



HOW TO SURVIVE NEOLIBERAL GOVERNMENTALITY? THE DILEMMA OF SUBALTERN INDIVIDUALS FROM THE FILM PARASITE

COMO SOBREVIVER À GOVERNAMENTALIDADE NEOLIBERAL? O DILEMA DE INDIVÍDUOS SUBALTERNOS A PARTIR DO FILME PARASITA

¿CÓMO SOBREVIVIR A LA GUBERNAMENTALIDAD NEOLIBERAL? EL DILEMA DE LOS INDIVIDUOS SUBALTERNOS DE LA PELÍCULA PARÁSITOS

ABSTRACT

Dilemma: What can the Ki-taek family do to survive the hardships caused by neoliberal governmentality?

Educational objective: This case was developed to assess the implications of neoliberal governmentality on individuals' living conditions and analyze the possibilities for overcoming these implications, as well as the role of the state in this regard.

Context: The Ki-taek family lives in dire poverty in an unhealthy basement on the outskirts of Seoul, South Korea, due to unemployment. Resorting to odd jobs to get by, the family's situation begins to improve when Ki-woo starts working as an English tutor for the eldest daughter of a wealthy couple in the city. Enamored by the couple's opulent lifestyle, the Ki-taek family devises a plan to infiltrate this privileged home. The opening created by Ki-woo is enough for all his relatives to see an opportunity for social ascent, even at the cost of a series of schemes that will reveal a high price.

Main Theme: Neoliberal governmentality.

Audience: This case can be explored by postgraduate students in Administration (Advanced Academic and Professional Programs).

Originality/value: Through this case, students can develop the Foucauldian concept of neoliberal governmentality, constructing a critical view of the state's role in promoting social justice. Additionally, students are expected to reflect on the ethical implications of the decisions and actions undertaken by the Ki-taek family.

Keywords: Neoliberal governmentality. Social inequality. Parasite.

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RESUMO

Dilema: O que a família Ki-taek pode fazer para sobreviver diante das dificuldades causadas pela governamentalidade neoliberal?

Objetivo educacional: O caso foi elaborado com o intuito de avaliar as implicações da governamentalidade neoliberal nas condições de vida dos indivíduos e analisar as possibilidades que os indivíduos possuem para superar essas implicações, bem como o papel do Estado nesse quesito.

Contextualização: A família Ki-taek vive em uma situação de penúria em um porão insalubre na periferia de Seul, na Coreia do Sul, graças ao desemprego. Submetendo-se a subempregos para obter o mínimo, a situação da família começa a melhorar quando Ki-woo começa a trabalhar como tutor de inglês da filha mais velha de um casal abastado da cidade. Deslumbrados com a opulência da vida do casal, a família Ki-taek inicia um plano para se infiltrar naquele lar privilegiado. A fresta que foi aberta por Ki-woo é suficiente para que todos os seus familiares vejam uma oportunidade de ascensão social, mesmo que às custas de uma sucessão de artimanhas que revelarão ter um alto custo.

Tema principal: Governamentalidade neoliberal.

Público: O caso pode ser explorado por discentes de pós-graduação em Administração (*lato e/ou stricto sensu*).

Originalidade/valor: Através deste caso, os discentes podem desenvolver o conceito foucaultiano de governamentalidade neoliberal, construindo um olhar crítico sobre o papel exercido pelo Estado no fomento da justiça social. Além disso, espera-se que os discentes ponderem acerca das implicações éticas das decisões e ações empreendidas pela família Ki-taek.

Palavras-chave: Governamentalidade neoliberal. Desigualdade social. Parasita.

RESUMEN

Dilema: ¿Qué puede hacer la familia Ki-taek para sobrevivir frente a las dificultades causadas por la gubernamentalidad neoliberal?

Objetivo educativo: El caso fue elaborado con el fin de evaluar las implicaciones de la gubernamentalidad neoliberal en las condiciones de vida de los individuos y analizar las posibilidades que tienen para superar estas implicaciones, así como el rol del Estado en este sentido.

Contextualización: La familia Ki-taek vive en situación de penuria en un sótano insalubre en las afueras de Seúl, Corea del Sur, gracias al desempleo. Con un subempleo para ganar lo mínimo, la situación de la familia comienza a mejorar cuando Ki-woo comienza a trabajar como tutor de inglés para la hija mayor de una pareja adinerada. Deslumbrados por la opulencia de la vida de la pareja, la familia Ki-taek comienza un plan para infiltrarse en ese privilegiado hogar. La grieta que ha abierto Ki-woo es suficiente para que todos los miembros de su familia vean una oportunidad de ascenso social, aunque sea a costa de una sucesión de trucos que resultarán tener un alto costo.

