

ALIENATION OF MAN AS REFLECTED IN JOHN GRISHAM'S *THEODORE BOONE: THE ACTIVIST*

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ABSTRACT

This article is purposed to reveal alienation of man as reflected in the novel of John Grisham's entitled *Theodore Boone: the Activist*. In this paper, alienation is described as the condition when man is separated from his surroundings. This matter occurs due to the replacement of concrete understanding into abstractification. In the novel, abstractification is narrated in the description of treating nature and land for profit orientation. As a result, the alienation of man is shown in his feeling of separation from essential values of humanity. By using the postmodernism approach for this research, the results show that an authority's policy such as the project of infrastructure without considering the public interest, as told in the novel, will cause not only the damages of environment but also the destruction of the civilization. In this paper, alienation of man is classified into alienation from activity, self-alienation, and alienation from others. Those classifications in the novel are proven to bring human to dehumanization.

Keywords: alienation, abstractification, separation

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengungkapkan keterasingan manusia yang tergambarkan dalam novel John Grisham berjudul Theodore Boone: the Activist. Dalam artikel ini, keterasingan manusia digambarkan sebagai kondisi manusia yang terpisah dari sekitarnya. Hal ini terjadi karena pengalihan pemahaman konkret menjadi abstrak. Dalam novel tersebut, pemahaman abstrak dinarasikan dalam pendeskripsian bagaimana alam dan tanah diperlakukan hanya untuk orientasi keuntungan. Sehingga, keterasingan manusia ditunjukkan dengan keterpisahan manusia dari nilai-nilai penting atas kemanusiaan. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan posmodernisme, hasil menunjukkan bahwa kebijakan kekuasaan seperti proyek infrastruktur tanpa memikirkan dampak serius bagi kepentingan publik tidak hanya akan menyebabkan kerusakan alam tetapi juga menghancurkan peradaban manusia. Dalam artikel ini, keterasingan manusia diklasifikasikan ke dalam keterasingan dari aktifitasnya, keterasingan diri, dan keterasingan dari orang lain. Pengklasifikasian atas keterasingan manusia tersebut terbukti membawa manusia pada dehumanisasi.

Kata kunci: keterasingan, pemahaman abstrak, keterpisahan

A. INTRODUCTION

Alienation of man is a kind of crucial matter suffered by million people. This issue is initially caused by the policy of authority with the aim of the economy development of country. The policy decided by country or authority is trusted to be beneficial for a lot of people in nation, then people can enjoy the advantages which are claimed as result of that policy. However, the fact proves the opposite thing. In the process, the policies made by authority only involve a few people with certain interests, and the policies are approved without any involvement from the public. For that reason, any policy agreed in such a way will lead to people in alienation.

Alienation of man as the result of the policy made by authority is also represented in the John Grisham's *Theodore Boone: the Activist*. In that novel, Grisham has tried to describe how policy in the process contains a lot of dirty plays and cunning negotiations from some parties with their certain interest; meanwhile, the people in public have to be responsible for the losses. *Theodore Boone: the Activist* reveals that there is expensive price that have to be paid by the public due to the policy, especially the destruction of nature and human civilization. The authority policy, such as the infrastructure of road expansion as narrated in the novel, is proven to be exploitative for land and nature that should be protected because they are very essential for human's life, and that kind of exploitation has alienated man for the life providers have been vanished by the greed of infrastructure.

This is true that that the novel is purposed to confess the social inequality caused by the authority with defective laws. One that is explained in the novel is that the Eminent domain is an old legal idea, but that legal idea is practically manipulated. For that reason, the novel has many times mentioned forms of alienation owing to the policy agreed carelessly for the project to construct the new bypass road.

Theodore Boone: the Activist is kind of fictional literature work. Though fictional it is, this literature is always used to express any social problems happening around. This is relatable to what Nyoman Kutha Ratna (2008:364-365) has stated that the structural elements in tendency of literature work is imaginative and emotionally representative, but fictional literature work also has to contains the socially factual competences. For that reason, according to Rudolf Unger, he mentioned one of the social issues mostly discussed in novel is about foredoom: the relation between freedom and compulsion, and the spirit of human to nature (Efendi, 2005:63). Thus, in order to know foredoom whether man is alienated from surrounding or not, it can be discovered from the human freedom in his strong bond with nature and the human compulsion in his separation from nature.

Alienation of man is a condition when he is separated from activity and surrounding. Erich Fromm started this discussion with quantification and abstractification. These terms are used as the fundamental economic system of capitalism whose process of production make people involved in the occurrence of control and calculation; therefore, man cannot internalize himself with specific character since it is replaced by different quantities with similar qualities (Fromm, 1955). This can be concluded that alienation or separation of man from his activities in the process of

production is caused by the system that does not concern the concreteness of nature and surrounding, apart from calculating the potentially profitable values.

