

PARASITE AS PARABLE

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PARASITE AS PARABLE

Bong Joon-Ho's Cinematic Capitalism

Minjung Noh

Winning both the Palme d'Or at Cannes Film Festival 2019 and Best Picture—along with Best Directing, Script, and International Feature Film—at the 2020 Oscars, *Parasite* achieved unprecedented international success for a South Korean film. It is even more striking to find that a film shot entirely in the Korean language with South Korean production received the highest honor at the Oscars, a generally domestic film festival in the United States. Admittedly, the filmmaker, Bong Joon-ho,¹ was not only already a top-tier director in South Korea, but also a reputable auteur of cinema who had gained international fame since the early 2000s and made major films in the United States, including *Snowpiercer* (2013) and *Okja* (2017). The mastery of Bong's filmmaking is evident: storytelling that can grab the audience "by the collar and shake them up,"² a detail-oriented cinematography, and impeccable editing that deserves textbook status at film schools. That said, the triumph of *Parasite* goes beyond Bong's previous successes in the field of international film festivals and art houses, and beyond his existing accomplishments as a filmmaker. *Parasite* speaks to the broader public because its narrative is centered on the practice of today's ubiquitous religion, global capitalism.

The relationship between religion and capitalism, or capitalism as a religion, is a classic subject of religious studies, since Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Among many other works on religion and capitalism, I draw particularly on Walter Benjamin's 1921 fragment, "Capitalism as Religion." Benjamin's fragment was published in 1985, long after his death, and it is an incomplete piece of writing that

shows the significant influence of Weber in Benjamin's early thought on the topic.³ Mentioning that "Capitalism has developed in the West as a parasite of Christianity," Benjamin lists four religious characteristics of capitalism. First, capitalism is a religion that relies on utilitarian practice, rather than the doctrine of a creed. Second, the cult of capitalism is celebrated "*sans rêve et sans merci*"⁴—there is no pause in the practice of capitalism, and every single day is sanctified by capital. Third, capitalism is a guilt-producing, instead of expiatory, religion that leads humanity to despair. Lastly, capitalism's God must be hidden and addressed only when a believer's guilt is at its peak. In addition, Benjamin argues that the dominant result of capitalism is the affect of despair derived from guilt, which does not allow anyone to escape from capitalism or hope for a different mode of existence. Based on Benjamin's idea, I argue that the core narrative of *Parasite* and its concomitant affects effectively showcase these religious aspects of capitalism, thus becoming a universal *parable* of contemporary capitalism.

I borrow the concept of the parable from John Dominic Crossan. Crossan distinguishes between "myth" and "parable" among types of religious stories.⁵ While a myth is a type of story that establishes the current world, a parable subverts and exposes the injustice in it. A myth attempts to "establish the possibility of reconciliation," but a parable creates "contradiction within a given situation of complacent security."⁶ If *Parasite* can be read as a parable of the contemporary religion of capitalism in Crossan's sense, the film's title could not be more apt. That is, the innately political concept of *parasite* represents the ironically interdependent nature between the poor and the rich who are all embedded in the capitalistic structure.⁷ Therefore, this essay interprets the film as a cinematic parable of global capitalism that employs the effective analogy of the parasite. To make my case, I will first analyze the narrative of *Parasite* in relation to religious aspects of capitalism à la Benjamin. Then, I will explore the film's linguistic analogy, visual techniques, and politics to show the ways in which it functions as a cinematic parable of capitalism.

Religion of Mammon and *Parasite*

Although Bong has a Catholic background—his baptismal name is "Michael"—he hardly uses religious elements in his films except for a small number of depictions of Korean Protestant evangelicals.⁸ *Parasite* is

not an exception in its lack of presence of institutionalized religions. Instead, the film revolves around the contrast between the poor and the rich in the capitalistic economy. The film begins with the struggle of the poverty-stricken Kim family and their opportunistic machinations for achieving economic stability. It is by making their way into the wealthy Park family household as hired helpers and tutors of their children that the Kim family appears to resolve their financial distress. In the first half of the film, the process through which the Kim family devises the ruses to be employed by the Parks is depicted with a touch of humor, along with elements of editing reminiscent of the caper film genre.