Tema principal: Gubernamentalidad neoliberal.

Público: El caso puede ser explorado por estudiantes de posgrado en Administración (*lato y/o stricto sensu*).

Originalidad/valor: A través de este caso, los estudiantes pueden desarrollar el concepto foucaultiano de gubernamentalidad neoliberal, construyendo una mirada crítica sobre el papel que juega el Estado en el fomento de la justicia social. Además, se espera que los estudiantes reflexionen sobre las implicaciones éticas de las decisiones y acciones emprendidas por los individuos.

Palabras clave: Gubernamentalidad neoliberal. Desigualdad social. Parásitos.



INTRODUCTION

Parasite is a 2019 South Korean feature film that blends thriller, drama, and comedy genres. Directed by Bong Joon-ho, it was critically acclaimed and won the Oscar for Best Picture that year. This was an unprecedented achievement, as it was the first non-English language film to win this category. Besides the acclaim from critics, *Parasite* has been widely praised by the audience since its release, notably due to the multiple unsettling questions it raises. These concerns are rooted in visceral portrayals of the effects of neoliberalism, wealth accumulation, social inequality, the construction of subaltern identities, power and domination relations, and class struggle.

From a biological perspective, the Michaelis Online Portuguese dictionary defines the term "parasite" as an organism that lives as a host in another organism, extracting its food and generally causing some harm¹. Indeed, this is the perfect metaphor for the film's plot, which introduces us to the Ki-taek family, consisting of Ki-taek (patriarch, unemployed driver), Choong-sook (matriarch, housewife), Ki-jeong (the couple's daughter), and Ki-woo (the couple's son), who live in extreme social vulnerability in a dirty and unhealthy basement on the outskirts of Seoul, South Korea.

The plot is built around the Ki-taek family, who live in dire poverty in a dirty and unhealthy basement on the outskirts of Seoul, South Korea, due to unemployment. The family's situation begins to improve when Ki-woo starts working as an English tutor for the eldest daughter of a wealthy couple in the city. Fascinated by the opulence of the Park family's life, the Ki-taek family devises a plan to infiltrate this privileged home. The opening created by Ki-woo is enough for all his relatives to see an opportunity for social ascent, even at the cost of a series of schemes that will eventually have a high price.

It is from this initial context that the narrative of the feature film is constructed, mixing intense moments that evoke anger and others that border on comedy. Consequently, this backdrop allows us to construct a dilemma born from a fictitious situation but highly rich in providing

a pedagogical opportunity aimed at promoting critical reflection on reality. Thus, the dilemma/problem situation guiding this teaching case refers to the question: *what can the Ki-taek family do to survive the hardships caused by neoliberal governmentality?*

However, considering the actions of the Ki-taek family in their quest for survival and social ascent, the case raises a complex ethical and moral dilemma about justifying such actions in a context of extreme social inequality exacerbated by neoliberalism. Consequently, the following secondary dilemma emerges: *to what extent can socio-economic circumstances justify or explain morally questionable actions of individuals in vulnerable situations?*

Therefore, it is emphasized that this teaching case is aligned with the field of Public Administration, addressing the role of the state in promoting social justice. Thus, the case is aimed at postgraduate students in Administration and is intended to be applied in courses such as "State and Peripheral Contexts" and "Politics, Organizations, and Society."

CASE DESCRIPTION

The feature film begins with a view from the window of the Ki-taek family's residence, which is almost at street level. In the scene, you can see old socks hanging and a pile of garbage right at the entrance. Then, we are transported to a failed attempt by siblings Ki-jeong and Ki-woo to use the neighbors' Wi-Fi, who apparently change the password constantly to prevent them from accessing it. While Ki-woo searches for a solution, with his sister suggesting possible password combinations, Choong-sook, the family's matriarch, utters the following line: *"The phone is turned off. Now our Wi-Fi is gone,"* as exemplified in Figure 1. After saying this, she asks her husband, who is lying on the floor, *"What is your plan?"*

¹ Available at: <https://michaelis.uol.com.br/busca?id=QwQNZ>. Accessed on: April 27, 2023.



Figure 1

The family loses their internet connection



Source: Excerpt from the film Parasite, 2019.

