The Portrayal of the Main Character's Struggle Against Capitalist Society in *The Shawshank Redemption* Movie by Frank Darabont

Stephen Ali Barkah[1], Rasiah[2], Nur Israfyan Sofian[3]
[1, 2&3]English Literature Study Program, Language and Literature Department
Faculty of Humanities University of Halu Oleo
Corresponding Email:stepangkep123@gmail.com

Abstract

Capitalism has been a specter of modern life which puts people in classes. Capitalism itself is reflected in The Shawshank Redemption (1994) movie by Frank Darabont. This research is concerned to reveal the portrayal of the main character's struggle against capitalism in Shawshank Redemption movie. The data in the research is collected through watching the movie intensively, identifying the data in detail which refers to the Marxism class struggle perspective, and cataloging the data by sorting the data analyzed in Marxism theory. The researcher uses qualitative descriptive analysis as the method to analyze how capitalism works in the prison institution in the movie. The research found that there is the distinction between the two social classes in the prison, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The research also found that Andy as the main character was treated differently before and after being a prisoner, so he did the struggle by using his intellectuality to defeat the capitalists in the prison. In the conclusion, the researcher found the relationship with the position of the Capitalist triggers them to oppress the prisoners in the Shawshank prison, and the process of the main character in defeating the capitalist society.

Keywords: ***capitalism, class struggle, marxism, portrayal***

INTRODUCTION

The Shawshank Redemption is a 1994 American drama movie written and directed by Frank Darabont, and released by Warner Bros based on the 1982 Stephen King novel Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption. The movie was nominated for seven Academy Awards in 1995. The Shawshank Redemption tells the story of a banker named Andy Dufresne who was sentenced to prison because he was accused of killing his wife. He finally lost his job, social status, as well as getting tortured. He was imprisoned in a prison called Shawshank. In this prison, Andy Dufresne is exploited for money laundering activities remembering his banking knowledge. The prisoners have no choice to do like Mr. Norton as the warden and his guards want and stay inside Shawshank because they are not given any chances to continue their lives once they get out from the prison. Due to the illegal activities, some of the prisoners consider this prison to be their home. Since most of them are old and more likely to be not accepted back into the society once they get out. The

warden also will never release Andy from Shawshank prison because he is dangerous to the warden himself, and knows everything that they are doing inside the prison. The warden will do anything to cover his felonies and the truth about Andy's innocence regarding his sentence.

In researching this movie, the researcher decides to analyze this movie because the story shows the huge difference between the rulers and the slaves completely. It can be analyzed that the capitalist society is represented as The Warden and Guards. They exploit the proletariat that are represented by the prisoners as workers. The warden and his systems as the upper class use a clever way to conceal his crime. They exploit the proletariat and they oppress them in many ways. The prison and its systems could be considered as a capitalist society. Based on the problem explored above, the researcher uses Marxism to examine the capitalist society inside Shawshank prison. The Shawshank Redemption relates to the marxism perspective because the prisoners are treated like slaves, how the upper class making profits from hiring out the prisoners, how Andy and other proletariats are oppressed, and struggle against the pressure of bourgeoisie. Marxism enables to expose how capitalism applies inside this prison, and also to focus on how Andy struggles against the capitalist society of Shawshank prison. The wealth and power in capitalist society belongs only to the capitalists. People are controlled by capitalists who use their power to exploit the lower classes as well as the upper class or the ruling class, therefore Marxism presents as a critique of capitalism and history of the class struggle of the proletarians.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research analyzed The Shawshank Redemption contains the class struggle of marxism. The writer used a qualitative method to explain how the class struggle portrayed in this object. In addition, A qualitative study is defined as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting. The main characteristic of qualitative research is mostly appropriate for small samples, while its outcomes are not measurable and quantifiable (Creswell, 2014). In this study the author used the descriptive method, because the data collected by the writer are words that indicate a symptom of the problem, not numbers. Thus, descriptive methods are needed to construct

