

The Influence of Social Class on Racial Discrimination in the Movie *The Help*

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Abstract:

This research aims to analyze the influence of social class on racial discrimination in the movie The Help. There are two objectives in this research. The first is to found the form of social influence. The second the effect of racial discrimination. The theory used in this research is Marxism by Karl Marx. The research uses the qualitative descriptive method in analyzing the movie. The primary data in this research is the movie The Help and the secondary data are journals, research, e-books and other related sources. The researcher finds the form of social class, they are proletariat and bourgeoisie. Social class differences can affect discrimination between white and black people.

Keywords: social class, racial discrimination, the help

INTRODUCTION

Literature is the imaginative work portraying human life in society which can be enjoyed, understandable and used by the society. Wellek and Warren (1963) stated “the term literature seems best if we limit it to the art of literature, that is, to imaginative literature”(p.22). Based on the definition, it can be concluded that literature is produced by the imagination of the author.

People who created literature usually present their work in such kind of literary works. The authors write the manifestation of the imagination on a form of literary work. According to Pradopo (1994, p. 26), “the literary work is as the picture of the world and human life, the main criteria that is put on the literary work is ‘truth’, or everything that wants to be pictured by the author”. From this statement, the researcher considers that authors normally use social background phenomenon around them. It can be social problem related with the culture issue, politic issue, crime, etc.

Literary works has many kinds, such as prose, poetry, drama and movie. In this research, the researcher will use movie as the object. Movie is one of literary works, a moving image with meanings and aesthetics. The researcher choose movie as the object of this research because movie have strong portrayal of realities such as telling about social, cultural, political and as a mass media communication that has a function to convey information messages, education and entertainment through stories and images are presented to audiences.

Considering movie can also reflections of reality, the researcher particularly noticed that social reality is among the one mostly portrayed. Literary works such as movie that discusses about social reality are prevalent in the media because it reflects the relevant state of reality. The author adopts social reality into literary work, and therefore the involvement of the background and the real life of an author of the literary work that creates it is dominant. Social reality means the things that do exist and applies in real world, especially in the social fabric such as the existence of social class. Social class is a hierarchical system in society that exist because of the capitalism. Social class is divided into capitalist or ruling class and proletariat or labor class. The existence of this social class can trigger the emergence of differences in interest between classes or commonly called by Karl Marx as social conflict. Karl Marx defines the social class as follows:

“For Marx, then, capitalism is a system of class domination. There are two main classes which are looked together in an equal relation of power and explanation. Obviously, the dominant class is wealthier and enjoy a better quality of life than the subordinate class, but this is not the essential different between them, for the basic issue has to do with who owns the means of production rather than the subsequent distribution of the goods and service which come to be produced.” (Sanders, 1989, p.6).

This statement shows that the dominant class or usually called the upper class can enjoy a better quality of life because they wealthier than subordinate class, it is because the basic issue has to do with who owns the means of production rather than subsequent distribution of the goods and service which come to be produced. Based from this definition, the researcher concludes that social class in the community have an influence and impact on people’s life, and one of them is discrimination.

Discrimination is distinction of treatment to people, community or ethnic. Discrimination has been a major source of injustice, because in the certain groups, there are certain basic

rights that are not fulfilled because of the involvement of superior social class. Theodorson defines discrimination as follow:

“The term of discrimination is usually to describe, an act of the majority of the more dominant than minority to act arbitrarily, “minorities are the groups that are recognized based on race, religion or ethnicity, who suffered losses as a result of prejudice.” (Theodorson, 1979, p.258).

This statement about describe the minorities are the group who suffered losses result of prejudice because their race, religion or ethnicity from the majority that usually called discrimination. However, in this research, the researcher will focus on analyzing about social class and discrimination race between proletariat and bourgeoisie of black and white race. On the other hand the researcher chooses the movie as the object, the movie entitled *The Help*.

The Help tells about the discrimination of blacks and whites that occurred in Jackson. Marxism theory is chosen to support this research because the theory is deemed suitable for this research. In this research, the researcher analyzes about the influence of discrimination made by white people on their maids who are black, as portrayed in the movie *The Help*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The main theory used on this research is Marxism theory. This theory can be used to study sociology within literary works. The theory can be used to identify the influence of racial discrimination in the movie *The Help*.