Ki-taek then suggests that his son hold the phone up high and search around the house for a place where he can find a signal. Eating a piece of bread, the patriarch also complains about the insects infesting their precarious residence. Surprisingly, they find a Wi-Fi signal from a new café that opened nearby in the bathroom, near the toilet. The matriarch promptly asks the children to check WhatsApp to see if Pizza Generation has sent a message. They work assembling pizza boxes in exchange for a few cents. While assembling the boxes, Ki-woo finds a video online showing someone assembling boxes at high speed. He joins his family, saying, "Look at this, everyone. If we are as fast as her, we'll finish in a day. Then we get the money." Figure 2 illustrates this context.

Figure 2

The Ki-taek family assembling pizza boxes



Source: Excerpt from the film Parasite, 2019.

As they work, a pest control service arrives on the street, spraying poison to kill insects. The thick smoke enters the family's house, and although they are clearly bothered by the toxic fumes, they continue working. Shortly after, the employees arrive to collect the assembled pizza boxes and start criticizing the work, noting that the lines are crooked and the folds poorly

done. They conclude that one in every four boxes is defective and therefore unusable. As a result, they will cut 10% of the payment. The matriarch then questions heatedly, "The payment is already low. How can you do this?" Realizing the situation escalating, the siblings Ki-jeong and Ki-woo intervene sympathetically with the pizzeria employee. The siblings, already scheming something bigger, begin to talk about a problematic employee at the pizzeria. At one point, Ki-woo suggests, "Speaking of which, boss... we'll accept the 10% cut. But in exchange... how about hiring a new employee?" Ki-jeong then adds, "Get rid of that guy. Send him out." Without letting the employee speak, Ki-woo says, "I can do the interview tomorrow. What time is best?" The employee then concludes, "Wait a moment. Let me think first."

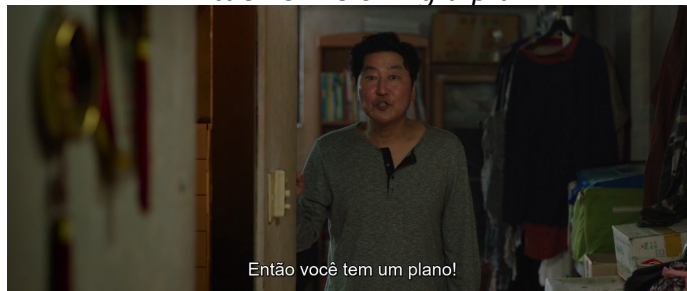
Receiving payment for the assembled boxes, the family gathers around the table to celebrate the reconnected phone and the "generous" Wi-Fi. However, the matriarch's question to her husband, "What is your plan?" remains unanswered. It appears the family has no plan to escape their situation. As they sit together at the table, watching a drunk man urinate on the trash bin at the entrance, the family notices the arrival of Min-Hyuk, Ki-woo's friend. Arriving uninvited, Min-Hyuk drives the drunk man away and brings with him a wooden box. Handing the box to the family, he mentions that his grandfather insisted he bring a gift to them. Opening the box, he reveals a stone from his grandfather's collection. Calling it Gongshi, Min-Hyuk emphasizes that the stone brings material wealth to families. Ki-taek responds, "Absolutely. It's a very timely gift. Our deepest thanks to your grandfather." In Figure 3, we can see Ki-woo observing the Gongshi and saying, "This is so metaphorical."

**Figure 3***Ki-woo admiring the Gongshi*

Source: Excerpt from the film Parasite, 2019.

Going outside to talk, Min-Hyuk states that through the stone, he could see Ki-woo's parents and that they seemed healthy. Ki-woo replies, *"They are healthy. They're just unemployed."* Knowing his friend's story, Min-Hyuk mentions that he is an English tutor for a wealthy girl and suggests that Ki-woo take over his job while he is out of town. Min-Hyuk asks his friend to look after the girl while he is away, stating that the job pays well. Clearly, he trusts Ki-woo to take care of Da-hye, his love interest. Ki-woo then asks, *"Thanks for the trust, but do I have to pretend to be a university student?"* Min-Hyuk encourages his friend, saying that he is much better than any university student. Skeptical, Ki-woo questions, *"But will they hire me? I'm not a university student,"* and Min-Hyuk responds, *"Just pretend."*

At this moment, a plan seems to form. Using Ki-jeong's Photoshop skills, Ki-woo manages to forge a perfect enrollment certificate. Heading to his interview at the Park mansion, Ki-woo receives the following words from his father: *"I'm proud of you."* Hearing this, Ki-woo responds, *"Dad. I don't see this as forgery or a crime. I'll go to university next year. I just printed the documents a bit earlier."* Ki-taek finally concludes, *"So you have a plan!"* This context is illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4*Ki-taek envisioning a plan*

Source: Excerpt from the film Parasite, 2019.

