

Social Class Inequality On Passenger In Movie Snowpiercer Directed By Bong Joon Ho

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Abstrak

Studi ini meneliti penggambaran ketimpangan kelas sosial dalam film Snowpiercer, yang disutradarai oleh Bong Joon-ho. Berlatar di masa depan dystopian di mana sisa-sisa terakhir umat manusia berada di atas kereta yang terus bergerak, film ini berfungsi sebagai mikrokosmos masyarakat, yang secara mencolok terbagi berdasarkan kelas. Kaum elit hidup mewah di gerbong depan, sementara massa yang miskin menanggung kondisi yang keras di gerbong belakang. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif dan analisis konten, studi ini secara sistematis menafsirkan adegan, dialog, dan interaksi karakter untuk mengungkap representasi ketimpangan kelas sosial. Studi ini mengidentifikasi lima kategori ketimpangan yang berbeda yang digambarkan dalam film: borjuis, proletariat, pemilik properti, kelas pekerja, dan kelas komersial. Lebih jauh, studi ini mengeksplorasi implikasi sosial yang lebih luas dari ketimpangan ini, seperti konsentrasi kekayaan, erosi lembaga demokrasi, keresahan sosial, dan dampak lingkungan terhadap hasil individu.

Kata Kunci: Ketimpangan Kelas Sosial, Dystopia, Analisis Film

Abstract

This study examines the portrayal of social class inequality in the film Snowpiercer, directed by Bong Joon-ho. Set in a dystopian future where the last remnants of humanity exist aboard a perpetually moving train, the film serves as a microcosm of society, starkly divided by class. The elite live luxuriously in the front carriages, while the impoverished masses endure harsh conditions in the rear. Utilizing a qualitative methods and content analysis, the study systematically interprets scenes, dialogues, and character interactions to uncover representations of social class inequality. It identifies five distinct categories of inequality depicted in the film: the bourgeoisie, proletariat, property owners, working class, and commercial class. Furthermore, the study explores the broader societal implications of these inequalities, such as wealth concentration, the erosion of democratic institutions, social unrest, and the impact of neighborhood environments on individual outcomes.

Keywords : Social Class Inequality, Dystopia, Film Analysis

1. Introduction

Literature, as defined by (Dianti, 2017) encompasses works that engage with language in innovative and transformative ways, challenging conventional modes of representation and interpretation. This definition implies that literature is not confined to traditional forms but includes any work that uses language creatively to push boundaries, explore new modes of expression, and invite readers to view the world from different perspectives. Literature spans various forms and genres, such as experimental fiction, poetry, avant-garde plays, metafiction, films, postmodern novels, and other innovative storytelling methods. These forms challenge readers and viewers to engage with language and narrative in unexpected ways.

Film, as a form of literature, offers a unique medium for analysis and interpretation akin to conventional written works. (Schrader, 2018) argues that films are a medium for artistic expression, blending narrative structure, visual imagery, sound, and performance to create a unique form of storytelling that explores complex themes and emotions. Movies, as modern and popular art forms, cater to both business and entertainment purposes. They provide diverse genres and storytelling techniques that captivate audiences, often using subtitles to enhance understanding. While many viewers consume films for entertainment, movies can also offer profound insights into life lessons, such as tolerance, respect, and social inequalities.

One film that addresses social class inequality is Snowpiercer. The movie portrays a dystopian future where the last remnants of humanity survive on a perpetually moving train, divided by rigid social classes. The front carriages house the elite in luxury, while the tail sections are reserved for the impoverished, who endure harsh conditions. The film illustrates the detrimental effects of social class divisions on human society. This study focuses on Snowpiercer because it vividly depicts various forms of social class inequality among the passengers.



The motivation for analyzing this topic, specifically under the title Social Class Inequality of Passengers in the Movie *Snowpiercer* Directed by Bong Joon-ho, stems from the recognition that social inequality is a pervasive concept in social science and political theory. It highlights how societies divide individuals into various social categories, leading to numerous health and social issues, such as reduced life expectancy, limited social mobility, increased violence, and mental health challenges. Through this film, the study aims to explore these complex dynamics of social class inequality and their broader implications.

