

### The Platform

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*The Platform*. Directed by Galder Gaztelu-Urrutia, Basque Films, distributed by Netflix, 2019.

THE Spanish director, Galder Gaztelu-Urrutia's Spanish-language thriller on Netflix, *The Platform* (*El Hoyo*, 2019) is set in a dystopian future in a "Vertical Self-Management Center." It is a prison-like building referred to as "The Hole," consisting of over 300 levels, with two inmates to a cell. A platform full of food descends every day from the highest level to the bottom to feed these incarcerated inmates, which is closely concerned with food distribution and rationing. The inmates at the highest level get to decide whatever and how much they desire to eat, after which the food is taken one level down. The leftovers of the inmates above become the food those below. People are randomly moved to another level after each month. The film illustrates the protagonist, Goreng's physical and metaphorical journey which gradually reveals the brutal reality behind the Hole through his experiences with his cellmates and other people in the prison.

The movie has numerous dystopian characteristics, which may lead one to label it a dystopian movie, whereas some others may categorize it as a horror movie or science fiction horror thriller. Generically speaking, it bears certain similarities to the structural pattern of literary dystopias or dystopian movies. The film starts in medias res, as we find the protagonist Goreng (Ivan Massague) waking up on Level 48 in his cell, staring at his inmate, Trimagasi (Zorion Eguileor), an old man imprisoned due to his accidental murdering of an immigrant. The main character is initially confronted with the foil, Trimagasi, who expounds on how the system in the Hole functions, which starts his transition from a state of naivety to a state of knowledge and experience. He is gradually exposed to the reality of the system through external factors such as Trimagasi, Miharu, and other inmates. Miharu, whose name stands for "open one's eyes wide" plays a significant role in his journey (Ishida 106).

The dystopian protagonist starts to comprehend the internal mechanics of the system and resists against the system. Goreng, who takes Cervantes's book, *Don Quixote* with him as his only item, struggles hard both to understand how the Hole

works and to promote fair food rationing so that everyone can have something to eat. When the protagonist does not find support from other characters, his determination is partially vitiating. The protagonist manages to stay alive and reach the symbol of hope, a girl in this case. The girl who is implied to be Miharu's daughter ultimately becomes the token of hope that may have the potential to change the current structure. Although the blame is not explicitly put on a political body, or rather, there does not exist a political body suppressing its citizens on a holistic level, the projected world remains highly dystopian.

It is possible to approach the movie from numerous perspectives that relate to the larger intellectual and philosophical questions and concerns raised. With its strong dystopian undertones, the movie engages itself with themes such as suppression, greed, cannibalism, corruption, surveillance, empathy, self-centrism versus altruism, violence, survival, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, control, loss of individualism, social class, inequality, capitalism, the fluidity and fragile nature of borders in between different social classes, socialism, and racism. *The Platform* highlights how people do serious harm to others in order to survive and to climb up the ladder before them—a strong critique against capitalism. These points, illustrated on differing levels in the movie, can be introduced as relevant to research on science fiction films, dystopian films, science fiction in literature and media, as well as utopian and dystopian narratives and their cinematographic representations.

It is no surprise that *The Platform* has immediately become one of the most viewed movies in Netflix during the time of COVID-19. It has many similarities to the current pandemic and the new “normal” lifestyle it has brought, as social distancing and individual physical existence seem to occupy an instrumental role in both situations (emphasis added). Survival becomes the chief objective of inmates in the pit, which is followed by the desire to be on the level above, creating a dichotomy between those below and those above. Although there may be the possibility that food is sufficient for everyone, inmates eat as much as they wish instead of rationing. Therefore, people on the lower levels resort to cannibalism when they are unable to feed themselves. The self-centered approach has become clear and palpable even within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the concrete parallel of which can be people's hoarding toilette papers, not caring for the needs of others.

In conclusion, *The Platform* with its unique texture, rich content and idiosyncratic characteristics suggests avenues for analysis from numerous angles in the light of

its themes and features, argumentation, and scholarly discussions. It represents topics that can be discussed within the context of various disciplines, suitable for the interdisciplinary nature of dystopian studies. The search for an ideal system, the nature of humans, and the need to disrupt dichotomous thinking in order to engender a non-binary approach would further discussion within literature, political science, and environmental humanities, which all reflect the strong potential of the movie in contributing to scholarly, academic and pedagogical approaches.

### Works Cited

Ishida, Priscilla. "Corpus Data and the Treatment of Idioms in Japanese Monolingual Dictionaries." *Research on Phraseology in Europe and Asia*, edited by Joanna Szerszunowicz, Bogusław Nowowiejski, Takaaki Kanzaki, Katsumasa Yagi, University of Bialystok Publishing House, 2011, pp. 101-127.