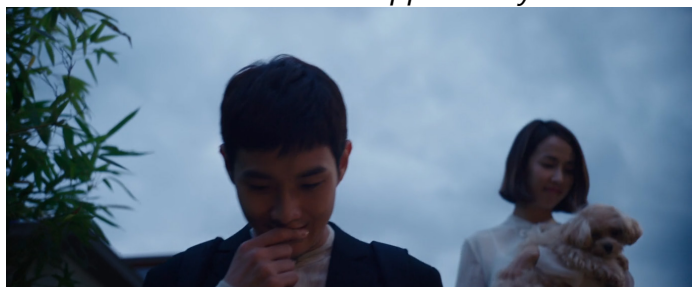
Arriving at the Park mansion, Ki-woo is warmly received and immediately encounters a living condition very different from his own. Winning over his employer, he begins his role as Da-hye's English tutor and slowly starts to enjoy the small pleasures that the new life offers. On his first day, he receives his payment for the next month of work and is informed by his employer, who nicknames him Kevin, that whenever he wants a snack during the lesson, he can simply request it from the housekeeper.

At the end of his meeting, he meets the couple's youngest son, Da-song, who is described by his mother as "eccentric" and "easily distracted." Talking about the boy's characteristics and his paintings, Mrs. Park mentions that she has never had much luck with art teachers, as none have lasted more than a month due to Da-song being "difficult to control." Upon hearing this, Ki-woo has an epiphany (illustrated in Figure 5) and says, *"Wait a moment, ma'am. Someone just came to mind. What was her name? Jessica! Yes, Jessica... She attended the same art school as my cousin [...] Well, before studying applied arts at Illinois State University, she returned to Korea [...] Her teaching method is unconventional, but she certainly knows how to handle children. She has a special reputation in her field. Despite her unorthodox methods, she can help children get into good art schools."*



Figure 5

Ki-woo realizes the opportunity



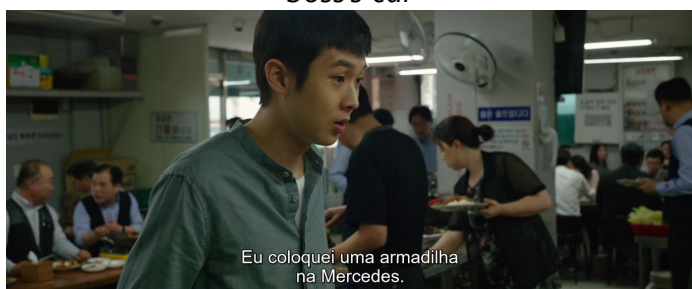
Source: Excerpt from the film Parasite, 2019.

Surprised, Mrs. Park says, "Now I'm very curious. What is she like?" At this point, Ki-woo suggests arranging a visit for "Jessica," but he mentions that she is highly sought after, so he is not sure if she will accept. In the next sequence, we see him bringing his sister, Ki-jeong, to meet Mrs. Park, who is immediately charmed by the young woman and hires her as her son's art teacher. Ki-jeong lies, claiming to be a specialist in art psychology and art therapy, which fascinates Mrs. Park. Persuasive as she is, Ki-jeong sets the number of classes she will teach per week and establishes a high price, after all, "... *it's not just a simple class. It's art therapy, you understand?*"

With Ki-woo and Ki-jeong well-established in their new positions, Ki-jeong sees an opportunity in the family's driver to get their father hired. Setting up a trap, she orchestrates the dismissal of Mr. Park's former employee. Noticing his sister's plan, Ki-woo asks, "*Are we moving to the next stage?*" and she responds, "*I planted a trap in the Mercedes.*" This dialogue is illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Ki-jeong stating that she planted a trap in the boss's car

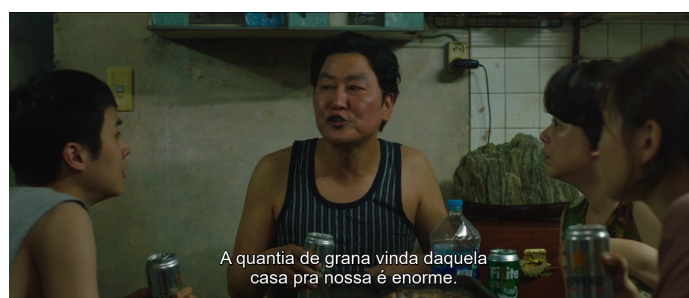


Source: Excerpt from the film Parasite, 2019.