The theme of alienation is now more frequently used to write literature work. One of the most influenced factors is that the complexity of human life is strongly affected by the system. The idea about the economic system allowed to controlling the process of production for calculation has sparked off the grasp when it is pointed to the destruction of environment and human civilization that make this issue turn more serious; therefore, there are several novels including *Theodore Boone: the Activist* raising separation of man from nature due to the damages.

The approach that will be used to analyze this novel is the postmodernism by using the Marx's theory of social class, alienation. According to Pauline Rosenau (Ritzer, 2003:18-19), postmodernism is existed to criticize modernism because of its fallacy in keeping promises that are claimed they have succeeded in granting hopes for futures. The fallacies of modernism at least consist of the fallacy in the improvement of any field, the fallacy in preventing the arbitrariness and abusing the authority, and the fallacy in tackling the poverty, unemployment and environmental damages (Ratna, 2004:151-152).

Therefore, the Marx's theory of social class alienation that is described in Grisham's novel will be used to interpret, so as to prove that modernism as being proud by the authority in reality indeed gives no advantages for society. And, the purpose of this paper is to describe the alienation of man as narrated in *Theodore Boone: the Activist*. Forms of alienation described in the novel can be found in some narrations and dialogs of the characters' both supporting the project and protesting against it. This research is able to reveal and represent the real condition of society in honesty, so that the issue can become the reminder of us that as being human, for any reason we have to combat against self-separation from the essences of humanization.

B. THEORY

Fromm (2002) defines alienation as the human's condition in the self-experience of being alien; however, he doesn't clarify alienation as the condition of solitude but illuminates that man encounters himself as the one obeying his created objects instead of being a creator. This is emphasized that an alienated person considers himself as a thing existing from human's creation that should obey its creator. In contrast, it is the creator obeying objects he has created.

The term "alienation" is used to refer insane human. Then, it is developed by Hegel and Marx who points it as a self-estrangement which is illustrated that man does his activity, practically matching with the reason, but the fact proves that it is actually a socially patterned defect which describes that man in his unconscious never sees any defect, for it has brought him to happiness. While according to Burston and Olfman (Olfman, 2003:206), socially patterned defect is a system of pathogenic belief which comes to be normative in the arrangement of behavior and lifestyle impairing the capacity for reason and love but receiving them in the very intense and widespread social validation, as a consequence both of them do not bring about inner conflict.

In the quotation of Marx, alienation is explained as an activity which man cannot defeat. In contrast, his own activity controls him. As emphasizing in the term 'polytheism' ("*Konsep Manusia Menurut Marx*," 2004) which is defined as idolizing man's own creation, Fromm illustrates human in the control of his activity through term "idolatry" as mean by man creating an idol then worshiping it while the idol does not have any excess but man's creation.

Alienation as mentioned above, then will bring human to the unproductiveness, for he doesn't internalize himself as human but a thing. Man should be in the process of productiveness to show his essence; otherwise he will be receptive and passive. But industries have turned man into machine which will make him in passiveness; as a consequence, he never gets self-understanding.

C. RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this research is qualitative. And, the primary source of the data is *Theodore Boone: the Activist* written by John Grisham. By using postmodernism approach, this paper will discuss some social issues, the information of which at least can be represented in this novel. By analyzing and highlighting some important points discovered in each data whether they are discourses, sentences, and even word, those points can be used as the representative tools in such a way that this paper can give clear description and understanding that alienation of man resulting from the system trying to control every human activity, is expressed by the novel in honesty.

The techniques of collecting the data in this research consist of reading, collecting and sorting. The first step is reading the whole story of the book to know the exact plot, after that highlighting some important points that can be predicted to be used as the source of the data. Finally, the last step is filtering or sorting the collected data as to find the information appropriately to the topic explained in the discussion

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the result, alienation of man as described in *Theodore Boone: the Activist* is found from the characters in the novel both protesting against the policy and supporting it. And, the alienation suffered by the people in the novel is classified into *alienation from activity*, *self-alienation* and *alienation from others*.

1. Alienation from Activity

The identification of man alienated from his activity can be differentiated from the way man internalizes the surrounding concretely and abstractly. As stated by Erich Fromm (1955), abstractification can occur when the process of production is controlled under calculation. It means that the concrete understanding to the surrounding is able to bring human to the essences, as human who lives and relies on environment for his life; this is very contradictive to the abstract understanding. Abstractification never tends to rest upon a concrete observation for the environmental management, except for the strict quantifiability in the figures of all the economical occurrences, so as to predict how profitable that can be earned (Fromm, 1955: 107-108). Thus, this can be concluded that

the environmental management without thinking of the concrete values will separate human from his activity or his process of production.