It is a thrill for the audience to witness the Kim family's plot falling impeccably into place. It involves forgery, deception of identity, and framing previous employees of the Parks. The Kim family's son, Ki-woo, showing his forged university enrollment certificate to his family, ironically remarks: "I don't think of this as forgery or crime." Instead, the deception and fraud are justified in the logic of survival and as an opportunity for escaping dire poverty. It is a thoroughly rationalized and intelligent process, and there is nothing magical or supernatural about it. In other words, there is no religious enchantment in the Weberian sense in the film. Instead, capitalism as an agent of disenchantment is what propels the actions of the characters. It is evident that utilitarianism derived from capitalism is a firmly shared worldview of the characters: after all, it is about money.

Weber would suggest that the narrative is not religious in a traditional sense, even though he admits that a religion—i.e., Calvinism—contributed to the formation of a capitalistic economy. However, Benjamin disagrees with Weber. Capitalism is not a merely "a formation conditioned by religion."⁹ Rather, it is "an essentially religious phenomenon."¹⁰ It only introduces a different form of enchantment, instead of eliminating it. He writes that through "a comparison between the images of the saints of the various religions and the banknotes of different states," one finds the "spirit that speaks from the ornamental design of banknotes."¹¹ Advancing Benjamin's agenda, Eugene McCarraher in his recent book *The Enchantments of Mammon: How Capitalism Became the Religion of Modernity* powerfully argues:

Walter Benjamin suggested almost a century ago that capitalism is a religion as well, a “cult” with its own ontology, morals, and ritual practices whose “spirit . . . speaks from the ornamentation of banknotes.” I take this as a point of departure and argue that capitalism is a form of enchantment—perhaps better, a disenchantment, a parody or perversion of our longing for a sacramental way of being in the world. Its animating spirit is money. Its theology, philosophy, and cosmology have been otherwise known as “economics.” Its sacramentals consist of fetishized commodities and technologies—the material culture of production and consumption. . . . And its gospel has been that of “Mammonism,” the attribution of ontological power to money and of existential sublimity to its possessors.¹²

What McCarragher calls “disenchantment” is a new form of enchantment that capitalism provides. That is, capitalism has recreated the way humans understand their existence, value, and purposes based on the fetishization of material culture, money, and the greater power given to those who own more of these types of capital. In this respect, the Kim family in *Parasite* abides by a different category of religion, that of capitalism, when they justify and ground their behavior in the name of making a living, i.e., in the name of money. Their plot is not actually a crime in the logic of capitalism when money is the ultimate—even a moral—goal.

Returning to Benjamin’s original fragment, it is clear that the premise of the Kim family’s infiltration trick is consistent with the first religious aspect of capitalism listed there. Benjamin writes that capitalism “does not rely on doctrine or principle. . . things have a meaning only in their relationship to the cult [of capitalism]. . . It is from this point of view that utilitarianism acquires its religious overtones.”¹³ In *Parasite*, money-oriented utilitarianism gains prominence over other value systems. Admittedly, the reversed morality of capitalism is not a new subject in popular culture narratives, let alone in our everyday lives. The reason the audience is absorbed in the crime narrative of Kim family is because they more or less sympathize with the capitalistic motivations of the family. Living in a half-basement apartment, a symbol of poverty in urban South Korea, the family is plunged in inescapable penury in which they cannot even pay for their Wi-Fi bills—an ultimate nightmare for any individuals living in a contemporary capitalistic society (Fig. 1). The audience intuitively knows that the

family's situation is universally adverse, and this is because they too are participants in the religion of capitalism. The categorical imperative implicitly agreed-upon between the Kim family and the audience is to do whatever it takes to obtain the sacrament of capitalism.



