



**REPRESENTATION OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN *SNOWPIERCER* (2013)
DIRECTED BY BONG JOON HO**

Raissa Talitha Anindya,* Nurholis

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung

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ABSTRACT

This research discusses how social issues that occur in society, such as social inequality represented in literary works, film as the genre, *Snowpiercer* (2013) directed by Korean director, Bong Joon Ho. The background of the research is social issues that are reflected in literary works. The purpose of the research is, to find out and show to the reader, how social inequality and exploitation are represented in *Snowpiercer* (2013). The research method used in this research is a literary qualitative method, where all the information is collected in various references. The conclusion that can be obtained from this writing is, that social issues such as social inequality and exploitation can be represented through the literary work, film. *Snowpiercer* (2013) shows that there is an inequality social issue and exploitation which often occurs in real life society.

INTRODUCTION

In this technological era, films have become one of the most popular literary works and are in great demand by people from all walks of life, from small children, teenagers, adults, and even the elderly. Film is a literary genre that is much in demand nowadays. Film is also a mass communication medium that has a strong influence on society. The growth and development of films is very dependent on technology and a combination of artistic

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: thalitaraissa11@gmail.com (Raissa Talitha Anindya)

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elements to produce quality films (Pertiwi, 2020). It cannot be denied that films have audio-visual technology with very diverse stories that attract many fans in society and create lots of film enthusiasts.

Films are powerful tools for shaping perspectives and influencing audiences through storytelling. Based on Effendi's opinion (1986: 134) regarding film, it is a medium for audio-visual communication to convey messages to a group of people gathered in a certain place. Although at first the film treated as a commodity that is bought and sold as a medium of entertainment (Syulhajji, 2017). However, in its development, film is also often used as a medium propaganda, information tools and even education. Film becomes a medium for communication in conveying a message and moral, because a film must contain a story which definitely has an implied message.

Film is not only a form of entertainment but also a complex medium that conveys narratives and themes comparable to literary texts, making it an essential subject for academic analysis. According to Mario Klarer (2004:56) in his book, *An Introduction to Literary Studies*, films have a unique way of presenting, with camera angles, editing, montage, slow and fast motion which often parallel the characteristics of literary texts. Even though literature has its own characteristics and terminology that makes it different from other literary genres, film analysis can be carried out using literary criticism methods, because film criticism is closely related to traditional approaches in textual studies. With the rapid development of mass media, the reach of films is increasingly expanding. As time progresses, films can be easily enjoyed by anyone without age restrictions. It is not uncommon for a film to be made based on habits carried out in the daily life of a society (Puspitasari, 2021). Mario Kaler also argues that in his book, *An Introduction to Literary Studies*, he includes film genres as literary works and all kinds of film presentation modes are in accordance with the features of literary texts and can also be explained in a textual framework. So it can be concluded that literary works are included in literary works because they contain text or narrative. The development of film cannot be denied that films have developed rapidly, from those that were initially only black and white, had no dialogue, had little duration, and did not have friends or specific genres such as the 1888 film entitled *Roundhay Garden Scene* by Louis Le Prince or *Workers. Leaving the Lumiere Factory* directed by Louis Lumiere and other films from the 18th century. But as time goes by, literary works of film have developed a lot in terms

of production to genre, especially electronic sophistication such as the use of CGI technology, making films more able to explore the writer's imagination.

Films not only present fictional stories, but some are also documentaries, where films document reality without any engineering. according to Hidayat (2015), apart from being entertainment media, national films can used as an educational medium for formation of the younger generation in order nation and character building. But there are also films with fictional stories that relate facts, one of which is about social issues originating from real life in people around the world. One film that addresses social issues is the 2013 film *Snowpiercer*, directed by Bong Joon Ho.

Snowpiercer is a film released in 2013 directed by one of the famous directors in South Korea, namely Bong Joon Ho and directed by the production houses Stilking Films, Opus Picture, and Moho Film. *Snowpiercer* is a film adapted from the French novel, *Le Transperceneige* by Jacques Lob. This English language film actually comes from South Korea and is the first English language film from director Bong Joon Ho. But this film succeeded in stealing the attention of the public overseas. Based on news from the Yonhap news agency, the film *Snowpiercer* has been watched by more than 8 million viewers in 19 days of broadcast, which beats the film *Ironman 3* which is an American film in 19 days of broadcast. Not only that, this film from Korea has many achievements. *Snowpiercer* (2013) was a huge success in its home country, namely South Korea, the film received around 35 trophies at prestigious awards events in Korea.