Before it is clearly elaborated how alienation of man from his activity appears in this Grisham's novel, it is also important to see the comparison with how pleasure the environmental management with concrete understanding is, as mentioned in the dialog following:

“My father and grandfather wanted us to appreciate nature and to respect the land. They took us hunting and fishing, still do. I killed my first deer when I was eight years old, then I watched my father clean it and save the meat. He made venison sausage and took it to the homeless shelter.” (p. 19)

This quotation contains a lot of reasons why Hardie insisted on rejecting the government policy of project to construct the new bypass road. The reason is not only because the project of government's would replace his family's residence but also because it would alter the natural field. In the quotation above, he believed that nature and land give life for human. In this case, some examples such as *fishing* and *hunting* show that nature and land provide a lot of advantages for all human's daily needs. In that novel, Hardie also told that *the meat* that he got from *hunting* was not only cooked for *venison sausage* but also taken it to the *homeless shelter*. This indicates that the concrete understanding to the land and nature can make human feel how beneficial every surrounding of his, and this can turn him to be grateful, as well.

We've never killed animals just for the sake of sport. We fish the ponds and Red Creek for bass, bream, and crappie, and I could clean and grill them in a skillet over a fire when I was ten years old. This is our land, Theo. No one has the right to take it.” (p. 19)

Moreover, another quotation from Hardie as attached above also emphasize that nature and land will manage to be beneficial for human survival providing that human is consistent to keep them wisely. And, this is proven by what Hardie has told in the novel how important it is to be grateful. The novel also tells that nature will treat human the way human treats it. This is the illustration that can be interpreted as the concrete act of treating environment. Both to *appreciate* and to *respect* the nature and land are the wise actions which Hardie's family always advised as they already realized that the concreteness of nature will never be paid with any calculation.

In comparison to concreteness, the abstract understanding to the nature and land can be found in the fallacy of internalizing them. In abstractification, the system always tries to avoid seeing the nature and land in uniqueness, beautifulness, and usefulness. In this case, the act of abstractification tends to treat the environment only for the profitable purposes.

“And there are also these local business guys who think they can make a buck off the bypass. Think about it. Two hundred million dollars is about to be spent right here in Strattenburg, and so a lot of folks are jumping on board.” (p. 20)

The quotation above shows that *these local business guys can make a buck off bypass* as mentioned by Hardie in the dialog points out the agreement about the abstractification is to only consider any potential profits gotten from the natural sources. abstractification is always ignoring another potency of serious consequences. And, this impact is possibly to get suffered by man as kind of alienation.

When abstractification does not have any concern about the importance of treating nature and land wisely, human will feel the harmful effect of this. Alienation of man can be seen from the serious consequences such environmental damages as described in the novel.

“All of the city’s drinking water comes from the Red Creek, and no one knows how much the bypass will affect it. Plus there will be all this truck traffic zooming by Jackson Elementary School. Think of the noise and exhaust fumes.” (p. 25)

The destructions like *the bypass will affect the city’s drinking water and the noise and exhaust fumes from truck traffic zooming by* eminently remark how terrible this problem affects human life. Man will be in separation from his activity because the system in that abstractification has destroyed environment as the human dependency. Alienation from his activity can be predicted not only from some distractions but also other losses such as the lost livelihood.

The denial of thoughts about the land and nature in uniqueness, beautifulness, and usefulness is founded in more elaboration by Henri Lefebvre. In accordance to Lefebvre, abstractification as involvement of control in the process of production has cut down not only uniqueness but also spontaneous and naturalness (Alexander, 2019).

“Four hundred students. Right now it sits off to itself, isolated from traffic and noise, just minding its own business, educating little kids while the birds chirp outside and the breeze blows the leaves here and there. However, economic development is on the way.” (p. 76)

This dialog is quoted from Sebastian who also protested against the project of bypass road. The cutting down of spontaneous and naturalness by the control in the Lefebvre’s elaboration is proven in this quotation. The *economic development is on the way* which plays the main role of controlling production indeed has taken over the essential values of nature and land. This can be ensured from the replacement of *educating kids during the chirp of birds’* and *the breeze blow* into the appearance of *traffic and noise*.

In addition, there are still some other serious consequences as mentioned in this novel to emphasize that the abstractification in the process of production in many levels is always marked as the destroyer of the concreteness. In the novel, that can be seen from Sebastian describing serious hazards which will scare people all time when any construction as the government's policy get executed.