Figure 1.. Kim family's bathroom in their half-basement apartment. Screen capture from *Parasite*, 2019. Produced by Barunson E&A.[Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Both on-screen and off-screen, capitalism works as a shared world-view, and this point connects to Benjamin's second argument on capitalism: the cult of capitalism is celebrated *sans trêve et sans merci*; there is no pause in the practice of capitalism and every single day is sanctified by capital. It is a truism that every bit of contemporary human existence is dominated by monetary transactions and purchased material artifacts. Although Benjamin is referring to the temporal continuation of capitalistic practice, it applies spatially as well. It is ubiquitous even within and outside the cinematic world, not only in the storyline of the film and within the audience's minds, but also in the practice of the film industry. Without capitalism, the film could not have been made nor distributed. It is capitalism, the religion of the public, that *Parasite* articulates to the audience through the quintessential art form of capitalism, cinema.¹⁴

Whereas the first half of the film invokes the fundamental premises of capitalist religion in a fairly predictable way, the latter half of the film, initiated by the absence of the wealthy Park family in the mansion, starts to take a darker turn. To make a memorable birthday for Da-song, the Park family's treasured son, the family goes on a camping trip, and the residence is taken over by the Kim family. They consume the food and alcohol of their employers, who do not know that all the employees of their residence—the tutors, the maid, and the driver—are from the same family, and that they ended up in their home based on utter falsehood. When the Kim family begins to act like the owners of the house in the absence of the legitimate owners, the sense of irony is elevated. This is the exact moment when the Kim family encounters an unexpected visitor, Moon-gwang, the maid who was fired due to their own plot to get the mother (Choong-sook) hired in her place. The family reluctantly lets Moon-gwang in, and she confesses that she had to return to the house to feed her husband, Geun-sae, who has been hiding in an underground bunker built by the previous owner and architect of the house. The Parks, the current owners, are unaware that the bunker exists, hence Geun-sae and Moon-gwang's ability to appropriate the situation when Geun-sae became the target of predatory debtors: he hid in the secret bunker of the house where his wife Moon-gwang worked as a residential maid.

There is a parallel between this couple and the Kim family. They are working class people who rely on the overflowing capital of the Park family household. Under the fortunate ignorance of their employers, both enjoy a

certain degree of luxury that they did not earn by the rules of the capitalistic economy. At first, the Kim family attempts to report Geun-sae to the police, as any sensible employees would do. However, as soon as Moon-gwang finds out that the Kim family has been lying to the Park family, she threatens to expose their secret to their employer. The conflict is followed by a scuffle—in a sense, it is a fight between two parasitic families. At this point, *Parasite*, the title of the film, seems to simply represent these underprivileged families in conflict. After the intense confrontation, the Kim family is left with a seriously injured Moon-gwang in the bunker, and the news that the Park family is suddenly returning earlier than planned due to heavy rainfall at the camping trip. They erase the traces of their presence, hide until the Park family falls asleep, and run back home. The descending sequence of the Kim family running barefoot in the pouring rain, from the house on a hill to their own squalid half-basement apartment in the lowland part of the city, is not only visually striking, but also a prelude of the dominant affect that Benjamin listed as one of the characteristics of the religion of capitalism: despair.¹⁵ When the tragedy predestined for the "parasites" is disclosed, the film turns into a cinematic parable.

Parable and *Parasite*

The latter half of *Parasite* and its ending aptly exemplifies the third trait of capitalist religion in Benjamin's staunchly anti-capitalistic fragment. He writes that capitalism does not resolve human guilt nor provide an opportunity for atonement. Capitalism is not a religion of salvation. Rather, it is a religion of consumption, which results in the complete destruction of existence through the generalization of despair. Benjamin, although he briefly connects capitalist religion to the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche to provide a positive outlook,¹⁶ does not detail in this fragmentary text how capitalism is bound to human destruction. It would be the work of later commentators to fill in the gaps in this obscure fragment; as part of this endeavor, reading *Parasite* as a parable may provide an example of the inherent fractures of capitalistic religion.

