



SOCIAL DETACHMENT AND FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS IN *THE LOTTERY IN BABYLON* BY JORGE LUIS BORGES

Rina Saraswati*, Rita Apriliya Cantika , Tia Ivanka Wardani, Alifya Rahma Asy Syaffa, Alifia Kamila Jasmine Putri Hariyanto, Sonya Ivanda Fiorella
Universitas Airlangga

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 09-05-2023

Accepted: 26-05-2023

Published: 29-06-2023

Keywords: Marxism,
social class, false
consciousness, *The
Lottery in Babylon*

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the portrayal of social class between The Company that ran the lottery as the upper class and the citizens who were the lottery participants as the lower class in *The Lottery in Babylon* by Jorge Luis Borges. This study used the theory from Karl Marx regarding the existence of the false consciousness of the bourgeoisie toward the proletariats. The qualitative approach was employed in this study to collect the essence of the short story. It is found that according to Marxist theory, *The Lottery of Babylon* portrays the existence of alienation from the existence of the Lottery which defines one's social class and fate.

INTRODUCTION

One thing that people have in common is social class. It is one of the most significant elements of societal issues in today's society and is typically connected to a social and economic class. Using the class analysis method, social class can be used to determine socioeconomic status based on factors like income, occupation, and education. Marx defined social class as a relationship between individuals that is mediated through production. He divides society, the economy, and culture into three categories and further divides each category into two types. Proletariat and bourgeoisie exist (Tyson, 2015).

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: rinasaraswati@fib.unair.ac.id (Rina Saraswati)

ISSN : 2597-7385 (Online) - ISLLAC : Journal of Intensive Studies on Language, Literature, Art, and Culture is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Those that belong to the upper class are wealthy and have a lot of money, which gives them influence or political power. The term "bourgeoisie" refers to the members of the upper class who are capitalists with the authority to own and manage the means of production. The lower class typically refers to the proletariat or working class person and includes those who work but are poorly compensated and whose labor is insufficient to compensate for their sacrifices. Consequently, authority can be impacted by socioeconomic class. The higher a person rises in social class, the more influence and power they acquire. The bourgeois and the proletariat are social classes that are defined by their marker capability and depend on the social relations of production.

Short stories are one of the literary productions that help sustain social classes, among other cultural items. Throughout popular culture, short stories serve as instruments for readers to examine "morals and societal ideas of good and evil" and frequently ideals of social class in addition to serving as entertainment. Short stories are well known for their rigid structure. Mostly, short stories center around the idea of rich and poor representation, telling the issue and association between living in the wealthy and poverty. Such a condition above is illustrated in the short story *The Lottery in Babylon* by Jorge Luis Borges, which was published in 1941.

Borges explains that lottery regulations are arbitrary, and their administration is shrouded in mystery and ambiguity. Nonetheless, the inhabitants of Babylon have a strong bond with the lottery and regard it as an essential part of their daily lives. Borges' key issue in the narrative is the idea of mistaken awareness. False awareness is the deception of believing that one's activities are voluntary and desirable when they are influenced by an outside power. Residents in "The Lottery of Babylon" believe the lottery is a game of chance and choice, and they happily participate, despite the reality that the lottery manipulates their lives and dictates their futures.

Borges explores the essence of reality and the illusion of false awareness via a complicated and strange narrative. He invites the reader to investigate how societal systems might fool individuals and shut them off from the realities of their position. *"Babylon's Lottery"* is also a critique of repressive societal institutions that control and exploit individuals. The plot draws similarities between the lottery and larger systems of power and control in a society in which people might unconsciously participate in oppressive processes. Borges asks readers to consider their involvement in supporting such a system, as well as the repercussions of turning a blind eye to the suffering of others.

A previous study conducted by Salma Alfaraaj found that The Babylonian society in *The Lottery in Babylon* is a civilized society ruled by unplanned disorder, with one powerful authority ruling everyone, perhaps in secret (Al-Arfaj). A place where immediate death is commonplace. Through these characteristics, the civilization demonstrates a dystopian aspect that the Babylonians might or might not be conscious of. This research is completed to analyze the dystopian aspects of the story of *The Lottery in Babylon*. Therefore the writer attempts to fill the gap in which to conduct the study from the Marxist perspective to understand the social detachment as well as the false consciousness depicted in the story *The Lottery in Babylon*.