“The bypass rips through this parking lot here and comes to within a hundred yards of the school's front door. So in two years there will be four lanes of heavy traffic, big trucks and buses blasting diesel fumes into the air while cars fly by doing eighty miles an hour.” (p. 76)

Some other impacts such as *lanes of heavy traffic* and *diesel fumes* in the quotation are not showing any beneficial effect from the economic development as the claim. It is clearly proven that when the concreteness of nature found in its beautifulness, uniqueness and spontaneous becomes shifted by the abstractification, man in his alienation is the result of production control. Thus, alienation is a phenomenon of man's condition when he suffers any hazardous disadvantages that are caused by failure in treating the nature; meanwhile, nature and land are concretely the essential sources that must be protected and used wisely to expand human's survival lively.

Abstractification initially introduced to discuss the concept of alienation is also supported by both Horkheimer and Adorno. They called it as instrument of enlightenment to make a contrast to the widest sense as the advance of thought (Horkheimer & Ardo, 2002:9). Abstractification means as standing in the relationship indifferently to object as fate, and Horkheimer and Ardo notice that everything under leveling rule of abstraction or abstractification tends to be repeatable and distanced between subject and object by the means of being controlled (p. 136).

“Well, in this case, it's a road to nowhere that will cost at least two hundred million dollars and allow truckers to save about five minutes as they travel through Strattenburg.” (p. 12)

The relationship to the object as fate is also described in the dialog of Mrs. Boone's. She mentioned *it's a road to nowhere that will cost two hundred million dollars* to show a fate about the effectiveness of the bypass road. This can be proven not only from the wasting money but also from *to save about five minutes* to indicate bad impacts of the bypass road for people's activity instead of the effectiveness.

Surprisingly, the fate of effectiveness under such kind of policy is proven to occur repeatedly due to abstarctification strongly affects man to calculate more profit without any wise consideration.

“This bypass was a rotten idea ten years ago, and it’s an even worse idea now. It crosses Red Creek in two places and will harm the quality of the city’s water. It will be built very close to Jackson Elementary School, so there will be twenty-five thousand vehicles a day, many of them big trucks, running right by a playground where four hundred kids are playing. Think of the noise and pollution.” (p. 13)

This quotation is the clear explanation about a lot of serious consequences when a policy is made without any consideration except for the profit orientation. The *rotten idea ten years ago* is the repeated mistake that should be thought wisely, but it isn’t avoided. This shows that alienation also occurs in anyone who doesn’t get the understanding of what the nature is essential for human. The profit orientation has described how it looks like if man is separated from the uniqueness and spontaneous of surroundings. The serious impacts such as *it will harm the quality of city’s water* and *the noise and pollution* are the damages that are also mentioned several times in the novel to emphasize those will lead to man in alienation happening when he is separated or distanced between himself and surroundings.

The repetition of fallacy in managing the natural resources occurs owing to the capitalists’ obsession to the living standard of middle-class. In this case, such obsession tends to be a crucial matter since people never feel enough when standardizing the life style of middle-class. Moreover, the strongest factor of this, in accordance to Magdoff and B. Foster (2011:10), is that people in their globally social system are demanded by a principle that ‘enough is little’. Consequently, Magdoff and Foster agree that this will dehumanize people and the around.

“It’s being pushed by some trucking companies north and south of Strattenburg. They hate coming through town on Battle Street because they get clogged up in traffic. They think a bypass around town will make it easier to haul freight and do all sorts of wonderful things for their business.” (p. 20)

In the explanation from Hardie, that can be seen how frustrated he felt when he was trying to ensure Theo that hazardous effect and the exploitation of human are the most dominated in the construction of the bypass road. In addition, the demand of globally social system with the basis ‘enough is little’ can be found in the purpose of constructing the new road. Avoiding the traffic jams on the Battle Street does not seem to be totally logical since the most possible thing to predict after the construction is in fact the increasing volume of private vehicles that will practically decrease no crowd on street. In this matter, it is shown how clearly they think about ‘enough is little’. They might only think about the development of their business. However, they don’t consider the terrible drawbacks which are actually the serious matters for the rests of their life. One of the serious problems is clearly decreasing the agriculture area, and probably they even will lose the whole agriculture areas if they don’t take this case seriously.

2. Self-Alienation

Self-alienation is the result of man's separation from his activity. The concrete activity has been cut down and replaced by abstractification. Consequently, man will not be independently free in progressing his own productivity (Saeng, 2012:132).

