



Exploitation in James McBride's *the Good Lord Bird*

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to explore exploitation in James McBride's *the Good Lord Bird* undergone mostly by the colored people because they are dominated by the white. Using descriptive and dramatic method to analyze as well as discuss the speech and action of the characters, the study finds that the colored people are exploited through two ways, man by man exploitation and labor exploitation. Man by man exploitation refers to enslaving, taking bribes, killing, and threatening, whilst, labor exploitation refers to selling by the owner and working for the owner. Thus, exploitation is an inhumane conduct since human should be respectable as they are created the same only those with great fear of the God.

Key Words: exploitation, man exploitation, labor exploitation, social class.

INTRODUCTION

As commonly understood that exploitation refers to the illegal taking advantages from others. Marulasiddaiah (2020) states that exploitation is a negative perception from the factors until the forces of the exploitation itself. People suffer oppression in various ways, such as enslaving, killing, robbing, taking bribes, threatening, etc. Man's exploitation by man

is built by the man who oppresses his fellowmen. Man organizes his society into several semi-circular areas of activities such as politics and administration, economy and industry, religion and morals, education and recreation, law and justice, family and kinship, etc. She further states that the exploitation cannot end in our life because the man forgets about his friend and drunk with power, and he wants that he is more powerful than the others. The man uses modern knowledge likes physical and psychosocial, and he has brutal weapons at his command.

Sakisaka (2006) in one section of *Introduction to Capital* (1967), states that the ruling class can take advantage of the labor income. The capitalist represents the commodity era in the history of capitalism. Capitalism develops commodity production, and exploitation is a problem for labor. Accordingly, exploitation of labor is the contrast to capitalism. Labor becomes an animal. They have no freedom. The labor productions become a slave owner, and the labor just receives the food from their production. Under capitalism, the power of labor is commodified and sold according to its value. It means the owner has production in the capitalist class. Even if the owner buys everything and gets value, they get the surplus-labor and surplus-value. Marx uses the term surplus-value for the capitalist pocket without compensation. For Marx, surplus-value is the fruit of the exploitation of worker's labor. There is no labor life without exploitation. Social class is that owns of production. It calls the ruling class. The ruling class cannot live without exploiting the labor of those who work.

It seems that exploitation not only happens in real life but also in a novel. One of the novels discusses exploitation is James McBride's *the Good Lord Bird*. The novel is about an exploitation of groups within slavery. The higher class exploits the groups who have no power in slavery at that time. The higher class is then represented by the white people, whilst, the lower class by coloreds. Therefore, the researchers are interested in discussing this issue since through such a discussion, people are aware that humans are created the same, only those with much fear of the God are noble.

Though there are kinds of exploitation: the exploitation of syntactic ambiguity (Frow, 1986:232), man by man (Gregor, 2000:10), and the exploitation of labor (Dahrendorf, 1959:81), however, since the issue deals with the exploitation of man by man and of labor,

the researchers then exclude the other kind of exploitation, the exploitation of syntactic ambiguity.

Since exploitation is the effect of the difference in class in society, the researchers then refer to the previous studies dealing with the social class; Aura and Ekalestari (2023) in their article *Social Class in Kevin Kwan's Crazy Rich Asian*, analyzes the fate of a girl (a middleclass) who is romantically involved with a higher class boy. Using descriptive qualitative method, the study shows that the girl suffers from the mockery as well as ridicule of the higher class boy that leads the rejection of the marriage.

Putra and Widyastuti (2014) in their article *Class Struggle as the Impact of Oppression Seen in Clifford Odets' Waiting for Lefty*, analyze the gap between the proletariat and the capitalists. Using Marxism, the study shows that the proletariats are oppressed, therefore, as the consequence the proletariats conduct the class struggle. Farahmandian and Iseni (2013), in their article *Angela's Ashes: Class Struggle and the Dream of Betterment* analyze the main character's economic issue that leads him to do the class struggle. Using Marxism, the study shows that the character is alienated and oppressed due to his economic background. Accordingly, he moves to the United States for the better economy.