METHOD

Conducting qualitative research utilizing Marxist theory entails gathering pertinent data from Jorge Luis Borges' book *The Lottery in Babylon*. This entails carefully reading and re-reading the material, taking notes, and identifying passages and parts linked to social distance and misperception concerns. Quotes, descriptions, character actions, or conversation relating to Marxist principles, such as class struggle, exploitation, ideology, and alienation, may be included in the data. *Marxist theory*, developed by Karl Marx, concerns the links between social classes, means of production, and the distribution of wealth and power in society. It also investigates how ideologies and erroneous beliefs influence people's views of reality and social connections. Marxist principles are used to understand and explain the Babylon Lottery events, happenings, and characters in connection to social estrangement and false consciousness. Social distance is the state of being cut off from one's social setting, frequently owing to class inequalities and an inability to fully appreciate the social dynamics and power connections that surround them. How the story's characters are divorced from the lottery system's reality, the result of winning or losing, and the greater societal impact. Look for passages or occurrences that illustrate the character's lack of social awareness, consciousness, or agency. *False consciousness* refers to a distorted perception of reality resulting from ideological manipulation or indoctrination. Look for passages where characters in *The Lottery of Babylon* have beliefs, attitudes, or actions that go against their class interests and can perpetuate the existing social order. Despite its arbitrary and oppressive nature, the character's acceptance of the lottery system may reflect a false consciousness or ideological hegemony that prevents them from realizing and questioning their

exploitation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Social Detachment

The division of social classes in the short story entitled *The Lottery in Babylon* is characterized by the concept of ruler and control, or, according to Marx, it was called Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. The ruling party or Bourgeoisie here is described as the Company. "First, the Company was forced to assume all public power (The unification was necessary because of the vastness and complexity of the new operations)" (Borges & Fein, 1959).

The company owns the public power means that they own the means of production and the employers (Tariq, 2018). In this story, they were responsible for the lot sale rate as well as its drawing and judgment. The Lottery was one of the National traditions of the Babylonian community, and the Bourgeoisie took all the process upon the lower-class assumptions.

With its customary discretion, the Company did not reply directly; instead, it scrawled its brief argument in the rubble of a mask factory. This apologia is now numbered among the sacred Scriptures. It pointed out, doctrinally, that the Lottery is an interpolation of chance into the order of the universe, and observed that to accept errors is to strengthen chance, not contravene it. It also noted that those lions, that sacred squatting place, though not disavowed by the Company (which reserved the right to consult them), functioned with no official guarantee (Borges & Fein, 1959).

The proletariat community stated directly by the first point-of-view in this sentence

The Lottery was made secret, free of charge, and open to all. The mercenary sale of lots was abolished; once initiated into the mysteries of Baal, every free man automatically took part in the sacred drawings, which were held in the labyrinths of the god every sixty nights and determined each man's destiny until the next drawing (Borges & Fein, 1959).

Here proletariats are pointed out as the exploited and oppressed by the class which exploits and oppresses it (the bourgeoisie) (Marx, Engels, & Taylor, 1967), in which they were alienated from the community agreement.

False Consciousness

Marxist theories of social class are the source of the idea of false consciousness. Marx

argues that the ruling class manipulates the ideas, values, and perceptions of the working class to their advantage. Thompson (2014) states that false consciousness is the idea of a phenomenon when people in a capitalist society who are subordinated to a group of more powerful people are not aware that they are being exploited and oppressed. For instance, a worker may think they are getting appropriately compensated for their work but, in reality, their employer is taking advantage of them. The inequality they experience is due to the existence of ideas that normalize and justify the presence of social classes in that society. The mental images that members of a subordinate class (workers, peasants, and serfs) have of the social interactions surrounding them make it such that the reality of subordination, exploitation, and dominance those relations reflect is routinely hidden or obscured.

In the short story "*The Lottery in Babylon*", a government-run organization called the Company uses a chance to decide the fate of its inhabitants. The lottery is intended to help the government keep control of the populace and make them submissive and obedient. The people of Babylon think that fate is decided by chance and that the lottery is reasonable and fair. Yet as the narrative goes on, it becomes evident that the Corporation manipulated the lottery to keep its grip on power and control over the citizens of Babylon. As a result, the citizens of Babylon are suffering from false awareness since they are ignorant of the actual purpose of the lottery and the Company's manipulation of it. They think they have hope for a better life, but the Company has already decided what will happen to them. The propaganda of the ruling class contributes to the false consciousness that the narrative portrays. The people are bombarded with messages that promote the lottery as a symbol of freedom and equality. The propaganda hides the actual purpose of the lottery and the power of the ruling class over the means of production. The citizen accepts their subordinate status in society and is unaware of their exploitation. The Company knows that people in Babylon are devout followers of logic, so they manipulate the lottery to convince and attract people. The evidence can be seen in the part of this narration:

Combining bets was difficult; we must remember, though, that the individuals of the Company were (and are) all-powerful and astute. In many cases, the knowledge that certain joys were simple fabrications of chance would have diminished their moral worth; to avoid this inconvenience, agents of the Company made use of suggestion and magic. Their moves, their manipulations, were secret. To get at everybody's innermost hopes and fears, astrologers and spies were employed. There were certain stone lions, there was a

sacred latrine called Qaphqa, and there were fissures in a dusty aqueduct all of which, according to general opinion, led to the Company; persons malign or benevolent deposited exposés in these sites. An alphabetical archive collected these reports of varying veracity (Borges & Fein, 1959).