meaning over an event more clearly because the data are in the form of describing an existing reality. The data source in this research is The Shawshank Redemption 1994 Movie by Frank Darabont. Marshall and Rossman (1999:150) describe data analysis as the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is described as messy, ambiguous and time-consuming, but also as a creative and fascinating process. Broadly speaking - while it does not proceed in linear fashion -it is the activity of making sense of, interpreting and theorizing data that signifies a search for general statements among categories of data (Schwandt, 2007:6). The researcher analyzed the data in this research descriptively and interpretatively in showing the portrayal of the main character's struggle in getting his freedom and defeating capitalism in *The Shawshank Redemption* movie. The data will be interpreted by approaching Marxism theory.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Shawshank Redemption tells us about a prisoner who is struggling to defeat the capitalist society and also his freedom. Mr. Norton as the warden in the Shawshank prison has an ambition to get more money and also has a good image in front of the media, so he would do anything to get them even though killing somebody for keeping his position and image. One of them is when Mr. Norton uses Andy as a tool for his money laundering. One day a prisoner named Tommy knows that Andy is innocent of a case that sentenced him to prison. This makes Andy as the main character in the movie begin the class struggle to fight for his freedom and destroy the capitalist society in the prison. Andy's struggle is certainly not easy and takes many years and the plan is fully structured, and Andy does his plan without being noticed by anyone or even his fellow prisoners. The researcher used Marxism to reveal the issue of class struggle against capitalism in this movie. The researcher sees that Marxism is applied in the film when the upper class or classes that have power in the prison institution oppress the lower classes in this case they are the prisoners.

Social Class

In The Shawshank Redemption movie divided into two classes, they are bourgeoisie and proletariat. The warden Mr. Norton and his guards as the bourgeoisie class while the prisoners as the proletariat class. The bourgeoisie are rich and powerful, the controllers of a society. In the movie, the bourgeoisie has their power to oppress the proletariat for getting profit from them, this is the capitalism in the shawshank prison. The class owning the means

of production utilizes the state, equipped with instruments of oppression, to maintain its rule over the exploited class (Wilczynski, 1981: 80).

In the movie, it can be seen that the prison warden Mr. Norton is a capitalist who led in the shawshank prison, introduced himself and the captain guard of the prison Captain Hadley, states several rules that should not be violated in the prison to the new prisoners and no one may oppose them. This shows Mr. Norton has power in the area and no one can disobey the rules if they don't want to be persecuted. This shows that they are the bourgeoisie who can do anything in the prison even though they abuse their authority and use the prisoners without giving an impression on the prisoners in there. There is one time when Mr. Norton speaks, one of the people asks "when will we eat?" Norton orders Captain Hadley as the captain guard of the prison to give him a punch. Captain Hadley also has the power to torture inmates in the Shawshank prison. No one dared to complain to them because it was they who made all the rules that applied in Shawshank Prison, and if anyone did that they would surely get a punishment in the form of physical punishment carried out by Mr. Norton and Captain Hadley and other guards.

One of some exploitations can be when Mr. Norton uses the prisoner as a worker to do some contracts. Warden Norton creates the "inside-out program", where inmates leave the prison to work on public service projects, such as the building of roads. Because independent contractors can't compete with the prisoners army that being slaves. Norton is taking up all of the projects they need to make a profit. Norton makes them bribe him so they can get the contract instead of Norton's men. Also, Norton would skim off of the top by buying expensive equipment at a discount and then steal all of the extra money. Capitalism is a mode of production in which labor power itself becomes a commodity, purchased for the purpose of creating surplus value (Stearns, 1994: 118).

Andy as the exploited is working for Mr. Norton's taxes and the profit from Inside-out program. Andy launders the money by setting up several accounts in several banks, along with several investments, using the fake identity of Randall Stephens, a man who only exists on papers, created by Andy himself through his knowledge of the system and mail

ordered forms. Randall Stephens officially has a birth certificate, social security number and driving license. Should anyone ever investigate the scheme; they will chase a man who only exists on paper. In short, Andy is being used as a tool for money laundering for making more profit for Mr. Norton as the capitalist. In the Shawshank Redemption movie, the proletariats are the prisoners. Oppression toward the prisoners makes all of the prisoners afraid then continues to the physical oppression that is arranged by the capitalist in the shawshank prison. A new prisoner named the Fat Ass is crying and making a scene inside the cell. Fat Ass's first notable appearance is as he exits the bus and is, like the other newcomers, forcibly processed at Shawshank. During his first night, suddenly realizing the harsh truth of Shawshank, he began to cry, speaking of how he did not belong in prison and wanted his mother.