Research Questions

To support the research study the writer proposed with three statements of problem, there are:

1. What are the types of social class inequality in movie *Snowpiercer*?
2. What are the effects of social class inequality in movie *Snowpiercer*?

Theoretical Review

Social Class Inequality

Social class inequality refers to the structured patterns of unequal access to resources, opportunities, and privileges within a society. According to (dos Santos Accioly Lins et al., 2021) these disparities are often based on characteristics such as race, gender, class, and ethnicity, leading to unequal advantages for some groups. These inequalities are systematically maintained by social structures, creating persistent gaps in access and opportunities.

Additionally, (Mayer, 2015) states that social class inequality is the systematic disparities in power, wealth, and status among individuals or groups within a society, perpetuated by social structures and institutions, and resulting in unequal opportunities and life outcomes. This definition means that within a society, there are organized and persistent differences in power, wealth, and social status among individuals or groups. These differences are maintained and reinforced by social structures and institutions, leading to unequal opportunities and varying life outcomes for different groups.

From the definition above, it can be concluded that social inequality shapes societies by creating structured disparities in access to resources, opportunities, and privileges. These inequalities, often tied to race, gender, and class, perpetuate social hierarchies and limit upward mobility for disadvantaged groups, making it crucial to address the institutional roots of inequality.

Types of Social Class Inequality

According to (Marx, 2023), social class inequality is divided into two main classes:

1. **Bourgeoisie:** The upper class, consisting of capitalists who own the means of production, such as businessmen and landowners. They hold significant economic power in capitalist societies.
2. **Proletariat:** The lower class, made up of individuals who do not own production tools and rely on selling their labor for wages. They face economic hardship due to their dependency on wage labor.

(Nilsson, 2020) describes social class through three cultural tiers:

1. **Cultural Elites:** Individuals with high cultural capital who engage in elite cultural activities like attending operas, art galleries, or classical music performances.
2. **Mainstream Middle Class:** People who participate in a mix of mainstream cultural activities, such as watching popular television shows or attending local theater productions.
3. **Working Class:** Individuals who primarily engage with mass media and popular culture, such as watching television or attending sporting events, and have limited access to elite cultural spaces.

(Aarons & Willis, 2022) identify three dimensions of social class based on economic power:

1. **Property Owners:** Those who own and control the means of production, including land, factories, or businesses, and derive income from property ownership and investments.
2. **Commercial Classes:** Individuals involved in trade, business, and commerce, including entrepreneurs, managers, and professionals engaged in market activities.
3. **Working Classes:** People who sell their labor for wages, ranging from unskilled laborers to highly skilled professionals, but with limited economic power.

In conclusion, these classifications highlight the diverse ways in which social class inequality manifests, whether through economic ownership, cultural engagement, or labor roles. The persistence of these inequalities across different aspects of society continues to create barriers to resources and opportunities, reinforcing the need to address social and economic disparities.

Impact of Social Class Inequality

According to (Piketty, 2014), social inequality has four key impacts:

1. **Concentration of Wealth:** When the return on capital outpaces economic growth, wealth becomes concentrated in the hands of a few, widening the gap between the wealthy and the rest of society.
2. **Erosion of Democratic Institutions:** Extreme inequality can undermine democracy by giving the wealthy disproportionate influence over politics, leading to policies that favor the rich and exacerbate inequality.
3. **Social Unrest and Rebellions:** Historical data shows that high inequality often correlates with social unrest, as disenfranchised groups become more likely to protest and rebel.
4. **Intergenerational Inequality:** Wealth inequality is often passed down through generations, as the rich transfer their assets and advantages to their descendants, perpetuating social disparities.

(Sharkey, 2023) discusses the influence of social inequality through:

1. **Urban Violence:** Economic inequality and concentrated poverty drive higher crime rates in urban areas due to lack of opportunities and services.
2. **Impact of Neighborhood Environment:** Poor infrastructure and inadequate services in disadvantaged neighborhoods exacerbate poverty's effects.
3. **Crime Decline and Gentrification:** While urban crime rates have dropped, gentrification displaces long-term residents, leading to new inequalities.
4. **Community-Based Solutions:** Sharkey advocates for investing in local programs that tackle the roots of violence and inequality, such as job training, education, and healthcare.