From the previous studies above, it is clear that the researchers' study has the gap that even though the difference in social class is the cause, yet, the effect is that the character in this study undergoes exploitation which is different from the above studies. Besides, through this gap, the researchers regard this topic as being urgent to discuss because social class gap creates ridicule, oppression, alienation, and exploitation that are inhumane.

METHODS

Research Approach

Qualitative method is worth conducting in this study since it refers to phenomena in society, an exploitation. Sugiyono (2010) states that qualitative method deals with the facts in society wholly as meaningful as possible. Besides, this method's setting is natural so that it needs words to explain instead of numbers (Bogdan, 1982). Thus, qualitative method deals with phenomena in society.

Kind of Research

Because the primary source of this study is from James McBride's *the Good Bird*, the researchers then conduct this study literarily in that the researchers refer to the words as well as description dealing with the exploitation. Hence, not all words as well as description in the novel are worthy of quotation here.

Data Collection Technique

Descriptive and dramatic method is worth conducting here in that the researchers mean to describe, to discuss, and to report the speaking as well as the behavior of the character (Little, 1966). Therefore, through the description, discussion, as well as the report of speaking and behavior of the main character, the researchers analyze and discuss the exploitation of the main character referring to exploitation of man by man and of labor.

.Data Analysis

The data are divided into exploitation of man by man referring to enslaving, taking bribes, killing, as well as threatening and of labor referring to selling by the owner and working for the owner. From this way of analyzing the data, the researchers strongly believe that the main characters are exploited.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Exploitation of Man by Man

The exploitation of man by man happens to all the colored at this time in Kansas territory. The colored suffer exploitation from enslaving, taking bribes, killing, and threatening. Slavery also happens at the time. Irish men become dominant in Kansas. They have many lands and become the owner of the slaves. The colored from African who are called Negro become a slave. As a result, slavery happens in Kansas. Therefore, the colored suffers from poverty all around the land.

As to the enslaving, the colored undergoes physical exploitation; Pa works for a white man who is called Dutch. Dutch runs a tavern with Pa and his child, Onion. Dutch, as a white man, is a landlord. As a landlord, many slaves work in his place, including Pa. Pa also cuts hair in the tavern so that there are two jobs for Pa at the same time that is normal for a slave. The colored just trusts God for their condition. Pa is a lunatic person. He always relates the

injustice of the colored with God. God would hear and see the colored suffer from social injustice at this time. Besides, Pa never breathes freedom in his life. The white man as oppressor also oppresses the colored. *"And while they mostly clubbed him to the floor and kicked out his teeth, the white fellers didn't more blame my Pa for flinging himself at them in the name of the Holy Ghost."* (Mc Bride 2013, p12). The quotation above means that Pa suffers exploitation from folks in the tavern. They kick out his teeth and club him to the floor. It happens when the folks come in the tavern. Pa is hollering, *"The Lord's coming! He's comin' to gnash out your teeth and tear out your hair!"* (McBride 2013, p12) There are no mistakes in what Pa does. He flings at them in the name of God that could be shown that folks do not like it when Pa says that. Besides, the folks do not blame him because he flings himself at them. It signs that the folks oppress the colored because of Pa's exclamation. It also shows Pa believes in the Lord and the name of the Holy Ghost. He thinks that the Lord will protect him, although he gets sick because the folks kick him. It shows the social injustice toward Pa as Negro and a slave. Screaming at God does not do him any good. Although the oppression occurs to Pa physical harm, Pa as a preacher believes that God will help him even though the slave cannot revolt against the oppression from the oppressor. As the oppressors, the folks consider that they are more superior than the colored. The colored cannot express their anger. They just surrender when the folks exploit them. The folks show that they are not humane. Pa flings himself to them, but they exploit him like an animal.