How does *Parasite* become a parable, then? Crossan provides a compelling starting point:

[Parables] challenge the fundamental principle of reconciliation [of myth] by making us aware of the fact that we made up the

reconciliation.... You have built a lovely home, myth assures us; but, whispers parable, you are right above an earthquake fault.¹⁷

In contrast to myth, parable exposes the intrinsic contradictions and fissures of the “home,” or the given world of the listeners. It is a kind of a story that deconstructs, and facilitates reformation and subversion. While Crossan uses the concept of parable and myth to read Judeo-Christian texts, the framework is also useful for reading a cinematic text of capitalistic religion. The earlier half of *Parasite* is a story that faithfully represents the utilitarianism of capitalist religion. It is at best humorous and satirical, not subversive. The existing world of capitalistic religion is inhabited by the poor and the rich, and the struggle to obtain the sacraments knows only one moral principle: one needs no morals as long as one achieves the goal. The capitalistic world is not exactly a “lovely home” from the perspective of traditional religious morality, but it is a harmoniously organized cosmos in its own logic. When the film shifts after the traumatic revelation about Moon-gwang and Geun-sae, the Kim family acts according to their capitalistic religion. To protect their source of income, or sacraments, the Kim family must conceal what happened in the rainy night, even if it requires them to take extreme measures. This is where the whisper of parable intercepts. How far can capitalistic utilitarianism contain the situation? Will it guarantee the maintenance of a harmonious world, or is it bound to expose the paradoxical nature of capitalism?

With its appalling narrative in the latter half, *Parasite* seems to offer a simple answer to these questions. As Benjamin foreboded, destruction takes place, in the form of the gory bloodshed at the garden party and three deaths. That said, *Parasite* is not a film only about the parasitic working-class families who struggle among themselves. The parable is convincing only if it reveals another important mechanism of capitalistic religion, besides unabashed utilitarianism. The development of the parabolic narrative is propelled by the hierarchy and distinction between the rich and the poor; they are unconsciously agreed upon “rules of game” among the participants of the system and misrecognized to be given or natural condition of the world. In the capitalistic cosmos, it is important not to “cross the line” and to keep one’s place, as Mr. Park emphasizes multiple times. Even though one’s actions may not cross the line, a smell

—something that cannot be controlled by one's rational will—can cross the line. The smell of “boiling an old rag” or the stench of people who ride the subway “powers through right into the back seat.” On the rainy night, Mr. Park discusses the smell of his driver, Ki-taek, without knowing that Ki-taek is hiding under his table listening to the description, humiliated. Ki-taek stretches his shirt and sniffs it while Mr. Park complains about the smell. The source of visceral shame derives from a sensory element that no capitalistic utilitarianism or elaborate craftiness can ever hide. It is attached to one's existence and to one's place, like a scarlet letter. Ki-taek's place is the half-basement apartment, and the smell is attached to the place, as his daughter Ki-jung explicates. As they inevitably carry the smell of poverty, Ki-taek and his family are *different* from the Parks—even a child can recognize it. The Park family's spoiled son, Da-song, yells when he discovers the same smell from Ki-taek and his wife, Choong-sook: “It's the same! They smell the same!”

In his essay “What a difference a difference makes,” Jonathan Z. Smith discusses how difference is not merely an indicator of distinctiveness between agents in equal standing.¹⁸ Rather, differentiation between us and them, or the act of distinguishing Others, “is a matter of relative rather than absolute difference.”¹⁹ Further, identifying difference often entails “a hierarchy of prestige and ranking.”²⁰ One of Smith's examples is the development of the concept of the parasite in Western biology. The English word “parasite” only recently came to denote the biological category, as late as the 19th century. It originally comes from the Greek *parasitos*, literally something or someone beside the grain, and used in the fifth century B.C.E. to refer to the temple assistants in Greek religion who lived on grain offerings. Then it became a name for the comedic stock character of the *kolax* (the flatterer) in Greek and Latin comedy, who solicits free lunches with his wit.²¹ As late as the seventeenth century, the word still denoted a type of human who seeks opportunities for freeloading, not insects.