With Ki-woo, Ki-jeong, and Ki-taek now employed by the Park family, the next and final step is to scheme against the current housekeeper and have Choong-sook take over the position. Upon discovering that the housekeeper Moon-Gwang is allergic to peaches, they create a well-rehearsed narrative in which she has tuberculosis and is still working, putting the entire household at risk of contagion. After Moon-Gwang's dismissal, it falls to Ki-taek to recommend his wife for the position. He promptly does so, suggesting a fake agency that offers high-level professionals for VIP clients. Through this contact, Choong-sook secures an interview and begins working as the housekeeper of the residence. The family celebrates, as "*The amount of money coming from that house to ours is huge.*" Figure 7 illustrates this context. Additionally, as shown in this figure, the Gongshi stone can be seen in the background. Indeed, isn't it metaphorical how this stone brought material wealth to the Ki-taek family?

Figure 7

Ki-taek celebrating the family's financial ascent



Source: Excerpt from the film Parasite, 2019.



TEACHING NOTES

1. Educational Objectives

This proposal has the following educational objectives:

a) Evaluate the implications of neoliberal governmentality on individuals' living conditions;

b) Analyze the possibilities for individuals to overcome these implications, as well as the role of the state in this regard.

Suggestions for Case Use in the Classroom:

Initially, it is suggested that the lecturer ask the class to watch the film *Parasite* and read the article "Foucault: Biopolitics and Neoliberal Governmentality" by Tótorá (2011) before the scheduled session for applying this case.

However, the lecturer should provide students with the main dilemma and the secondary dilemma, as well as the two debate questions in advance, so that students can watch the film with a critical eye, looking for answers and generating possible insights. Additionally, it is suggested that the lecturer ask students to prepare a brief summary of the film, narrating a scene that caught their attention.

Regarding the application of the case, it can follow this structure: assuming the lecturer has a three-hour class, the following division is suggested. In the first segment, with a suggested duration of 30 minutes, the lecturer can broadly introduce the present case, outline the dilemma (without providing definitive answers), re-present the debate questions, and explain the theoretical lens that will aid in understanding the problem situation.

In the second segment, with a suggested duration of one hour, it is advised that the lecturer give the floor to the students so they can share their initial perspectives on the film, commenting on which scene caught their attention and why. At this stage, it is expected to encourage students to develop their critical thinking, expressing their opinions assertively.

It is essential for the lecturer to guide the students' reflection towards an in-depth analy-

sis of the characters' living conditions, as well as their perceptions of the characters' attitudes, personalities, learning, motivation, group behavior, leadership, exercise of power, and conflict arising from their actions. The idea is to inspire students to judge the conduct of the families involved in the plot, supporting their arguments with their own references on social justice and the role of the state.

In the third and final segment, with a suggested duration of 1 hour and 30 minutes, the lecturer should divide the class into two groups for a mock trial. One group will take on the role of prosecuting the Ki-taek family for their actions, while the other group will defend them. Each group can have up to 30 minutes to articulate their ideas among themselves and choose who will act as the defense and prosecution lawyers. After that, the final dynamic will last one hour.

Thus, this discussion becomes even more relevant in the context of Public Administration, where decisions and policies can have direct implications on the perpetuation or mitigation of inequalities. It is hoped that students will be able to consider the ethical implications of the decisions and actions taken by the Ki-taek family, weighing the boundaries between the need for survival and moral integrity in a world where the disparity of wealth and opportunities is a tangible reality.

2. Data Sources

Parasite (2019), directed by Bong Joon-ho, is a South Korean drama co-written by Bong and Han Jin-won. The 132-minute film was produced by Barunson E&A and released in South Korea on May 30, 2019. The main characters, the Ki-taek family, are portrayed by actors Song Kang-ho, Jang Hye-jin, Choi Woo-shik, and Park So-dam. For the preparation of this case study, *Parasite* was watched in April 2023. The film was accessed through a digital streaming platform. Data collection was conducted through narrative and scene analysis of the film.



3. Discussion Questions

1. How does neoliberal governmentality act to create the social inequality faced by the Ki-taek family?
2. What is the interpretation of the actions taken by the Ki-taek family to promote their social ascent?
3. What is the role of the state in promoting dignified living, working, and housing conditions for individuals?

4. Literature Review and Analysis

4.1. Literature review

In his lectures *Security, Territory, Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*, given at the Collège de France in the late 1970s, Foucault expands the understanding of biopolitics, re-inscribing it as the art of governing, or more precisely, as governmentality. Additionally, in continuing to examine governmentality, the philosopher addresses it under two themes: liberalism and neoliberalism (Costa, 2009).