As to taking bribes, Pa undergoes exploitation through his privilege which Dutch gives him. Pa's owner, Dutch Henry, is a German feller. He is big and has a rumbling voice. As an owner, Dutch Henry has labor such as Pa, Onion, Onion's aunt and uncle, and several Indian squaws. As a white feller, the Dutch can control his business and the slave that builds privilege for him. Privilege emerges as the authority which can control anything. Dutch uses his privilege to own them. To control his slaves, Dutch manipulates Pa anytime. He gives privilege to Pa with a reason for it. It means that the privilege has a hidden meaning. For Pa, a privilege might be a special thing for him but not for the Dutch because Dutch has a purpose why he gives Pa so that it can say that Pa undergoes exploitation from the Dutch through the privilege. *"Pa was privileged. He comes and goes as he pleased. But at noon every day, Dutch came in to collect his money...."* (McBride 2013, 14) The quotation implies that Dutch takes bribes through Pa's privilege, such as free access for Pa comes and goes to the tavern

as Pa pleased. The hidden meaning is exact that Dutch gets the benefit from Pa through collecting money. At the same time, he does not work, exploiting the energies and skills of Pa to rich himself. Likewise, Pa works for a hair cutter then delivers the liquor for some drunks, showing that Pa sends money to Dutch. Besides, privilege is a sign that the Dutch can manipulate the colored, but the colored still suffers from the oppression with or without it. Although Pa is the first slave who has a privilege, Pa still undergoes oppression in his life. He still is a slave for the white feller. Pa still gets pressure from people who have power and authority.

As to killing, the white man undergoes exploitation through the social class. The Yankee considers that white men always agree with Pro-Slavery, whereas every white man always exploits the colored in this land. The white man often looks from a different perspective at the white man race and the colored. They consider that they belong to a different social group. It is a reason why Doyle oppresses the colored. On the contrary, Yankee does not like the differences in the social group between the white man and the colored. Therefore, the Old Man oppresses Doyle through a social group of the white man because the Yankee wants to destroy the group of the white man in their land. As the United States' original kinship, the Yankee has privilege, but the privilege makes the Yankee sadistic and brutal.

“I’ll beg the Lord your forgiveness, then,” Brown said. He turned to Fred and Owen and said, “Make quick work of it.”

“By God, them two raised their swords and planted them right in the poor man's head, and down he went. Doyle wanted to live so bad he fell and got up in the same motion, with Fred's broadsword still planted in his skull, scrambling for life. Owen struck him again and knocked his head nearly clean off, and this time he went down and stayed there, still twitching as he lay on his side, legs running sideways, but even with his head half sheared off.....” (McBride 2013, p30).

The first quotation above explains that Brown is sarcastic about what he says. He will beg God for an oppressor as the white man to the colored who suffer from the oppression. Back to their purpose, the Yankee wants to destroy the white man from their land. Then, the Old Man orders Owen and Frederick to be quick of killing Doyle. The second quotation above explains the execution of Doyle. Owen and Frederick become brutal and inhumane. Their sword kills Doyle. The brutal action of Owen and Frederick makes Doyle's skull planted by

a broadsword. Doyle is constrained to receive exploitation because there is no way to escape from the Old Man. He cannot deny that he has the colored who worked for him, but he hides him. Then, Doyle cannot answer the Old Man's question. Finally, without further ado, the Old Man ordered Owen and Frederick to kill Doyle. Finally, Doyle is killed by the Yankee.

As to threatening, Onion undergoes exploitation through his sex type and social group. Therefore, Onion felt threatened, so that he said he is a girl and blooded as them.

“What are you?” the leader asked. “Is you part nigger or just a white girl with a dirty face?”

“Well, I was fluffed, wearing that bonnet and dress. But I had some practice being a girl....” (McBride 2013, p59).

The quotation above is about the conversation between Onion and Chase. It looks like Onion feels threatened when Chase, as the leader, knows the real sex type and social group of Onion. He tries to hide it by disguising himself as a girl. Onion plays the role of a girl. The quotation shows Onion wears the dress and bonnet. Bob and Onion are safe at the time because they are fluffed. It means that the situation happens because they feel threatened. They will be worried if the condition concerns the white man who will exploit the colored, whereas the white feller believes that Onion is a girl.