It was in the nineteenth century, alongside the emergence of parasitology, when the word began to be used to refer to insect parasites as commonly used today.²² Smith argues that “there is . . . no scientific area of scholarship in which more sustained attention has been devoted to the taxonomy and definition of ‘otherness’ than parasitology,”²³ since the definition of parasite and host depends purely on the relationship of the

two, regardless of the biological class of each. Therefore, Smith concludes:

Note that such taxonomic distinctions ... are explicitly political. The definitions are based on hierarchical distinctions of subordination and superordination, on mapping structures of benefits and reciprocity. Such political interests are continued in those taxonomic distinctions made with respect to the nature and character of the direct relationship between host and parasite.²⁴

Smith conceives of the political nature of the modern concept of the parasite from the disciplinary history of parasitology. In addition, with the example of Christopher Columbus, he argues that making sense of Others emerged as a significant subject of inquiry in the era of Western expansion, colonialism, and encounters. In a way, the parasite is a thoroughly modern concept, if one subscribes to Nicholas Dirks' definition of modernity: "modernity is a story that a people tell themselves about themselves in relation to Others."²⁵

Capitalism, as one of the essential conditions of modernity, is also deeply embedded in this relational category of the parasite. The difference that marks the Kim family, their smell, even though it seems to be attached to their existence, is only effective in relation to the capitalist economy and the actors in the system. The alleged difference is humiliating because it points to the hierarchy within the capitalistic religious cosmos, and it is also dehumanizing since it disguises itself as a natural and intrinsic difference between the same biological humans. The Kim family is described as if they are ontological Others, perhaps of subhuman nature. Smell, which is a more corporeal sensation compared to vision and sound, is claimed to be an organic and natural difference between the rich and the poor.

Since capitalism has become a kernel of modernity, the political and relational nature of the parasite was captured by both believers and heretics of capitalism, each applying the category respectively to the poor and to the rich. Earlier, I mentioned that the two families—the Kim family, Moon-gwang and her husband—are apparent parasites to the Park's family. However, it is also true that the Park family relies entirely on the labor of these "parasites." That is, the capitalist religion conceals another parasitic class, the rich. In this vein, Irish socialist James Connolly writes:

The capitalist, I say, is a parasite on industry; as useless in the present stage of our industrial development as any other parasite in the animal or vegetable world is to the life of the animal or vegetable upon which it feeds. The working class is the victim of this parasite—this human leech, and it is the duty and interest of the working class to use every means in its power to oust this parasite class from the position which enables it to thus prey upon the vitals of labour.²⁶

The ownership of means of production and capital allows the rich to parasite on the labor of the working class; on top of that, as the film shows, it deprives the humanity of the poor by marking them with hierarchical difference.

In the macabre garden party scene, the film amplifies the parabolic tension between capitalistic religion and the human despair therein. After his half-basement apartment is destroyed in a flood, Ki-taek is forced to wear a racist native American headdress for a surprise event to please Da-song. Then Geun-sae appears on the scene in a frenzy, having already watched his wife Moon-gwang die in the basement bunker and attacked Ki-woo who tried to murder him. The bourgeois paradise filled with Western classical music and upper-class figures who would never smell like “people who ride the subway” is immediately devastated by Geun-sae. Geun-sae stabs the Kim family’s daughter, Ki-jung, to avenge his wife’s death. Da-song passes out, and the Park family urges their driver, Ki-taek, to get the car ready to take their beloved son to the emergency room. For the Park family, the even more critically injured and bleeding Ki-jung is of no consideration, since “Jessica” is only a tutor. When Ki-taek attends to his daughter and fails to respond to the family’s request, the Park family gives Ki-taek a disparaging look: he is a bad employee who does not know his priorities, even though they are paying him! Ki-taek has violated the norms of capitalistic religion, and is thus guilty.