Generally speaking, governmentality is understood as:

[...] the ensemble constituted by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit complex, form of power that has the population as its principal target, political economy as its essential form of knowledge, and security devices as its technical instrument (Foucault, 2008a, p. 144).

In summary, Michel Foucault coined the concept of governmentality as an art or practice of governance, grounded in the state's ability to produce knowledge about populations and subsequently use this knowledge as a governing mechanism to manage the population more efficiently, productively, and discreetly (Ambrózio, 2012; Costa, 2009; Tótora, 2011).

As Foucault's thought advanced toward liberalism and neoliberalism, the notion of go-

vernmentality expanded. Governments began to focus increasingly on the production and management of markets. From the philosopher's perspective, "liberalism is not a discourse opposed to power; it is a mode of rationalization of power, a set of rules that allow limiting and making it more effective" (Foucault, 2008b, p. 34). Thus, liberalism is not only a political theory that challenges individual liberty and the limitation of the state but also a scope of practices, techniques, and devices that make the exercise of power more subtle and effective. Liberalism is a mode of governance that uses freedom, property, and competition as mechanisms to exercise power at both the individual and population levels.

Regarding neoliberalism, it is seen as an interventionist type of liberalism, no longer grounded in *laissez-faire* but in permanent surveillance and intervention. According to Foucault (2008a) and Lima Filho and Chaves (2021), neoliberal theorists propose that the government needs to be active, vigilant, and interventionist. Therefore,

[...] price mechanisms are not achieved through equalizing phenomena, but through a play of differentiations that is inherent to competitive mechanisms and established through fluctuations that only fulfill their function and regulatory effects when allowed to act through differences (Lima Filho & Chaves, 2021, p. 52).

As Foucault mentions (2008b, p. 195-196), "there must be people who work and others who do not, or there must be high wages and low wages, prices must also rise and fall for regulations to occur." Consequently, social policy in the context of neoliberalism needs to let inequality operate and not pursue equality as a goal. Thus, neoliberal governmentality is an art of governance that, in addition to constructing games of differentiation as a mechanism of power, impacts all spheres of life with market economy and entrepreneurial logic (Lima Filho & Chaves, 2021).

Furthermore, from Dardot and Laval's perspective (2017, p. 328), "'Enterprise' is also the name to be given to self-governance in the neoliberal era." For the authors, neoliberal govern-



mentality is characterized by the “administration of things,” where the government acts as a resource manager and risk allocator rather than a provider of goods and guarantor of rights. Consequently, neoliberalism produces a governmentality aimed at creating a market that governs all areas of life, leading to a governance crisis where the state loses the ability to protect its populations.

In summary, neoliberal governmentality is a concept that describes how governing practices have adapted to neoliberalism, promoting competition, individualism, and the extension of the market into all social and economic contexts. This governmentality affects how the state, institutions, and individuals govern themselves and others, as well as the ways populations are governed (Dardot & Laval, 2017; Lima Filho & Chaves, 2021).

4.2. Analysis

The discussion of this case will be articulated around three key moments: differentiation games, the rain, and the competition for survival.

Differentiation games

From Foucault’s (2008b) perspective, it is inherent in neoliberal governmentality to construct boards where differentiation games are perpetually played. In these games, humans are the pieces, and the demarcation of their ontological and social positions is crucial for fostering neoliberal governing practices and, thereby, maintaining the profits of the power elite. It is essential to understand, as Lima Filho and Chaves (2021) also point out, that social policy under the aegis of neoliberal governmentality uses social inequality as a propellant for the economic regime itself, not seeking to support individuals but relegating them to their own fate.

Using fragments from *Parasite* to reflect on the context of differentiation games, one can observe, at first glance, that the director extensively uses lines to subdivide characters. As Veríssimo, Reis, and Pereira (2020) point out, the imagistic construction of differentiation between the Ki-taek family and the Park family is based on ele-

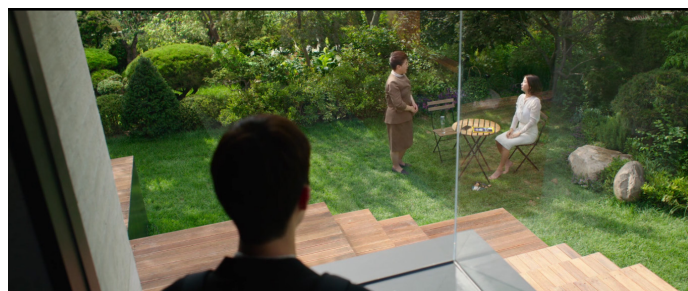
ments ranging from vertical architecture, window positioning, endless staircases, and metaphorical use of lines.