In conclusion, the various impacts of social inequality discussed by Piketty and Sharkey illustrate the deep-rooted consequences on wealth concentration, democratic processes, social cohesion, and urban environments. Addressing these issues requires structural changes that focus on reducing inequality and creating sustainable solutions for affected communities.

2. Research Methodology

In this research, the writer employs qualitative research. According to (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), qualitative research is a form of inquiry that analyzes the qualitative aspects of phenomena to provide a deep understanding of participants' perspectives and the contexts in which they live and work. It relies on textual or visual data and involves an iterative process of data collection and analysis. The writer explores data through the dialogue and events in the movie *Snowpiercer*, focusing on how the lower classes are oppressed, with attention to characters, dialogues, and events that reveal class conflict.

To collect information and relevant data, the writer selects written sources connected to the topic. These sources are reviewed, and data relevant to the research are extracted. The following steps are implemented in this research:

1. Watch the movie on the Netflix platform.
2. Understand the story to grasp its themes and key moments.
3. Find important data, including dialogues and scenes that relate to class struggle.
4. Identify relevant sources to support the analysis, such as articles, books, and theories.
5. Take notes of all significant data related to the research and theoretical framework.

The inquiry includes the type of research, data resources, methods of data collection, and methods of analysis. Each step is briefly described below. After collecting the data, the writer applies the following procedures for analysis:

1. **Identification:** The writer identifies the data from primary sources, such as the movie *Snowpiercer* (directed by Bong Joon-ho), and secondary sources, including books, articles, and other relevant information.
2. **Classification:** The writer classifies the data, such as dialogues from the main or supporting characters, as well as relevant theories and research from books and journals.
3. **Analysis:** The writer analyzes the selected dialogues and literature in connection to the research theme, focusing on class struggles and oppression.
4. **Conclusion:** Finally, the writer draws conclusions based on the analyzed data. This final step completes the research study.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Types of Social Class Inequality

After analyzing the data, the writer found 5 types of social class inequality mentioned by Marx, Aarons & Willis. There are bourgeoisie, proletariat, property owner, working class, and commercial class.

1. Bourgeoisie

According to (Marx, 2023), the bourgeoisie are the owners of the means of production and hold economic power over the proletariat. In "Snowpiercer," Wilford, the train's creator and overseer, represents the bourgeoisie class. He maintains control over the train's resources and enforces a strict hierarchical order.

Wilford lives in the engine room, the most privileged part of the train, symbolizing the upper echelon of society. His control over the train's ecosystem highlights his position as the ultimate authority figure.

Wilford : "Curtis, everyone has their own preordained position ...and everyone is in it. Except you."

Curtis : "That's what people in the best *place* say to the people in the worst place. There's not a soul

There's not a soul on this train who wouldn't trade places with you."

(In the engine room, 01:37:57-01:38:25)

2. Proletariat

(Marx, 2023) describes the proletariat as the working class that lacks ownership of the means of production and is subjected to exploitation. In the film, the residents of the tail section represent the proletariat, suffering from severe deprivation and systemic oppression.

The tail section of the train in Snowpiercer is where the proletariat class lives. They lack basic hygiene facilities and medical care. The environment is dehumanizing, with overcrowding and lack of privacy, the section is cramped, dark, and dirty, with minimal light and poor ventilation, and the guards often exercise brutal control, and the people are subjected to harsh and arbitrary punishments.

3. Property Owners

According to (Aarons & Willis, 2022), property owners is the individuals who own and control the means of production, such as land, factories, or businesses. They derive their income primarily from property ownership and investments."

Wilford : "Do you think my station is without its own drawbacks? It's hot. It's noisy. And it's lonely."

Curtis : "Right. Poor fucking Wilford. Steaks, plenty of room, this whore to bring you whatever you want."

(In the engine section, 01:37:57-01:38:25)

Wilford lives in engine room at the very front of the train in movie Snowpiercer. He is also the creator and overseer of the train's self-sustaining ecosystem, holding a position of power and control over all the passengers.