Their success is not only in South Korea, but has spread throughout the world from countries in Asia, America, and even Europe. *Snowpiercer* (2013) received around 96 other awards from various Awards Ceremonies around the world. The film tells about the ice age earth's survivors have lived in a train travels around the world for seventeen years creating their own economy and class system (Lasiana, 2021). The great success of *Snowpiercer* (2013) certainly cannot be separated from the hands working behind the scenes such as the actors, actresses, staff, and of course the hard work of the director himself, namely, Bong Joon Ho.

Bong Joon Ho is a Korean man born in 1969, he completed his higher education at one of the 3 best universities in Korea, Yonsei University, majoring in Sociology. After graduating he continued his education by attending the Korean Academy of Film Arts and that was the beginning of his career in film. His career began by writing films for a variety

of different directors. In 2000 he began his directorial career by directing a film entitled *Barking Dogs Never Bites*, unexpectedly, his first film received public attention, and from there he continued His career has been in directing various famous films. While taking a break from making his film *The Host*, he accidentally found the book *Le Transperceneige*, a French graphic novel, in a comic book shop in Seoul, South Korea. At that time he couldn't stop reading the novel because it had an interesting story. His interest in the story made Bong Joon Ho want to adapt the novel into a film.

Apart from Bong Joon Ho, as a director, who liked the story content of *Snowpiercer*, the audience also had very positive reviews of the story, which addresses many social issues that can be found in society. At the outset, it should be acknowledged that *Snowpiercer* is not mainly about sustainability issues. It is a mix of genres, including science fiction, action, and social critique (Baum, 2014). This film begins with a depiction of the environmental crisis caused by humans. This issue is not something foreign to us, we will always encounter it in our daily lives wherever we are. For example, floods caused by humans due to littering, or landslide disasters due to excessive harvesting of tree resources. It is not only the environmental crisis that is depicted in the film *Snowpiercer*, but there is also the issue of power. A German sociologist, Max Weber, said that "power is the ability to exercise one's will over others" (Weber 1992), according to him power means asking or ordering people over himself, he also believes that power can occur in social groups, an organization, and government. If we look at it from Weber's point of view, we must have felt this issue or seen it directly or through social media. Where the rulers always act according to their wishes and always do anything in the name of power. Social issues Environmental Crisis and issues of power. in *Snowpiercer* (2013), directed by Bong Joon Ho, is the setting for the birth of the main themes in this film, namely Social Inequality and Exploitation.

Social inequality and exploitation are included in sociological studies, both of which are social issues that often occur in sociology and literature. The correlation of sociology and literature is basic and sociology turns out to be a science while literature appears to be a phenomenon of society (Alwaqaa, M. A. 2020). Social inequality and exploitation are issues that occur because of human behavior in society. Abad Badruzaman, a Professor at the Tulungagung State Islamic University, believes that social inequality is a social imbalance that exists in society, creating striking differences

(2009:284). He also said that social inequality can be seen when the rich choose positions that higher and more powerful than the poor. Sociology provides an understanding of the social framework and processes for overcoming extreme poverty and social inequality in society (Fauzi, F. 2023). This intersection between sociology and literature emphasizes the importance of addressing these social issues, as both fields offer insights into the root causes of inequality and propose avenues for fostering a more equitable society.

The social issues above, social inequality and exploitation, will show the interest of this research because of the uniqueness of how Science-Fiction films will raise social issues that are very close to society. Appel (2016) said that science fiction is to provide meaning for otherwise unsettling real-world phenomena. In the book *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction*, Joyce G. Saricks argues that science fiction contains worlds and technology that might exist and the existence of science in this genre must be accurate and in accordance with the main axioms of Newtonian physics (Saricks 2009:245). So this research will be interesting because it is a genre that combines science and the world which brings up social issues regarding social inequality.