Captain Hadley enters and approaches him and tells him to be silent, but this Fat ass still doesn't want to stop and says that he is innocent, and he wants to go back to his mother. It is at this point that Hadley, who ordered him quiet and threatened to sing him a "lullaby", Captain Hadley immediately pulled him out strikes him in the center of the stomach and violently beats him with his baton, hit and kicked the boy's head so that he was dying, and the next day it was rumored that the child was dead because of Captain Hadley hit his head too hard and no one dared to report that Captain Hadley killed the Fat Ass. Fat Ass is then taken to the infirmary. However, there are no doctors on duty and he is left there overnight. He dies from his wounds by the time morning arrives. His death became a demonstration and example of Captain Hadley's fierce brutality. Nobody cares about the Fat Boy except Andy Dufresne. Oppression that the capitalists do in the prison makes all of the prisoners afraid to fight back because they have seen what has happened to the other prisoners.

Tommy is a new prisoner who has told Andy about the chronology of the incident of his wife's murder which was not Andy's fault. Tommy knew the real killer (Elmo Blatch), the one who killed Andy's wife & lover (for which Andy was sentenced). Andy would have a jury again if Tommy testified to it. If he did, Andy would have been a free man. But the Warden wouldn't like that because Andy knows all the scams in Shawshank. It was Andy's skillful in bookkeeping that filled the warden's pockets and kept him out of the watch. After hearing about it from Andy, Mr. Norton immediately meets Tommy at night in order to kill Tommy with a neatly arranged plan by Mr. Norton and Captain Hadley, Norton asks

Tommy to talk outside the prison area to talk about Andy while Hadley is preparing to shoot Tommy from the top of the building with his rifle, The warden asks him whether or not what he said to Andy and Red was the truth. When he answers affirmatively, the warden gives a signal to Captain Hadley to shoot Tommy from a tower. Four shots ring out and Tommy falls to the ground dead. As a result Tommy was killed on the grounds with a reason that he escaped from prison because he lay dead outside the prison. Andy is sentenced to be locked up in a hole for a month. Mr. Norton visits Andy in solitary and tells him that they had to kill Tommy because he was trying to escape, feigning contrition all the while. Andy says that he no longer wants to help him do money laundering, but Mr. Norton does not want and will threaten him if he does not want to do it, so all the efforts that have been done by him, namely library and education for prisoners will be abolished, and Andy will be transferred to prison which is worse than shawshank.

Oppression and exploitation are not equivalent concepts. Exploitation speaks to the economic reality of capitalist class relations for men and women, whereas oppression refers to women and minorities defined within patriarchal, racist and capitalist relations. Exploitation is what happens to men and women workers in the labor force; woman's oppression occurs from the relations that define her existence in the patriarchal sexual hierarchy as mother, domestic laborer and consumer. Racial oppression locates her within the racist division of society alongside her exploitation and sexual oppression. Oppression is inclusive of exploitation but reflects a more complex reality. Power or the converse, oppression derives from sex, race and class, and this is manifested through both the material and ideological dimensions of patriarchy, racism and capitalism. Oppression reflects the hierarchical relations of the sexual and racial division of society. (Eisenstein, 1979: 22-3)

Class Struggle

In The Shawshank Redemption, there is a phase before the oppressed class or the prisoners reach the stage of class struggle. The class consciousness happens to the prisoners especially for Andy Dufresne, he realizes about the capitalist system in the shawshank prison by using him as a tool for money laundering and keeping him imprisoned innocent. The bourgeoisie and the proletariat are opposites, so if there is something that makes the proletariat oppressed, then there will be an agent who realizes that they must fight against

the bourgeoisie because there is class distinction that creates the class consciousness of the main character. In this case, the capitalists in the prison do the exploitation and oppression toward the prisoners in order to gain more profits. The oppression remains the rise of class struggle that is started by Andy as the main character of the movie to defeat capitalism in the prison. Class consciousness is described as the awareness and understanding by members or groups of a particular layer of society belonging to a distinct social class (Wilczynski, 1981: 78).