The oppression of the lower class constantly happens because as the lottery expanded, the Company evolved. It gradually "accepted complete power" and progressively but inevitably gained the upper hand. It greatly influenced the populace, and everyone had their own opinions on the Company. The narrator introduces the reader to a random lottery that determines the possibilities of survival for Babylonians. According to the needs and wants of individuals who seek its enjoyment, this lottery changes its regulations and penalties. The lottery is perceived as a flawed system that is conducted in secrecy. This argument is supported by this narration:

Secondly, they made the lottery secret, general, and free of charge. The mercenary sale of lots was abolished. Once initiated into the mysteries of Bel, all free men automatically took part in the sacred drawings of lots, all of which were held in the labyrinths of the god every sixty nights and determined each man's destiny until the subsequent drawing. The consequences were incalculable. A happy drawing could instigate one's elevation to the council of magi or the imprisonment of an enemy (well-known or private) or, in the peaceful dark of one's room, one's meeting the woman who has begun to make one fluster or who one was never expecting to see again; an adverse drawing: mutilation, a variety of infamies, death (Borges & Fein, 1959).

These changes were made to attract people's attention to be more attached to the lottery. Hence, the chance is in charge in the world the Babylonians inhabit.

Discussion

From the analysis above, the researcher found that there are two ways used by the Company to rule society through the lottery. Individuals are alienated from society when they experience social detachment. According to Marxist theory, social detachment results from the ruling class's control over the means of production, which causes the working class to be alienated from the products of labor. It is related to the study in that Ishtiaq conveyed alienation as a result of exploitation (Ishtiaq, et al., 2019). *The Lottery of Babylon* portrays a civilization in which the ruling class has total control over the people's life. This control is represented by the lottery, which defines one's social class and fate. People are

alienated from one another because they have little influence over their fate, producing a sense of social detachment. They have no control over their life, and they have lost their feeling of community. Marxism sees progress as coming about through the power struggle.

The thing that keeps getting the proletariat in a worse and worse situation is that they take the lottery seriously. In fact, until now, the people of Babylon have not found a sure way to win the lottery. They are only trapped in their dreams and hopes and their desire to make something out of the lottery. What's worse is someone risking life and death through an illogical draw. The fakes found in this game increasingly affect the daily life of the Babylonians and even the influence of power. *The Lottery in Babylon* might be interpreted as a critique of authoritarianism and the consequences of unquestioningly accepting the current system. According to the story, false consciousness can result in confusion and the maintenance of repressive political and social structures (Newman et al., 2015)

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

In the short story *The Lottery in Babylon*, there is a depiction of class. In other words, the Company is considered the ruling party or Bourgeois. In comparison, society is portrayed to be the one who got repressed because of the lottery rule. Since the lottery has become part of society's life, it is easy for the Company, the party that has power, to control the lottery. Social detachment and false consciousness are depicted in this story to control it. In other words, social detachment is characterized by how the Company, as the ruling class, has total control over the people's lives. People no longer have the authority to manage their lives since the upper class already influences their fate, in this case, from the lottery. It produces a sense of social detachment. On the other hand, through false consciousness, the Company succeeded in manipulating the idea of the lottery to take advantage. The people of Babylon believe that the lottery is run fairly, whereas they do not realize they are exploited. Furthermore, they do not recognize that the Company has already decided Babylon's citizen fate in the lottery game. Through the lottery, the Company also achieves its purpose of instilling the propaganda that the lottery symbolizes freedom and equality.

REFERENCES

Al-Arfaj, S. (n.d.). The Dystopian Babylon. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/43308602/The_Dystopian_Babylon

- Borges, J. L., & Fein, J. M. (1959). Lottery in Babylon. *Prairie Schooner*, 33(3), 203-207. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40625498>
- Ishtiaq, N., Tariq, J., Khalid, K., Ahmed, N., Haroon, M., & Saddique, T. (2019). Marxist Alienation in Baniyal Mueenuddin's Short Stories. *International Journal of Scientific and Engineering Research*, 10(2), 1256-1263.
- Marx, K., Engels, F., & Taylor, A. J. (1967). *The Communist Manifesto* (Translation by Samuel Moore). With an Introduction by AJP Taylor. (S. Moore, Trans.) London: Harmondsworth.
- Newman, M., Johnston, C., & Lown, P. (2015). False Consciousness or Class Awareness? Local Income Inequality, Personal Economic Position, and Belief in American Meritocracy. *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(2), 326-340. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24363569>
- Tariq, H. (2018). Feudal System of Pakistan in Daniyal Mueenuddin's Short Stories: A Marxist Critique. *Linguistics and Literature Review*.
- Thompson, M. (2015). False Consciousness Reconsidered: A Theory of Defective Social Cognition. *Critical Sociology*, 41(3), 449-461. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277348961_False_Consciousness_Reconsidered_A_Theory_of_Defective_Social_Cognition
- Tyson, L. (2015). *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* Third Edition. New York: Routledge.
- Xiaohong, H. (2022). Brief Analysis of Raymond Carver's Short Stories from a Marxism Perspective. *British Journal of Multidisciplinary and Advanced Studies: English Language, Teaching, Communication, Literature and Linguistics*, 3(2), 27-34.