METHOD

This article researches using qualitative methodology. Qualitative research can be understood as a research method whose method utilizes descriptive data such as written or spoken language from the object to be studied. Sulistiyo (2023) said that qualitative research is one that emphasizes understanding problems in social life based on holistic, complex and detailed conditions of reality or settings. Qualitative research aims to describe and analyze individual or group phenomena, events, social forces, behavior, beliefs and understanding. Qualitative research has a descriptive nature and tends to use an inductive approach to analysis, therefore in this qualitative research the methods and uses are based on the subject's perspective. more emphasized (Fadil, 2020, p. 33). This approach allows researchers to capture the depth and richness of human experiences, making it particularly suitable for exploring the nuanced social dynamics and cultural contexts relevant to the study.

This research uses qualitative literature methods. By using this method, researchers want to get the results of a more comprehensive study of a phenomenon. Based on Sugiyono's opinion, the qualitative research method is a method based on the philosophy

of postpositivism which is used in natural conditions (a situation in accordance with the facts, not changed or in experimental conditions) to examine objects where the researcher has control over what is being studied (2019, p. 18). The results of the research pay more attention to the ability to describe, synthesize, analyze and evaluate, not from data obtained by the author as is done in quantitative research. The working steps of this method are, accumulating data, then compiling, describing, analyzing the data that has been obtained and finally concluding from what has been analyzed.

Library research plays a critical role in providing a strong foundation for academic inquiry, as it enables researchers to establish credibility and depth in their studies by building on existing knowledge. Sarwono believes that library research is a science that studies various reference books and similar previous research products which function to obtain a theoretical basis about the object to be observed (2006). The data collection technique in this paper uses documentation. Jailani (2023) said the documentation technique is where the author collects references in the form of books and journals that speak to the theme of this paper, then the author analyzes these books and journals to draw conclusions that speak to the research theme. According to Mardalis library research can be defined as research that has the aim of collecting indications and reports through various references in the library, which are in the library, for example: books, archives, magazines, documents, reports, notes, stories history and others. The library research method only focuses on searching for papers, data collection techniques are carried out using several work searches that are widely spread on the Google Scholar platform and special platforms. Several sources of reading material that can be reached to help with this research need, such as books, articles, or platforms that provide the same discussion. The information that has been collected will be examined effectively based on the process of providing opinions from one or more statements to reach a reasonable conclusion.

This library research method is carried out by combining data from library references such as books, journals, articles and other scientific publications related to the material to be researched. This method can be used to unite important theories and concepts related to argumentative and critical thinking skills.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

Social inequality is very clearly depicted in *Snowpiercer* (2013), directed by Bong Joon Ho. In *Snowpiercer* (2013), the story begins when humanity experiences the destruction of the earth hit by snow. The remaining human race must live on a train that will never stop circling the world. However, what is unique is that in *Snowpiercer* (2013), the issue of social inequality is depicted in the usual way, where social inequality is seen in how the remaining human beings living on the train are arranged according to their class, from the front car to the last is the class order. The front carriage contains rich people, the facilities in the front carriage are very luxurious, they even show a swimming pool, school, bar, a comfortable and clean place. Meanwhile, the rear carriage contains the lowest class, a place that is very narrow, dirty and has minimal lighting is the place for the lower class. These differences are clearly visible in how the conditions on the trains are differentiated according to class.

The activities carried out between the upper class and the lower class are very different, the occupants of the front carriage have many activities like people in power such as partying, school, swimming, and all the fun activities. Meanwhile, the occupants of the back carriage can only fight to survive and get justice. Every day they just look for ways to get out of the misery they are experiencing. Not only looking at the condition of the train, but the food is also shown to be very different. The upper class gets very luxurious and expensive food with premium quality food, while people from the lower class are only provided with boxes of black jelly. Appearance is also a symbol of the difference between the lower class and the upper class. People from the lower class only wear shabby clothes, predominantly dark in color, with a few small tears. Meanwhile, the upper class tends to wear clean clothes dominated by striking designs and colors.

In the dialogue at 17:30, when the female character from the front carriage named Mason is making a speech in front of all the people from the lower classes, she says

"We must all of us, on this train of life, remain in our allotted stations, we much is of us occupy our preordained particulate position." (Timestamp 00:17:30)

The dialogue above is intended to inform you that the lower class must remain at the back, while those of you above remain at the front. And the lower class must accept their fate as the lower class.