In the movie, when Andy asked to be released because he was not guilty of the case that he had killed his wife. He knows this because there was a new prisoner Tommy who knew the chronology of this incident and was ready to be a witness in court. Andy tells Norton that the financial schemes will stop. The warden counters, saying the library will be destroyed and all its materials burned. Andy will also lose his private cell and be sent to the block with the most hardened criminals. The warden gives Andy another month in solitary. However, Mr. Norton does not care about all that and ignores Andy's words, so Andy offers that if Andy left the prison he would not expose the secret of Mr. Norton who practices money laundering, Mr. Norton didn't want it to be raised and he punished Andy in a pitch black prison for a month. Mr. Norton with Captain Hadley killed Tommy, the person who told Andy in order to jail Andy as long as possible so that Mr. Norton can continue to use Andy as a tool to carry out money laundering practices. Andy began to plan something brilliant to trap Mr. Norton and its members. Andy has knowledge of finance that is utilized by Mr. Norton, but Andy also uses it to trap Mr. Norton later after he is free from the prison. The realization of Andy Dufrese and the other prisoners as the object in oppression and the common interest which is to be free from oppression then leads to the act of class struggle which is the struggle of one class against the opposed class.

So, the realization of Andy Dufresne as the main character is correct for the relationship between the two classes that are contradictory to one another. In The Shawshank Redemption, there is a class that is the owner of means of production, and wants to get more profit, maintains its position there, and has complete control over the prisoners. The proletariats realize what the bourgeoisie do is opposed to the values of nature. Especially for the working class or the prisoners, over time, reduce aspects of humanism, because it only concerns the work, or what is known as alienation. Then the prisoners in Shawshank prison

are being oppressed by the Capitalist society that is led by Warden Norton in order to maintain their superior position, while the latter proletariat wants to improve their life by insisting on their rights. According to them, they have been robbed by the capitalists. This consciousness is important because it is the forerunner of resistance to make the proletariat class, especially Andy Dufresne rise to the leading class. As a result, there is a class struggle against the capitalist society in the prison. Class struggle, according to Bukharin in Historical Materialism, is a struggle in which one class has entered into the action against the other class (1969: 298). Based on Day, the antagonism between the classes, based on their different relations to production, makes them conscious of themselves as classes and this leads to conflict (2001: 6-7).

In the beginning of his struggle, Andy tells Red a little about the brilliant plans that he will do to destroy Norton's whole career. He said that he had created a fake account called Randall Stevens. Randall Stevens is Andy's alias where all the money was embezzled by Mr. Norton flowed into the account, this is the name he uses to launder money the warden obtains illegally. Class struggle is a term that is used when the oppressed class realizes that they are being oppressed by that opposed class and stand against the opposed class. An oppressed class is the condition of existence of every society based on class conflicts. Thus, the liberation of the oppressed class necessarily involves the creation of a new society. The history of all societies up to the present is the history of class struggle (Dahrendorf, 1996: 18).

Andy is carrying out his plan of tunneling the prison wall with a small rock hammer, the hole is hidden by Rita Hayworth's poster through the wall of his jail even though it took 20 years to complete it. However, with firmness Andy can finish it too. Andy concludes that he has been there long enough after Tommy was shot under Norton's orders, and he had details that could be supporting Andy's innocence. He waits for a stormy evening, after which he takes the warden's shoes and one of his suits while hiding his Bible rock hammer, which he swaps for Warden's ledger, and he is issued on arrival. He procures a 6-foot-long Heywood rope and ties a plastic bag packed with records and books, as well as a soap bar and the stolen suit with his carved rock chess pieces. When there is a prison inspection that is not in place, immediately Mr. Norton panicked and asked the closest person in the prison, he