4. Commercial Class

According to (Aarons & Willis, 2022), commercial classes is the individuals involved in trade, business, and commerce. Includes entrepreneurs, managers, and other professionals who engage in market activities and business operations.

Tanya : "Why? Not enough fish?"

Mason : "Enough" is the wrong criteria. Balance. You see, this aquarium is a closed ecological system. The

number of individual units must be controlled very precisely to maintain the proper sustainable balance."

(In the aquarium section, 01:05:33-01:05:52)

Mason as the Wilford's spokesperson speech about the train's ecosystem sustainability serves to maintain the status quo and uphold Wilford's authority among the influential individuals aboard the train who play key roles in its economic systems.

5. Working Class

According to (Aarons & Willis, 2022), working classes is the individuals who sell their labor for wages. Can be further divided based on skill level, from unskilled laborers to highly skilled professionals.

Guard 1 : “Sit down! Be quiet!” (*The passengers reluctantly lower themselves to the floor.*)

Guard 2 : “You! Down! Now!”

Guard 1 : “Do as you're told, and you will be fed. Step out of line, and you'll be punished!”

(*A mother, desperate, speaks up.*)

Mother : “What about the children? They're starving!”

Guard 3 : “Silence. You'll take what you're given.”

(In the tail section, 00:14:05-00:19:49)

The guards play the role of enforcing order and maintaining control over the train's passengers, especially those in tail section. They act as the enforcers of Wilford's rules, ensuring that the strict class hierarchy is upheld and that any attempts at rebellion are swiftly suppressed.

3.2. Impact of Social Class Inequality

In this part, the writer analyzes about the impact of social class inequality in main character. The writer used the impact of social inequality according to (Piketty, 2014) and (Sharkey, 2023). The writer found five impact of social class inequality. They are concentration of wealth, erosion of democratic institutions, social unrest and rebellions, impact of neighborhood environment, and community-based solutions.

1. Concentration of Wealth

The first impact of social class inequality that the writer found from analyzing this movie is concentration of wealth. Concentration of wealth is that when the rate of return on capital exceeds the rate of economic growth, wealth becomes increasingly concentrated in hands of a few. This results in a growing gap between the wealthy and the rest of society.

When Curtis and his group reach the aquarium, they see a luxurious setting with an abundance of food. The scene in sushi bar has a character explain that sushi is only served twice a year to maintain balance, reflecting how the front sections have access to such luxuries.

Mason : “Do any of you feel like sushi?”

Curtis : “...”

Tanya : “Sushi? Hell, yea. Line that shit up.”

(*AQUARIUM SECTION - SUSHI BAR*) *At the small sushi bar attached to the aquarium, a pitch-black African Chef makes sushi out of the fresh fish. Mason, his hands tied to the front, sits at the bar with Curtis, Andrew, Grey, Namgoong, Yona and Tanya, salivating.*

Mason : “You people are very lucky. This is served only twice in a year, in March and September.”

(At sushi bar, 01:05:28-01:05:40)

The writer concluded that this scene starkly contrasts the luxurious lifestyle of the front section with the deprivation of the tail section. The fact that sushi is a rare delicacy served only twice a year highlights the opulence enjoyed by the elite, emphasizing the extreme concentration of wealth and resources.

2. Erosion of Democratic Institutions

Erosion of Democratic Institutions is that extreme inequality can undermine democratic processes as the wealthy gain disproportionate influence over politics and policy-making. This can lead to policies that favor the rich and perpetuate inequality.

Fuyu : “Seven minutes allotted for your speech, sir.”

Mason nods and picks up a wireless microphone, standing in front of Andrew, whose face is distorted in great pain.

Fuyu : (*sullenly silent*)

Mason : Order is the barrier that holds back the frozen death. Order. We – all of us Passengers on the Train of Life - must remain in our allotted stations.” (In tail section, 00:17:22-00:17:38)

From this scene, Minister Mason's speech about order and control underscores the authoritarian regime on the train. The lack of democratic processes and the rigid enforcement of class divisions illustrate how extreme inequality can erode democratic institutions, with the wealthy exerting disproportionate influence

3. Social Unrest and Rebellions

Social Unrest and Rebellions is that the historical data suggest that periods of high inequality often correlate with increased social tensions and rebellions. When large segments of the population feel disenfranchised, they are more likely to engage in protests and revolts.