The social inequality that occurs on the train has a huge impact on the people on the train. First, there is injustice and suffering, people in the lower classes experience difficulties, they cannot enjoy their life on the train, they can only accept fate and poor conditions. The resources they get are very limited, namely food, clothing, water and shelter. They got all this because of exploitation from the upper class which also resulted in great suffering felt by the lower class. Second, there was massive resistance and rebellion carried out by the occupants of the back carriage. Of course, this stems from existing social disparities. The anger they feel has a negative impact on all the people who enjoy luxury. This rebellion aims to win justice for their rights as human beings. Tensions arise between the two classes. The last is the emergence of ideological differences between the upper class and the lower class. Social inequality results in the emergence of conflicting ideologies between classes. The upper class definitely adheres to the status quo, where they feel they have power over everything, upper social circles think that they can do anything to the lower class,

Slavery, coercion, oppression, and forced labor. In this film, the upper class exploits the lower class a lot. Violence occurs when the lower classes are fighting for justice, they will receive torture and punishment for anyone who resists.

Forced work for the upper class is also part of the issue of exploitation, the back carriages filled with lower class people always follow what is ordered by people from the upper class, they have to be forced to follow all orders with a sense of compulsion because no one can they do it to fight. As in the following dialogue.

“In this locomotive we call home, there is one thing that between our hearts and the bitter cold, clothing? jenas? No. Order. Order is the barrier that holds back the cold and the death.” (Timestamp: 00:17:11)

The word 'order' there implies that people from the lower class must obey all orders given by the upper class in order to be safe from all existing dangers. Which shows that if people from the lower class want to feel safe, then they have no choice but to follow all orders from the upper class. the lower classes certainly supported the ideology of the resistance movement. They want to get all the treatment they get from the upper class. Their resistance began by breaking into the front carriages. One of the characters named Curtis takes the lead and makes plans for this rebellion. The lower class tries to fight and

dominate the upper class areas.

Discussion

Social inequality is a social issue that is widespread in society. The issues raised in *Snowpiercer* (2013) are very relevant to social issues in society. Unfair treatment, power, *Snowpiercer 2013* oppression like in the film is very common and not unusual anymore. Like several cases of social inequality in Indonesia

1. Minimum basic services in Bamusbama, Papua

The social gap that occurs in this case is between the government and communities in remote areas of Papua. The government pays little attention to basic services which are still minimal, there are no community health centers, primary and secondary schools, and road access is difficult to pass. Make the residents of Bamusbama District protest to get justice.

2. Corruption in Indonesia

In 2023 there will be 791 corruption cases in Indonesia with the number of suspects reaching 1,695 people. This case of social inequality illustrates how people from the upper classes can do whatever they want even though it is detrimental to society.

3. Enter the university through the insider

Recently there was a case that was busy on social media. Where people can pass the college entrance exam without taking the exam. Namely by paying a large amount of money. The more difficult the education program you want, the more expensive the money you have to pay. In this case, it can be seen how the rich collaborate with the rich to get what they want without having to follow the applicable regulations. Meanwhile, people from the lower classes try as hard as possible to get what they want.

The examples above are only a few of the many cases of social inequality that occur in Indonesia.

in *Snowpiercer* (2013) depicts how those in power will remain in power and those from the lower classes will remain oppressed and only experience the impact, as in examples of cases of social inequality in Indonesia. If we talk about the comparison

between the conditions in the film and real situations. How in *Snowpiercer* (2013) really depicts the social inequality that occurs in society. However, in *Snowpiercer* (2013), social inequality is depicted in a unique way and packaged in such a way as to attract the audience. Where social inequality is seen in a sequence of train carriages.

This film teaches how we as humans must treat other humans the same. Because according to our shape and the power we have, we are just the same creatures as other humans. By raising the issue, this film helps the audience understand that social inequality will always exist wherever, and in whatever situation we are in. And as a reminder to arbitrary people, that they, the oppressed people, will have times when they speak out and it will actually be detrimental to the people in power themselves.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Literary works often raise social issues. one of which is the 2013 film *Snowpiercer*, directed by Bong Joon Ho. Films that tell stories about social issues, namely social inequality and exploitation. This film, which has a science fiction genre, has a unique way of representing how social inequality is depicted in the *Snowpiercer* (2013). Where they live on a train that never stops traveling around the world. But they are classified based on class. From the front carriage to the last carriage is their class order.

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