Sociology of Literature

Sociology is study that learn about society. According to H. P. Fairchild (1955), “sociology as the study of relationship between man and his human environment” Based from this definition, the researcher concludes that sociology is always concerned with human activity with their environment. Sociology of literature correlate with each other because literature can also reflect human relationship and their environment. The sociology within literary works is called sociology of literature. According to Lefebvre in Habib (2017:3), Marx’s thought appear historically in relation with human activity to processing nature, for example with build the industrial big factories that makes social classes and create the social problems. the researcher uses theory of Marxism class by Karl Marx because the theory is suitable with the research.

Marxism

The researcher uses Marxist as the theory because the theory discusses about economic, social class, politics and political in social class, there are two classes, proletariat and bourgeoisie. Generally, the concept of social class by Karl Marx has been translated in the version of the economic system of capitalism.

Class Theory by Karl Marx

Marx identified structure social in community to be two classes, that is proletariat and bourgeoisie. According to Marx and Engels (1966, p.88) “by bourgeoisie is meant the class of modern capitalist, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage-labour. By proletariat, the class of modern wage-laborers who having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour-power in order to live”.

1.The Bourgeoisie

This class as usually known as the upper class, the bourgeoisie always controls the proletariat, Marx (1948, p.19) states, “thus the whole historical movement is concentrated in the hands of bourgeoisie, ever victory so obtained for the bourgeoisie”. The bourgeoisie which always being the upper class and automatically take the authority to control the proletariat which is that have lower class than them.

2.The Proletariat

This class as usually known as the working class and this class is always instructed by the bourgeoisie. It is because the bourgeoisie takes all the controls. Marx (1948, p.20) states “through not substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at the first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie. The researcher explain that the proletariat has to deal its own problem to bourgeoisie like the bourgeoisie in their owner. In this research, the proletariat class is described by black people who work as the servants of the white people

Prejudice

Prejudice means making a decision before knowing the relevant facts about the object, according to Giddens (2006), “prejudice refers to opinions or attitudes held by members of one group toward another”. It means prejudice is a negative opinion or judgement toward other group. Prejudice usually caused by the misconception between some groups.

Occupation

Occupation is defined as position or place of someone in a social group. Occupation can be defined as people who had power and can influence their position or status where they are live. Occupations are understood as positions defined within the technical relations of production; classes, on the other hand, are defined by the social relations of production” (p.117). From the statement the researcher explain that, occupation is position defined technically.

Discrimination

Discrimination is an event commonly found in human society and this is due to the human tendency to discriminate against others. The term of discrimination usually to describes, an act of the majority of the more dominant than minority to act arbitrarily, “minorities are the groups that are recognized based on race, religion, or ethnicity, who suffered losses as a result of prejudice (Theodorson, 1979, p.258). It means minorities can suffer losses as a result of prejudice based on their race, religion or ethnicity. From the statement the

researcher conclude that discrimination has a broad meaning, and it can be divided in some types, such as racial discrimination, ethnic discrimination and religion discrimination.

Racism

Race is a genetically diverse human population with members who had the same phenotype. There are some people who regard their group as better than other group, they regard their group superior and think that they have special right among inferior group. According to Erik (1980, p.57), “classically, racism works under the assumption that certain superficial phenotypical characteristics such as skin colour are hereditarily correlated with inferior or superior character traits”. From the statement, racism is a negative treatment by superior group towards inferior group because they regard their group has better condition in many aspects such economic, biological and education aspects.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research is a type of social science research that collects and works with non-numerical data and that seeks to interpret meaning. According to Lexy J. Moleong as cited in Bogdan And Taylor, “qualitative is research procedure that result descriptive data form of written or word of people and observed behavior”. Hence, descriptive research is a form research. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982), qualitative research is descriptive in nature which means the data collected in the form words or picture than numbers to describe or portray the phenomenon. This research use descriptive qualitative data, because this research uses the data in forms of words and pictures considering the object of this research is a movie.

In this research, there are two types of data used, namely primary data and secondary data. The first is primary data, The primary data of this research is a movie entitled *The Help*, an adaptation of the novel of the same title by Kathryn Stockett. The second is secondary data, Secondary data used by researcher are books on literary science by experts, various books on literature and references regarding Marxism theory. Several previous researches are also used as reference material. In the process of collecting data, researcher breaks it down to several steps: First, the researcher watched the movie *The Help* repeatedly to determine the sense of what to research. Second, the researcher identifies the dialogue and picture as the data to conduct the research. Third, the researcher determines the type of research. The type of research that is used is descriptive research using literature studies whose data sources come from different types books and documents as references. Then, the researcher collected various supporting data, such as books on literary theory, about the of literary Marxism by Karl Marx, and previous research. Then, the researcher conducts the research strictly within the theory Marxism by Karl Marx.