Exploitation of labor

The exploitation of labor happens because of slavery. Slavery occurs in the United States at this time. The capitalist is dominant in this land. So, the colored suffers from labor exploitation by working for the owner and selling by the owner concerning human trafficking. It happens because the capitalist has power in this land. The capitalist wants to develop the commodity production and exploitation of labor. The white man as a capitalist oppresses the labor at this time. The story tells when Onion and Bob ride to Lawrence by wagon then, they meet two white men on the road. The situation is threatened because one of the white men asks them to shoot his gun. Onion and Bob are fluffed at the time. Onion is a girl in the white man's eyes, and Bob follows him. Then, two white fellers escort Onion and Bob to their place in Pikesville. As the white man, they want Onion and Bob to work there (McBride 2013, p59).

Finally, they come to Pikesville. Pikesville has rude business. Onion sees the town as the grandest town with many laborers and white fellers. Randy and Chase escort Onion and Bod to the Pikesville hotel. The Pikesville is a high-class hotel and saloon with many white men. Thus, they meet Pie and Miss Abby there. Chase has a plan to sell Onion and Bob to Miss Abby. The exploitation of labor occurs when the white man sells the labor to a slaveholder or landlord. The capitalist sells every slave who works for them. If they want, they sell them. The capitalist usually finds the slaves on the road. Then they sell them to the landlord. They sell women or man slave to the landlord. Thus, human trafficking is available (McBride 2013. p65).

As to selling by owner, Chase intends to sell Onion and Bob. The colored undergo exploitation through exchange the colored with money. Chase tries to pay his debt to Pie with Onion and Bob. *"Pie, I got something better than nine dollars. Look." He pointed at Bob and me.*" (McBride 2013, p65) The quotation above is the part of the conversation between Chase and Pie. Chase gives Onion and Bob to Pie because he owes money. Chase tries to pay his debt with Onion and Bob. It means that the slaves are trafficked. As a capitalist, they exploit the slaves to make money. The slaves can work for them. Pie says that Chase should talk to Miss Abby if he brings slaves. Chase tries to change a slave to make pay off his debt. It can say that the white man becomes capitalist if he finds the colored, then sells the colored as a slave. The white man gets the money while the colored still suffer from the exploitation.

Another example of selling by the owner, Pie undergoes exploitation as a whore. Pie has a unique position among them. Pie is Miss Abby's whore. Miss Abby tries to exploit Pie through her energies and her body. It can say that a whole has a job to persuade every guest who comes to Miss Abby's tavern. Moreover, Miss Abby also use Pie to make money. *"... she was in competition with the tavern across the street that didn't have a colored slave-like Pie to bring in money, for Pie was her main attraction."* (McBride 2013, 70) The quotation above explains that Pie is a whore slave of the colored. She works to get the money for Miss Abby. Miss Abby, as a capitalist, knows how she gets the money. It means Pie is the main attraction for the guest who comes in the tavern. The colored, following their owners, is the best way more than they avoid or revolt. It can be safe to follow their owners. Miss Abby

just focuses on collecting money through labor or whore working in the Pikesville. To become rich, they exploit the colored all these times.

As to working for the owner, the colored undergo exploitation through their energies to get the product from production. They suffer from the exploitation of the capitalist as Miss Abby. The exploitation of labor can also be seen when the colored becomes a slave in the back alley of Pikesville hotel. The colored works under Miss Abby's authority. Miss Abby is a slaveholder. She has business in the Pikesville hotel. So, many slaves work for her.

“Behind that was a hog pen, which opened right to the colored pen for easy tending of Miss Abby's hogs. Inside both them pens combined—the pen where they fed the pigs and the pen where the slaves lived and kept a garden” (McBride 2013, p71)

The quotation explains the condition of slaves. Onion sees the slaves work in several pens. Onion sees them feed Miss Abby's hog in the hog pen where the colored also sleep there. It can imagine that the colored live in the hog pen. The smell of the hog pen is infernal. It is shown that the colored suffer from oppression under Miss Abby's authority. She uses slaves to work for her. Therefore, the colored have no freedom if they are still slaves to the capitalist.

As to working for the owner, the colored undergo exploitation through their energies and their times. Onion sees the colored work in the pen when he wants to find Bob.

