

Lack of Dubbing or Audio Description Tracks on Foreign Films Create a “Hundred-Foot Concrete Wall” for People with Low Vision

Los Angeles, Dec. 24 – As a massive fan of cinema, I enjoy all kinds of films: tearjerkers, horror, action, comedies, big blockbusters and independent films. I also enjoy foreign-language films when I can watch them, that is. You see, I am visually impaired. I occasionally need "audio description" or an "English dubbed track" when I watch movies, especially foreign language ones. I am not able to read the subtitles fast enough to enjoy them or even understand them fully. For those who don't know, audio description is an audio track available on some streaming services, blu-rays and in theaters. It is a human voice that describes the action on screen (and also reads subtitles). Dubbing is another tool where voices are cut over the original actor's voices in foreign films and says the lines in English or whichever languages you choose. Both of these tools help me – and others with low vision – to enjoy movies, especially foreign language ones. However, the majority of foreign language films do not incorporate an audio description or dub tracks.

Roma was nominated in 2019 for Best Picture. It was directed by one of my favorite filmmakers of all time, Alfonso Cuarón. I love his movies and his style. *Children of Men* is one of my favorite films. *Roma* is in Spanish, but it's a Netflix original. So, I was hoping it would have an audio description track because Netflix is great at making their content as accessible as possible. I planned a night to watch it and was so excited. Then I turned it

on and was disappointed to find it only had a Spanish audio description. It has been two years, and I still am not able to watch *Roma*.

2020 was the second year in a row an international film was nominated for Best Picture, and *Parasite* took home that prize. Congratulations again to *Parasite* and the historic achievement from Bong Joon Ho. I am thrilled that the Academy recognizes these incredible works of art. Once again, I wish his latest Best Picture-winning film was more accessible for consumers like myself. The only way I watched it (at the theater) was with my friend whispering summaries of every scene. I enjoyed the film, but this is not an optimal viewing experience, especially for an international masterpiece. I was looking forward to the Blu-ray release because the majority of blu-rays include audio description. Nothing. No audio description. No dub. At this point, I am not able to fully enjoy *Parasite*, and I know for a fact that it's incredible. I know some foreign language films are good at including dubbed or audio description options. For example, *The Raid* (which made my top 50 films of the 2010's list) and the Swedish *Dragon Tattoo* trilogy have dubbed versions. But alas, all films should have these options, especially ones that are as highly regarded as *Roma* and *Parasite*.

During one of his Oscar acceptance speeches, Bong Joon-Ho said, "once you overcome the 1-inch tall barrier of subtitles, you will be introduced to so many more amazing films." However, for those of us who have low vision, this one-inch barrier feels like a hundred-foot concrete wall. It is impossible to get over without a dub or audio description track.

I believe that accessibility needs to be considered for all foreign-language movies. There is an extensive catalog of films

out there that people like me cannot enjoy because of the lack of access for low-vision consumers. Not even *Inglorious Bastards* has an audio description dubbed track, and that film is mostly in German.

I urge filmmakers and studios to think of consumers with disabilities in this great time of equity and inclusion. Not only does it hurt us not to be included, but it also hurts you. There is an entire population of people who literally can't enjoy foreign language films because of the subtitles. Wouldn't you want your film to reach the largest audience possible?