These elements allow us to reflect on how neoliberal governmentality acts in constructing abyssal lines essential for creating distinct and incommensurable realities between those considered human and those beyond this pretended humanity (Santos, 2007). Veríssimo, Reis, and Pereira (2020) extensively articulate this interpretation and connect the construction of inequality for the Ki-taek family to the Western rationality that produces waste and erasure. Thus, even individuals with such skill and intelligence as the members of the Ki-taek family live in inhumane conditions, bordering on animality and non-existence, as they are rationally constructed for such a state.

This context becomes clear when observing Figure 8.

Figure 8

Metaphorical presence of lines dividing individuals



Source: Excerpt from the film *Parasite*, 2019.

Additionally, it is common to notice in the film that the families are presented on different levels, both in the positioning of their residences (as previously explained) and in the moments they interact in scenes. Figure 9, shown below, can be used to reflect on this aspect.

At a certain point, the Park family is preparing to go camping, and their employees are engaged in their tasks to make this trip possible. In an overt symbolism, the frame occupied by Mrs. Park when giving orders to Choong-sook is always higher, more illuminated, and cleaner. This is a clear reference to the differentiation games of the subjects, where Mrs. Park represen-



ts the wealthy, hierarchically and constitutively superior, who enjoy social prestige. In contrast, Choong-sook represents the marginalized, forgotten, and invisible side; always in a lower and darker frame, she fails to stand out and fades into the background along with other elements.

Figure 9

Hierarchical position of subjects



Source: Excerpt from the film Parasite, 2019.

Another important element, which may go unnoticed, is the smell. At a certain point in the plot, there is a symbolic construction of the differentiation of the Ki-taek family based on the odor they emit. This is first noticed by the Park's youngest son, who points out that all the employees in his house have the same smell. This immediately worries the Ki-taek family members, who begin to bathe with soaps of different fragrances out of fear that their schemes might be discovered. Figure 10 illustrates this context.

Figure 10

The Smell



Source: Excerpt from the film Parasite, 2019.

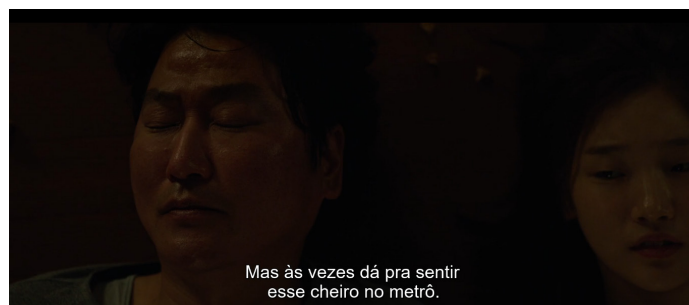
However, the interpretation that the Park couple makes of the smell is, shall we say, curious. Far from discovering the Ki-taek family's secret, they intuitively attribute the "unpleasant" odor of the family members to their social condition. It is

as if the smell they emit is common to all people marginalized by society.

In a particularly striking scene, the couple comments on how this trait of their employees is unpleasant and permeates the car and the house environments, and can also be detected in the subway. This context, shown in Figure 11, aligns with the title of the cinematic work, as the "parasites, in the plural, install themselves, infiltrate subtly, one by one, mysteriously, but not without a smell" (Veríssimo, Reis, & Pereira, 2020, p. 5).

Figure 11

The Ki-taek family overhearing the Park couple discussing their smell



Source: Excerpt from the film Parasite, 2019.

Therefore, returning to the assertion that governmentality is a "[...] complex form of power that targets the population through institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics [...]" (Foucault, 2008a, p. 144), it is crucial to understand that differentiation games are fundamental elements for governing practices. These games, imbued with knowledge revealed about populations, are undertaken to govern the population more efficiently, productively, and discreetly.

As unbearable as it is for the Parks to share their privileged life with parasitic beings with an unpleasant smell like the Ki-taek family, they do not relinquish their presence because their way of life cannot be maintained without servants. Thus, there is a symbiotic relationship between the antagonistic classes, which is one of the pillars of neoliberal governmentality.



The rain

Another fundamental element presented by *Parasite* is the rain, as this natural phenomenon can be terrifying for vulnerable classes while being a blessing from the heavens for the wealthy (Kleine & Santos, 2021).

Therefore, the element of rain is shown as a fundamental social difference between classes. While the Park family enjoys the pleasant weather in the comfort of their home, with their youngest son camping in the yard, the Ki-taek family is struck by a severe flood that destroys what little they had. Consequently, they are forced to take shelter in a temporary refuge, and the next day, they must be up and ready because their employers are organizing a birthday party for their youngest son.