“I walked to the fence. Several men and women were working along the back end of it, feeding hogs and tending the garden there, and when they seed me, they glanced up but never stopped working. It was twilight now. Just about dark.” (McBride 2013, p71)

The quotation above explains that Onion sees slaves work all day, though several see Onion in front of the fence. Indeed, the quotation describes how the condition of slaves. They suffer from the oppression of the capitalist in pen. They make a product. They keep their garden and feed the hog, but they cannot be free. Slaves give their energies and skills to the capitalists without commission or wage. The story also describes the atmosphere is dark and twilight. It means that the pen looks frightful. It is why Onion disguises himself as a girl of white people. As white people, they have power or higher social class than slaves, whereas Onion is safe from the white man.

As to selling by the owner, the colored undergoes exploitation of labor through human trafficking. Bob and the other colored will be sold whenever Miss Abby wants. It can be seen when Miss Abby sends Bob to the sawmill. Bob realizes that he will be sent to the pen since Onion and he comes to Pikesville. Meanwhile, Onion works in the tavern because Miss Abby knows that Onion is a girl when Chase tells her. Finally, Miss Abby orders Bob to work on the pen while Onion works in the tavern. Suddenly, Onion remembers Bob. He is aware that he forgets Bob. Thus, Onion looks for Bob in the back pen, but he does not see Bob. Onion just knows Miss Abby sends him in pen. He meets Sibonia at the back. Then, Sibonia tells Onion that all slaves will be sold.

“Your Bob’s been bounded out.”

“Bounded out?”

“On loan. Miss Abby loaned him out to the sawmill 'cross the village. For a price, of course. He has been out there practically since the day he got here. He'll be back soon. How come he never spoke of you?”

“I don’t know. But I’m worried Miss Abby’s planning on selling him.”

“So what? She’s gonna sell us all. You, too.” (McBride 2013, p73)

The quotation above is the conversation between Onion and Sibonia explaining Bob's condition in the sawmill where Bob works. More and more, Miss Abby has a commodity of labor. It shows that Sibonia talks to Onion about how the colored will be sent. Human trafficking occurs at the time. It means that white people have the power to exploit the colored. That Miss Abby sells the colored will get a value. They create and make a product and run the production while Miss Abby just watches them suffer from the exploitation.

As a capitalist, many owners sell their slaves because of the insurrection. The colored undergo exploitation through human trafficking. The colored can be sold when the owners do not need them. The situation is confusing because of the insurrection. After the insurrection, Miss Abby conceals her slaves. As a slaveholder, she sells the slaves after the insurrection. Sibonia and seven of them are hanged because of the insurrection. The insurrection makes the colored get into trouble. At least, many slaves are dead because of it. Finally, Miss Abby prefers selling their slave to letting her slaves die because of trouble.

“Miss Abby's selling off the souls in this yard,” Broadnax said. “Did you know that? She's doing it slowly, thinking nobody notices. But even a dumb nigger like me can

count. There are ten souls left in this yard. Two weeks ago, there was seventeen. Three of 'em's been sold off in the past week. Lucious there." (McBride 2013, p85).

The quotation above explains Onion and Broadnax's conversation in the back, and Onion is on the edge of the fence while Broadnax is in pen. The Onion looks for Bob, but he talks with Broadnax. It shows from the quotation that Broadnax says slaves will be sold. Miss Abby sells her slaves because of the insurrection. For Miss Abby, the colored will be in trouble soon. The colored suffers from exploitation through labor trafficking. It shows Miss Abby does not want to lose her money. She prefers selling them to being killed by the white man. Miss Abby does not want to lose her money. Although the exploitation does not happen physically but selling slaves is a form of exploitation. Miss Abby gets gain while the colored still suffer from oppression in the bondage. It can say Miss Abby cannot be rich if she does not exploit slaves.

CONCLUSION

The researchers conclude that difference in class of society gives effects to those lower classes, one of which is exploitation of the colored people. The exploitation, then, refers to exploitation of man by man and of labor, the former deals with enslaving, taking bribes, killing, and threatening, whilst, the latter deals with working for the owner and selling by the owner.

Finally, the researcher hopes so much that this study draws more interests to authors in that they conduct further study about exploitation from the same novel with different approach or the same novel with the same approach in order that the literary study in speed development.

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