The following scene further hinges on the sense of smell. When Ki-taek cannot carry out his role as a driver, the desperate Park family yells at him to throw the car key toward them, so that they can take their son to a hospital on their own. When Ki-taek throws the key on the ground, Geun-sae falls on the key, having just been stabbed by a skewer after a

struggle with Choong-sook, the Kim family's mother. Mr. Park reaches for the key, but the key is under Geun-sae's dying body. Geun-sae recognizes Mr. Park, since he has been secretly worshipping and thanking the rich patriarch for (unknowingly) providing him with a shelter. Geun-sae fanatically shouts "Respect!", an English word, to Mr. Park. Mr. Park is puzzled for a second that a strange intruder, or perhaps a creature, recognizes him. Indeed, Geun-sae's appearance resembles that of a subhuman, covered with blood and food after grappling with Choong-sook, and the skewer with which he was stabbed still has food on it. Mr. Park approaches Geun-sae to salvage the key and flips his body. At that moment, Mr. Park is appalled by the body odor of the man, who has been living in the basement bunker without showering. The camera lingers on Mr. Park's frowning face and visceral reaction to the smell. After he grabs the key, his extremely disgusted bodily gestures continue. He covers his nose with a shaking hand, makes a face, grunts, and tries to touch Geun-sae's body as little as possible, as if he is dealing with a repulsive insect. The camera then shows Ki-taek's face in a close-up. (Fig. 2) He has been watching Mr. Park's entire reaction to Geun-sae. Then, he grabs a knife from the ground, runs, and stabs Mr. Park in the back.



Figure 2.. Ki-taek's face in close-up as he watches Mr. Park. Screen capture from *Parasite*, 2019. Produced by Barunson E&A]. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Ki-taek's action is intuitively linked to his sense of dignity as a human, and it is not something that capitalistic religion would mandate. Now Ki-taek and his family are involved in three deaths: Moon-gwang, who died after being pushed from the basement bunker stairs; Geun-sae, who was killed by Choong-sook; and finally, Mr. Park. Unlike the other two, Mr. Park's death is a choice of Ki-taek's. It is a resistance to the humiliation of being categorized as Other or non-human. The resistance, however, is ironic because it is executed through murdering another human. He is inclined to kill Mr. Park to claim his humanity. This is the fissure and contradiction intrinsic to capitalistic religion, the parable says. In addition, another choice of Ki-taek's conveys one more warning from the parable. Ki-taek chooses to hide in the basement bunker, and to become a parasite himself. Even after the murder of Mr. Park, it is unlikely that Ki-taek will recover his human dignity within the persistence of capitalistic religion, since the religion will keep asking of him the same mode of practice that he has resisted. As Benjamin writes, this religion does not provide occasion for atonement or salvation. The only way of escape that Ki-taek can imagine is hiding in the bunker and being exempt from the rule of capitalistic religion.

The film ends with a hypothetical correspondence between Ki-taek and his son Ki-woo. Ki-woo's fantasy scene, in which he purchases the house and is reunited with his father, is a sorrowful daydream given both to the viewers and to Ki-woo. The off-screen audience, also adherents of capitalistic religion, now realizes that they are fundamentally contingent on the same system as Ki-taek. The same can be said of Ki-woo's determination that he will "earn money" and "buy that house first." It is an indication that even a fantasy of family happiness is only possible within capitalistic religion, when they earn the blessing of the capitalistic sacrament and change their *locus* to the other side of the parasitic relationship. This dark parable exposes the truth that even reconciliation is a fabrication, and we are living "right above an earthquake fault."

Conclusion

In this short essay, I have argued that *Parasite* is a cinematic parable of capitalistic religion that uses the effective analogy of the parasite, which is a largely political concept that signifies relationships of difference and hierarchy therein. In addition, the centrality of the sensual faculties in the film

is a powerful device that exposes the “earthquake fault” of capitalistic religion. In lieu of a conclusion, I would like to propose further questions to be explored. I did not have a chance to discuss the locality and transnationality of the film. The questions I have in mind include: How “Korean” is *Parasite*, and what kind of particularity is operating within and outside of the film? Why is this dark South Korean film enthusiastically welcomed by the U.S. film industry? It will be a good starting point to acknowledge that South Korea, an intimate proxy of U.S. hegemony since 1945, has historically experienced capitalism largely with the mediation of the United States. South Korea’s aesthetics of progress and imagery of capitalistic success have been entangled with the United States;²⁷ that is, the United States is a symbolic Vatican of capitalistic religion. It is not an anomaly that the depiction of capitalistic religion in the film closely resembles how it functions in the United States. However, even as it depicts the universal problem of capitalism, the film consists entirely of a cast of ethnic Koreans, and the class conflict dominating its direct center is hardly complicated by other factors. Given the conservative nature of the voting body of the prestigious Academy,²⁸ it is not too far-fetched to imagine that lauding *Parasite* enables the Academy to visibly present its initiative for promoting diversity while minimizing the possibility of invoking any uncomfortable race question. While appreciating the happy and dramatic success of a South Korean masterpiece, it would be apt to the spirit of the parable of *Parasite* to keep paying attention to what lies beneath it.