(Curtis grabs the barrel of the rifle, puts it to his own forehead and reaches for the trigger with his other hand. Soldier 1 is so taken aback that he turns into a blue-face statue. Everyone, paralyzed in shock, stares at Curtis. With a roar, Curtis pulls the trigger.)

CURTIS: "Ahhhhhhhh!" *CLICK - nothing.*

EDGAR: *(shouting)* "THEY'VE GOT NO BULLETS!" (EDGAR drops the red letter: "No Bullets.")

(Passengers overwhelm the Soldiers like a vast human tsunami. Curtis viciously kicks Soldier 1 in gut. The Soldiers fall like leaves under a hail of fists, steel rods and confiscated rifles used as clubs).

(In tail section, 00:27:30-00:28:02)

Curtis's rallying cry to the tail section residents marks the beginning of their uprising. This rebellion is a direct response to the systemic oppression and inequality they face, mirroring how high inequality often leads to social tensions and uprisings.

4. Impact of Neighborhood Environment

Sharkey emphasizes the importance of neighborhood conditions on individual outcomes. Poor infrastructure, inadequate schools, and limited access to healthcare exacerbate the effects of poverty.

The stark contrast between the tail section and the luxurious front sections of the train highlights the profound impact of one's environment. In desperate conditions of the tail section, survival often means resorting to the unthinkable, whereas the front sections, with their abundance and luxury, face no such moral and physical degradation.

(Eventually becoming absorbed in story, Namgoong's face begins to take on a similar expression to Curtis).

Curtis : "After three weeks, we began to eat the weak.

Namgoong : "..."

Curtis : "We were hungry. We stopped being humans. We became animals.

Do you know what I hate the most about myself? I fucking hate that I know what part of a human tastes good. I know the babies taste best." (In front section, 01:29:12-01:29:45)

The scene vividly illustrates how harsh living conditions can dehumanize individuals, reinforcing the social commentary on inequality and its consequences.

5. Community-Based Solutions

Sharkey advocates for investment in community-based programs and interventions that address the root causes of violence and inequality, such as job training, education, and health services.

At the end of "*Snowpiercer*," Wilford offers Curtis the chance to take over the train. This moment is significant because it suggests a potential shift towards a more just and equitable system.

Wilford : "I am old. I want you to take my station. It's what you wanted all along."

Curtis : "No...I..."

Wilford : "You must tend the Engine, keep her humming."

(Wilford helps Curtis up. As Curtis stands to look toward, he back of the train for the very first time, Wilford stands behind Curtis and whispers in his ear). (In engine section, 01:47:24-01:48:01)

4. Conclusion

The analysis of Bong Joon-ho's film *Snowpiercer* offers a compelling depiction of social class inequality, using the backdrop of a dystopian future to explore the dynamics of power and oppression. The study identifies five distinct social classes within the film: the bourgeoisie, proletariat, property owners, commercial class, and working class. These classifications are portrayed through characters and societal structures on the train, symbolizing the rigid hierarchies that define capitalist societies.

The bourgeoisie, epitomized by Wilford, live in opulence while exercising control over the train's resources. In contrast, the proletariat, represented by the tail section inhabitants, face exploitation, deprivation, and

subjugation. Property owners like Wilford assert significant control over production and infrastructure, while the commercial class operates within the train's trade and economic systems, benefiting from their position. The working class, consisting of essential laborers such as security personnel, sustains the train's daily functions but remains confined to their societal roles.

The impact of these class divisions is profound. The concentration of wealth in the hands of the elite exacerbates the marginalization of the lower classes, stripping them of agency and fostering a climate of rebellion. Social unrest, as depicted in Curtis's revolt, illustrates the consequences of inequality and the desire for revolution. The stark contrast between the front sections and the tail section mirrors real-world disparities, emphasizing how environmental and social conditions can shape individuals' behavior and life chances. Finally, the film underscores the potential for transformation through collective action, suggesting that solidarity and community-driven solutions are key to addressing the deep-seated inequalities within society.

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