found a hole that was covered by a poster model which he did not realize. The struggle of Andy Dufresne as the main character of this movie is corresponding with the theory of class struggle. So, Andy actually realizes that he has some reason for escaping from the prison. If he doesn't do that, he would be jailed in the prison for a long time and be exploited by the capitalists of the shawshank prison. Andy walks into the Maine National Bank in Portland and nearly a dozen other banks where he has put Warden Norton's money. He stole more than $370,000 of Warden's cash while posing as Randall Stephens. Andy uses this alias to avoid any government officials linking the operation back to the warden, or Andy himself. After he escapes from prison, Andy poses as this fictional person to collect all of the warden's money from the banks it was deposited at, which he then uses to get to Fort Hancock Texas to cross the border into Mexico. He also sent the package containing Warden Norton's account of financial crimes, perhaps together with evidence of his own innocence to Daily Bugle Newspaper. Captain Hadley was imprisoned when the story was published, while Warden Norton committed suicide to escape his criminal arrests.

Andy Dufresne ever got the best of him. When Andy is free, he made a false identity and got all the wealth of hundreds of millions of dollars as a result of his money laundering, and reported money laundering and murder cases against Mr. Norton, Andy mailed the evidence of his financial crimes to the Daily Bugle, presumably along with evidence of his own innocence. So Mr. Norton and Captain Hadley are found guilty and immediately arrested by the police at the Shawshank prison, where Captain Hadley was arrested and Mr. Norton does not not want to be pursued so he decides to kill himself by shooting his head using a gun to avoid arrest for his crimes. From this, it can be seen that this is a picture of the defeat of capitalist society in Shawshank prison, of course this is because of Andy's awareness that there is something wrong with the system imposed at the prison, as well as the case of innocence that was hidden by Mr. Norton and others. Andy got the freedom by having a new name and identity namely Randall Stevens and an account that contained a lot of money which was the result of money laundering conducted by Mr. Norton, Andy is now an ordinary person without a criminal track, and is not worried about being sought by the police. Andy used to get to Fort Hancock Texas to cross the border into Mexico. He later crossed into Mexico at Fort Hancock, before settling down in Zihuatanejo, Mexico. He starts working on opening his hotel. Andy's freedom signifies that he has succeeded in defeating the capitalist society in Shawshank Prison.

CONCLUSIONS

The result of the research in the movie *The Shawshank Redemption* By Frank Darabont using Marxism theory by Karl Marx illustrates the phases and oppression that leads to the class struggle of the main character of the movie. In addition, it also found the relationship with the position of the Capitalist that triggers them to oppress the prisoners in the Shawshank Prison. When someone is stronger in his position, they are more likely to become a capitalist and suppress the people under him.

The research also shows that the capitalism system can also appear in a prison institution, which we know that capitalism usually only appears in production companies or factories. Capitalism exists in the prison institution because of the ambition of the warden Mr. Norton to get more profit by using the prisoners in there as the workers to do some contract for him. They also found that the main character's wealth is not useful in the prison because the capitalism in the prison does not see where the person comes from. It can be concluded that the prisoners are the lower class and can be oppressed whatever the capitalist wants. Secretly, the main character (Andy Dufresne) used his intellectuality and knowledge to defeat the capitalist society in the prison without being realized by them. So, the struggle of the main character is succeeded because of the realization of the main character that they are being used as workers.

REFERENCES

Barry, Peter (2002). *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory 2nd Edition.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Marx, Karl & Engels, Frederick 1818-1883. (1996). *The Communist manifesto*. London ; Chicago, Ill. :Pluto Press.

Schwandt, T. A. (2007). *The SAGE dictionary of qualitative inquiry*. Los Angeles, Calif: Sage Publications.

Stearns, Peter N. (1994). *Encyclopedia of Social History*. New York: Garland Publishing.

Wilcynzski, J. (1981). *An Encyclopedic Dictionary of Marxism Socialism and Communism*. London: Macmillan.