Notes

1. In this essay, I use original Korean name order in which last name comes before first name. For example, Bong is the last name and Joon-ho is the first name.
2. This is what Bong mentioned in an interview as one of the goals of his filmmaking. Ugwu, Reggie. 2020, “‘Parasite’ Director Bong Joon Ho on Making Oscar History.” The New York Times, last modified Jan 13. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/13/movies/bong-joon-ho-oscars.html>
3. Benjamin, Walter, “kapitalismus als religion” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, band 6, eds. Rolf Tiedemann, and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), pp. 100–3. In this essay, I primarily refer to English translation by Rodney Livingston in Bullock and Jennings’ edited volume published in 2004. Thus, the following page numbers of the text are from Livingston translation. Benjamin, Walter, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, Vol. 1, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2014), pp. 288–91. Another partial English translation can also be found in Löwy’s article, but it is inaccurate. That said, Löwy provides a compelling commentary on the connection between Max Weber and Benjamin’s

- fragment. See Löwy, Michael, 2009, "Capitalism as Religion: Walter Benjamin and Max Weber," *Historical Materialism*, 17(1), pp. 60–73.
4. Benjamin, "Capitalism as religion," p. 288.
5. Crossan, John Dominic, *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press, 1998). I learned of Crossan from John May's article. May, John R, 1980, "Visual Story and the Religious Interpretation of Film," *Horizons* 7(2), pp. 249–64.
6. Crossan, *The Dark Interval*, p. 57.
7. Smith, Jonathan Z, "What a difference a difference makes" in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014), pp. 251–302.
8. For example, one of the suspects in *Memories of Murder* (2003) is a deacon in a local Protestant church.
9. Benjamin, "Capitalism as religion," p. 288
10. Benjamin, "Capitalism as religion," p. 288.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 290.
12. McCarragher, Eugene, *The Enchantments of Mammon: How Capitalism Became the Religion of Modernity*, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019), pp. 5–6.
13. Benjamin, "Capitalism as religion," p. 288.
14. Grieveson, Lee. *Cinema and the Wealth of Nations: Media, Capital, and the Liberal World System* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2018), pp. 247–286.
15. Benjamin, "Capitalism as religion," p. 289.
16. Benjamin, "Capitalism as religion," pp.289–90.
17. Crossan, *The Dark Interval*, p. 53.
18. Smith, Jonathan Z. 2004. "What a difference a difference makes," pp. 251–302. In this essay, Smith discusses the difference in the context of the scholarly discipline of comparative religion.
19. Smith, "What a difference a difference makes," p. 258.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, p. 257.
22. *d.*, p. 255–56. In addition, The Korean title of *Parasite*, *Gisaengchung* (kr. 기생충; traditional Chinese: 寄生蟲), directly refers to the biological category of parasitic insects.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 253.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 255.
25. Kendall, Laurel, *Shamans, Nostalgias, and the IMF: South Korean Popular Religion in Motion* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010), p. 1.
26. Gullestad, Anders M, "Parasite," Political Concepts: a critical lexicon, Issue 1. <https://www.politicalconcepts.org/anders-m-gullestad-parasite/> See Gullestad's note 2.
27. Harkness, Nicholas, *Songs of Seoul: an Ethnography of Voice and Voicing in Christian South Korea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), pp. 7–10; Han, Ju Hui Judy, "Shifting Geographies of Proximity: Korean-led Evangelical Christian Missions and the U.S. Empire" in *Ethnographies of U.S. Empire*, eds. Carole McGranahan and John F. Collins, (NC and London: Duke University Press, 2014), pp. 194–213.
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