3.2 Connotation

The main poster of Parasite Movie shows the connotative meaning of the difference between wealthy upper-class families and poor lower-class families. Luxurious and spacious houses and yards are connotative signifiers that mean the rich's homes because land prices in big cities in South Korea are very high. The connotative signifier of the relaxed position of the upper-class husband and wife means they have privileges for having all the needs. In addition, the connotative signifier of red wine symbolizes wealth and part of a luxurious lifestyle. The Park family characters on the poster depict the *chaebol*, the high-income people in South Korea. Since the 1990s, big companies in South Korea have changed the salary system so that top management gets higher salaries. Changes in government tax policy to reduce the tax percentage for the rich have increased the income gap in South Korea (Koo, 2019).

On the other hand, the lower class has a connotative signifier of wearing dark-colored clothes, which tend to be black. Black is one of 5 traditional primary colors in South Korea

(*obangsaek*) that symbolizes water elements, wisdom, darkness, and death (National Folk Museum of Korea, 2016). The darkness refers to dark semi-basement housing owned by the lower class. All of these connotative signifiers form a connotative sign of the gap between the upper and lower classes. More than 80% of South Koreans aged 20-40 years believe that no matter how hard they try, it will still be challenging to carry out upward social mobility (Yang, 2018).

There is another sign that showed Parasitism between the lower classes and the upper classes. Those are Gotham Sans-Serif Font's connotative signifier with a mixture of old-style Serif in some parts of the movie title. The Gotham Sans-Serif font with a modern impression depicts the upper class as the original inhabitants whom the lower class will evict. In addition, the connotative signifier of the youngest child of an upper-class family in the poster uses the attributes of Native Americans, whom immigrants then expelled. It illustrates that the lower classes expelled the upper classes. The black and white censorship bars covering the characters' eyes showed the Parasitism. The black sensor bar covered the lower class. Darkness is color in *obangsaek* have meant a nematode, a parasite that has no eyes but can detect light in the dark better than humans (Price, 2016). The white sensor bar means light as opposed to black, which means darkness.

The corpse of pale female legs depicts the consequences of Parasitism. The corpse depicts a disaster victim resulting from Parasitism that crosses the line between upper and lower classes. Marking the different positions of upper and lower classes in the poster showed the boundary line; the upper class on the left of the poster and the lower class on the right side of the poster. The presence of a corpse belonging to a lower-class family member on the left position of the poster illustrates the consequences of lower-class people violating the boundary by committing Parasitism.

The alternative Parasite movie poster in France has the meaning of the difference between the upper and lower classes indicated by the connotative signifier of a grey two-level modern house located on the top level, indicating the house and a safe position. In contrast, the lower class is shown with a connotative signifier a flooded house with a damaged roof, which means no protection, problems, and disasters for the lower classes. The 4D Association and Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF) report stated an increase in social numbers in France in 2019 (SDG Watch Europe, 2019). The results of a survey that states that 9 out of 10 French respondents agree that the gap in France did not decrease in the last 12 months in 2019 strengthened (SDG Watch Europe, 2019). As the result of the social gap, the lower classes try to carry out upward social mobility in a dangerous way, such as being a parasite to the upper classes. It is indicated by the connotative signifier of the lower class climbing up the house without safety and standing on dangerous things.

The alternative Parasite movie in the UK has a connotative meaning of the gap between the upper and lower classes urging the lower classes to improve their standard of living in a wrong way as described in the movie Parasite. The connotative sign of rainwater on the yellow tent showed the gap. The upper class considers rainwater to be a blessing, while the lower class considers rain to be a disaster because it can soak their houses. Floods are a problem for people living in lower-class residential areas in the UK. The UK Social Mobility Commission surveyed 5.000 people in the UK about social mobility in 2020. The result shows that 77% of respondents feel a sizeable social class gap in Britain (Social Mobility Commission, 2020). The connotative signified of green stairs, and white toilets mean that the lower classes try to carry out social mobility upwards through the wrong way, such as Parasitism. However, when they got to the top, the lower class met a blue staircase that took the lower class back to the room on the lower level, which was flooded and had closed ventilation. It means that the lower class cannot improve their standard of living. A survey conducted by Social Mobility Commission showed that 39% of respondents stated that it is increasingly difficult for British people to carry out

upward social mobility. Furthermore, 22% of respondents said that it is easier to do upward mobility, and 29% of respondents said that the situation had remained the same since the past (Social Mobility Commission, 2020).

3.3 Myth

The Indonesian version of the Parasite movie main poster forms the myth of the danger of social inequality in South Korea. The connotative sign described the Parasitism of the lower classes parasitism towards the upper classes. This Parasitism causes disaster, especially for the lower classes.

The alternative Parasite movie poster in France creates a myth about France's dangers of social inequality, triggering other problems. It showed a connotative sign that shows social inequality urging the lower classes to carry out dangerous activities to improve their living standards.

The alternative Parasite movie poster in the UK forms a myth that social inequality significantly impacts the lower classes. It is difficult for the lower classes to carry out upward social mobility to improve their situation.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The three Parasite movie posters showed denotative meanings of the Parasite Movie information and the existence of the upper and lower classes. The three posters show the connotative meaning of social inequality using cultural signs following the country of origin. Finally, the three posters create the myth of the danger of social inequality arising from raising the level of social class using unethical methods.

The suggestion is intended for further researchers to use other Parasite Movie poster objects with different visual designs. Thus, another point of view could complete this article.

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