Figure 12 shows the damage the rain caused to the Ki-taek family's precarious residence.

Figure 12

The rain destroying the Ki-taek family's home



Source: Excerpt from the film *Parasite*, 2019.

Perhaps one of the most emblematic scenes of the film, the moment represented by Figure 13, shown below, overflows with social inequality and the growing feeling of revolt nurtured within individuals marginalized by neoliberal governmentality.

Figure 13

The blessing of rain for the Parks



Source: Excerpt from the film *Parasite*, 2019.

On the phone, Mrs. Park says, "the sky is blue and pollution-free," "the air is so nice," "that rain was a real blessing!" while Ki-taek shows an expression of anger and resentment. This makes it clear that the same phenomenon is interpreted differently by different social classes (Kleine & Santos, 2021).

Given this, it is crucial to understand how the power and domination relations underlying neoliberal governmentality act in constructing severely opposing realities that often juxtapose in the same space, as is the case in major urban centers.

The competition for survival

Reflecting back on the feeling of revolt echoed in Ki-taek's facial expression, as shown in Figure 13, we can extract the first nuance of what we call the "competition for survival." As one of the main events initiating the catharsis that builds the final minutes of *Parasite*, the introduction of a new, ghostly character highlights the cruelty of the competition among individuals in the same subaltern condition for survival.

At a certain point in the plot, the Park's former housekeeper, Moon-gwang, returns to her employers' residence in desperation. She takes advantage of a moment when she knew the employers would not be home to rely on the solidarity of the new housekeeper to visit her husband, who had been living for years in the hidden basement of the residence. The revelation is shocking, as Moon-gwang's husband has been surviving right under the Parks without their knowledge, except for their young son, who has trauma from seeing a supposed ghost in the kitchen. Figure



14 shows the reunion of Moon-gwang with her husband.

Figure 14

The ghost in the Park's basement



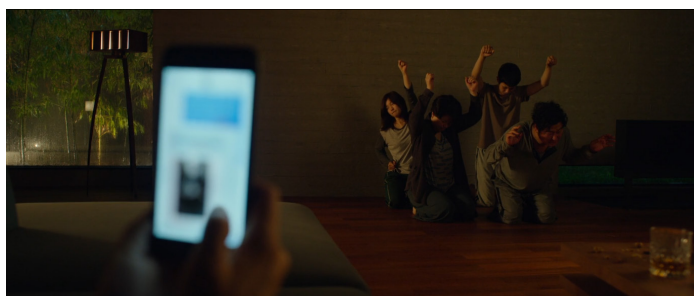
Source: Excerpt from the film Parasite, 2019.

Moon-gwang and her husband appeal to Choong-sook for help, as he is an illegal immigrant from North Korea with no government assistance rights. However, things take a turn for the worse when the other members of the Ki-taek family literally fall into the basement, revealing the truth of their deceit to the couple. This scene ignites a bloody sequence of violence between the characters, as if they were destined to compete against each other, since the privileged position of being the Park's parasites could not be occupied by everyone.

Through Figure 15, we see Moon-gwang and her husband threatening the Ki-taek family, in a complete reversal of roles.

Figure 15

Moon-gwang and her husband threatening the Ki-taek family



Source: Excerpt from the film Parasite, 2019.

Consequently, this bloody competition among subaltern individuals is also a key element of neoliberal governmentality, as it instills competition, individualism, and the extension of the market into all contexts of social and econo-

mic life. Beyond that, by depoliticizing the economy and transforming it into an autonomous sphere, neoliberal governmentality produces an individualized subject, an entrepreneur of the self, responsible for their own successes and failures (Dardot & Laval, 2017; Lima Filho & Chaves, 2021).

Thus, far from being supported by the state, the subaltern population is instilled with the need to compete to survive. In the absence of class consciousness, the competition occurs with peers, also subjugated by neoliberal governance, rather than against the pillars representing the dominant class.

As a result, a symbiotic relationship between poverty and wealth is perceived, with the parasite being "[...] a situation, a relationship, a state, a mutation that passes from one character to another, making the invisibility, inhumanity, and death of the other a choice for one's own survival" (Veríssimo, Reis, & Pereira, 2020, p. 5).

The competition for survival, a necessity arising from the scarcity of basic resources imposed by the economic regime, creates a hostile environment where violence and death are used as power resources. In the face of the cruel social inequality generated by neoliberal governmentality, only the smartest, strongest, and most fearless can survive and parasitize the system.

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