FINDINGS

The findings in this section contains the detailed of data found in the research that the researcher deemed relevant and related to the problem. The findings collected by researcher

are data regarding the social class and how the prejudice and occupation can influence racial discrimination in the *The Help* movie. In terms of discussing the findings, the data are collected and identified by the steps of analysis and interpretation, with credible references from theoretical review chapter to support the researcher's statement.

Table: 1 The Form of Social Class

| No | The Form of Social Class | Amount | Percentage |
|----|--------------------------|--------|------------|
| 1 | Bourgeoisie | 4 | 44% |
| 2 | Proletariat | 5 | 56% |

Total of the data: 9

Table: 2 The Influence of Social Class

| No | The Influence of Social Class | Amount | Percentage |
|----|-------------------------------|--------|------------|
| 1 | Prejudice | 10 | 53% |
| 2 | Occupation | 9 | 47% |

Total of the data: 19

DISCUSSION

The Form of Social Class

1. Bourgeoisie

In the movie *The Help*, white people are portrayed as the bourgeoisie and they have a decent life. They own the power and authority in The Mississippi City. They live in clean and decent environment. They have decent houses because they can pay for it. They are able to have good facilities or social life in Mississippi because of their privileges.

One of the characters, Hilly, a white people who functions as the leader of a charity group in Mississippi, drafts about healthy sanitation to the government. She wants to influenced the other to separate the toilets in their houses for the white and black people, due to her belief that black people can carry particular diseases related to the differences in their skin color.

2. Proletariat

In the movie *The Help*, black people are portrayed as the proletariat. Proletariat can be defined as lower class, unlike white people as the bourgeoisie. In the movie, black people are always treated as the second class citizens.

From the scenes in the movie that show where the black people lived, the place or the community of where they live is different with the white people. They are not able to live in the same environment with the white people. It is because they are not able to pay for it. Almost all of black women work as maids for white people.

Minnie, one of the black maid characters in the movie, a maid for a white character Hilly, is one of the examples of black people who live under poverty. She barely has enough money and her daughter should quit from school because she can not pay for the tuition. It is

difficult for black people to look for another job, Minny's daughter is forced to work as a maid as well. The cycle of poverty happens on black people in the movie.

The Influence of Social Class

1. Prejudice

One of the characters, Hilly, is a housewife and the leader of a charity group in Mississippi, the setting of the movie. She has black maid named Minny. Even though she has a black people as her maid, Hilly always assumes that black people should get no better treatment than the white people.

In one of the scenes in Elizabeth's house, Hilly shows how she is so uncomfortable of the thought of going into the toilet over the fact that Elizabeth and her black maid use the same toilet. Hilly mentions that she and her maid use different toilets at her house due to safety reasons. Here, Hilly shows her prejudice towards black people, believing that the black people carry disease and can be dangerous to the white people.

2. Occupation

Occupation can be a reason of racism. In the movie *The Help*, the black people as the proletariat do not have any power. White people as the bourgeoisie who have better occupations use their power to oppress the black people. For example, white people will oppress their maids who are people from the black community. Being uneducated and poor, becoming maids are the only available occupation to be owned by black women.

People like Hilly, a white people from the superior group always treats black people badly because they think that black people are inferior compared to them. As a person from the inferior group, like Minny, for example, she will "know her place" and let the white people use their power to control every situation even if it affects her life or her black community.

Other example, the character Aibileen also mentions in an interview with Elizabeth that she always knows ever since she was a child that someday she, like her mother before her, will be a maid. She accepts the fact that she will take care of white babies and do all the cooking and cleaning for the white people. She mentions that she has already raised seventeen kids in her life, she knows so well how to get the babies to eat, sleep, and so on.

The chance for a better occupation is only opened for white people, since they have the money and the opportunity to do so. They also have the education to help them to get better occupations. Meanwhile, the black people or here known as lower class or proletariat, they do not have the proper or needed education so they can just work as maids or other similar jobs.

CONCLUSION

The researcher explained in this study shows the influence of social class in the movie *The Help*. The class separation works in a way that white people functions as the superior class and black people as the inferior class. The law also put the black people as the second class

citizens, while the white people are comfortable in their high places. The white people have the power to dominate the black people and continuously discriminate the black people. The government also sets rule to prohibit black people of using the public facilities because of their prejudice and the differences in terms of occupation. The white people disregard the black people's basic and fundamental human rights. The study reveals that the social class happens because of the ongoing prejudice and differences of occupation between white people and black people. According to Marx, there are two types of class which are superior and inferior. The superior class claims that their class is different with the inferior, that is why they abuse their power to intimidate the inferior class.

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