“My poor grandparents are so upset by this. They've been married for fifty years and they've lived in only one place—the farm. If they have to leave, it'll just kill them. Both of them were crying last night. It was just awful.”
(p. 24)

This quotation is when Hardie tried to give rational explanation to Theo about why he insisted on rejecting the government project of constructing the new bypass road. *Upset, it'll just kill them* and *awfull* as mentioned in the novel shows that those feelings are the condition when man suffers self-alienation. In that novel, the Hardie's family would lose everything if they are demanded to leave the house, not only because they will lose their residence but also because they won't work with their own independent productivity. It can't be imagined if they really have to work with leveling rule of being controlled after the farm as life provider has been replaced the profit orientation. Practically, the rule of being controlled has separated man from himself.

3. Alienation from Others

Alienation is the concept which was initially introduced by Marx to criticize the system of capitalism. He believed that such system especially applied through work or any activity can lead human to obliteration from his self-understanding and even to the relation with others. Then, this theory of alienation was also developed by some other philosophers like Gyorgy Lukacs. He has introduced the term *versachlichung* to give the description of alienation as a condition where a work or any activity has confronted man who should be independently objective, then what happens in reality is that man does not modify his own activity except for being dominated by the law of external autonomy (Musto, 2018).

“Eminent domain is an old legal idea that's been on the books forever. It means the state has the right to take land when it can prove that it needs the land. The state has to pay a fair price to the landowners, but the landowners can't stop the state from taking their land.” (p. 19)

The eminent domain as the legal idea that has been long signed proves how terrible the law of external autonomy for separating man from his existence that deserves essentially independent and objective. Man with his self-separation does not have any power when the laws of external autonomy have to take over and authorize the ownership

of land and nature. In this case, it's been already known that there is no proof of the urgent need to take people's land.

In addition, Marx found out that the alienation of man in his social relation has been dominated by the exploitative system of economy leading to the dehumanization; in this case, the system just relates socially through commodity (Saeng, 2012: 125). It is concluded that the understanding of social relation is failed when that is considered as the commodity orientation. So, the essential values of social values will not be found in such orientation.

“Like construction companies, bridge builders, equipment salesmen, companies that sell materials. My dad says these guys will go nuts in support of the project. The economy is down, business is slow, and now suddenly there is this huge project. My dad says it's just a typical government pork scam. The politicians go for the votes while the businessmen scramble to make a buck. Meanwhile the taxpayers get stuck with the bill for another bad project.” (p. 20)

This quotation from Hardie has proven that such system never brings social relation to the essential values of humanization. In that novel, Hardie specifically some companies that support the bypass project to ensure the exploitative system of economy through the legal idea still resulting in dehumanization. Moreover, *a typical government pork scam* as mentioned in the novel indicates the impact of the laws of external autonomy abused by them only for their own interests. In this case, there is no public importance found in the government's project except for the certain interests between government or country and private companies.

The land grabbing issue as revealed in this novel happens to be a crucial matter as alienation of man. The Harvey's theory of dispossession states that accumulation by dispossession is used as one of the ways to execute the capitalistic system; by grabbing the proletarians' land and replacing them into alienated workers, he continues that this can be said as the process of reification in the transformation of man from a producer into a worker and in the replacement of the social function into the capital accumulation (Damarjiwo, 2018).

“The bypass cuts across the entire valley, one wide gash that begins over there between those two hills and goes through the tallest hill that way.” His right arm swept to his left. “That's Chalk Hill, and the plan is to level it with dynamite. Just blow it up and flatten it out. Everything else gets bulldozed, then covered with asphalt. Not sure what happens to my grandparents.” (p. 49)

The laws of external autonomy practically destruct not only human civilization but also the environment. The destruction of nature as the result of replacement from nature into infrastructures, as described by Hardie who pointed out the whole cut of valley from the bottom to the top of hill blown up and then flattened out entirely by using dynamite,

is also the most influencing factor of people being alienated. When providers of human survival land and nature are dispossessed by egoistic owners of capital, and even they carry out it disrespectfully, the nature won't afford to grant life for human anymore since those nature and land destroyers have been caused the degradation of environment.

E. CONCLUSION

After conducting the analysis of *Theodore Boone: the Activist*, this paper has concluded that John Grisham indeed has tried to criticize the modernism through the alienation concept as described in the novel. Also, the environmental destructions and the damages of human civilization as mentioned for several times can be the evidences that the authority's policy like infrastructure is hardly ever aimed for the public importance except for the certain interest. Furthermore, such policy has proven to alienate man from his activity, himself, and society since such policy with the calculation and accumulation oriented is the abstract understanding or abstractification which will lead human to the dehumanization.

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