

SLAVERY IN 'BILAL: A NEW BREED OF HERO' AND '12 YEARS A SLAVE' FILMS

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses slavery in Bilal: A New Breed of Hero film and 12 Years A Slave film. From the title of this paper, it would be known that the objects for this research are Bilal: A New Breed of Hero film and 12 Years A Slave film. The focus of this paper is to seek the portrayal of slavery and its relationship with economic and religion. To analyze both objects, the theory of slavery from Kevin Bales is employed, which sees that slavery is a state marked by the loss of free will. In addition, the theory of Marxism by Karl Marx as a literary theory to assist this research is also used since it is related to examine two antagonistic classes, which in this case, between slave and freeman. They are also used to discuss economic and religion. Besides, the researcher is going to compare both objects by using comparative literature. The method used in this research is descriptive analysis method and comparative literature method. As a result of the analysis, Bilal in the movie is not in accordance with what Karl Marx's theory that said 'someone will not contemplate about mental production such as religion, philosophy, and ethics (morality) before he fulfils his economy and basic needs, because maintaining economic power is the motive behind those things'. Bilal does not represent this theory because he is not materialist. Besides, he embraced Islam firmly, so even he was a slave and economically he had nothing, but he chose to prioritize religion (which is included in mental production) before economy (material production).

Keywords: *slave; slavery; economy; religion; Marxism*

INTRODUCTION

Slavery is a massive yet sensitive topic. Slavery becomes massive topic since it happened in many parts of the world, for instance Ancient Egypt, Ancient China, Ancient Greece, Roman Empire, Saudi Arabia, even in America. In fact, nobody wants to be born a slave.

According to Allain (2012, p. 1), slavery is status of person who must be obedient to one or all commands of his owner. There are various things that often connected when talking about slavery such as skin color differences, culture, economy, politic, social class, or combination from all of these.

Slavery may emerge due to the difference of people's economic level. The difference of economic level in society can produce social class, then social class triggers class conflict in that society. Class conflict occurs when there is tension between two antagonistic classes. The two classes here can be the rich and the poor, freeman and slave, oppressor and oppressed. This a relation between two class which one class exploited while the other class is exploited. Slavery is conflict that happened between slave and freeman.

Further, slavery issue is also evidenced by it is discussed in religions. Slavery is discussed in Islam (in the Qur'an and Hadith) and discussed in Christianity (in the Bible). Both of these religions have their own perspectives in seeing slavery issue.

Some slavery cases are raised as theme in literary works. Two of them are *Bilal: A New Breed of Hero* film and *12 Years A Slave* film. Slavery experienced by Bilal bin Rabah inspires *Bilal: A New Breed of Hero* film which is a 2015 animated film produced by Barajoun Entertainment, directed by Ayman Jamal. While slavery experienced by Solom Northup inspires *12 Years A Slave* film, which is a 2013 film produced by Regency Enterprises and directed by Steve McQueen.

These two films which talk about slavery, reminds the researcher to the Comparative Literature study in sixth semester that allows comparing two objects based on its similarities. Thus, based on the explanation above the researcher decided to make this research. The researcher is going to analyze how is the relationship of economic and religion with slavery in *Bilal: A New Breed of Hero* and *12 Years A Slave* films using Marxism as the literary criticism to support this research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper contains two main issues that need theoretical explanation from certain point of view, namely, films as one of literary works and slavery as an ideology residing in a work. Bluestone in *Eneste* (1991, p. 18) argues, film is a combination of a variety of arts such as music, fine arts, drama, literature and wrapped with photography elements. Film is one genre of various literature works because basically film and prose share similar elements, thus literary principles and dramatic analysis cannot be ignored when watching film (Boggs & Petrie, 2008, p. 41). The analogy between film and prose is like the shot and the word (Braudy & Cohen, 2009, p. 1). Thus, film is including to literature works and all kinds of film presentation modes suits with literary text features and can also be explained in a textual framework.

The theory used as a framework in analyzing this paper is Marxism. It is an understanding about society and history based on ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marxism covers economic, politic, social class, social conflict, and see these as a whole.

Marxism as a literary criticism attempts to link social-economic matter with literary works. This is caused by a literary work written by an author, consciously or unconsciously, will describe the reality situation that correspondence with the author's lifetime. Luxemburg (Luxemburg, 1984, p. 23) argues that social phenomenon can be seen through literature.

Marx In Marxism, obtaining and maintaining economic power is motive behind all social and political activities, including religion, philosophy, education, government, art, technology, science, media, and so on (Tyson, 2006). Marx in (Nurrachman, 2019, p. 192), argued that people will tend to prioritize their material production (economic) before other things such as religion, and ideology. Further, Marx (1992, p. 244) defined "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people."

Further, in reality, everyone's economic level is not all the same. (Aspers, 2010) said that the inequality of economy in society results classes and conflict.

“The history of all hitherto existing society** is the history of class struggles.....

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master[*] and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes” (Marx & Engels, 1970, p. 31)

Sooner or later, the lower class or whatever label the class is, which feel aggrieved, will have a motive to change their life. Demanding their rights and justice drives and encourages the lower class to act. When people want to pursuit a better life, they must struggle.

METHOD

This research uses descriptive analysis method. Descriptive analysis is an attempt to describe particular situations. Baha (2016, p. 4) argues that descriptive analysis is a method dealing with describing particular phenomena that how we think something is.

Comparative literature is also used to conduct this paper. Comparative literature is a study used to compare two or more objects based on its similarities, connections, or relationships. According to (Bassnett, 1993, p. 1), “comparative literature involves the study of text across culture, that is interdisciplinary and that it is concerned with patterns of connection in literature across both time and space”. Thus, it allows doing comparison between two works that come from different nations and different era. Further, it is fair in it to not only discuss literature works, but also knowledge comes from other disciplines.

Sample of data is obtained from the two objects Bilal: A New Breed of Hero, a 2015 animated film produced by Barajoun Entertainment, directed by Khurram H. Alavi and Ayman Jamal. And 12 Years A Slave films is a 2013 film produced by Regency Enterprises and directed by Steve McQueen.

The researcher uses purposive sampling in taking the sample of data. It is way of taking samples by picking up samples considerably relevant to the research (Sugiyono, 2012, p. 126). In this paper, the data are the events/scene in which Bilal shows his economic, political and religious condition. Hence, the theory of Marxism is constantly being compared to the state of Bilal in the movie.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Here are the findings that represent relationship of economic and religion with slavery in Bilal: A New Breed of Hero and 12 Years A Slave Films.

The Relationship of Economic and Religion with Slavery in Bilal: A New Breed of Hero

Bilal: A New Breed of Hero shows that Umayya, was one of the richest person at that time was Umayya. Besides, he was the leader of *Quraysh* as well as the leader of *Bani Jumah*, so he was respected by people. Even though Umayya and his friends already had a lot of money, they were not satisfied. They did everything in their power to make more money without thinking about whether the process was right or not and how it would affect other people.

This film shows that Umayya's friend, named Okba, gathers poor people in a place and then sells them as if they were goods. The rich people tend to influence them that those who were considered poor were worth to be a slave. This is in accordance with (Tyson, 2006) who said that the bourgeoisie tends to colonize the consciousness of the proletariat in order to make the proletariat see themselves as what the bourgeoisie wants them to see.

Sometimes Okba also auctioned off slaves and the slaves would be handed over to the person making the highest bid. This is represented by this scene:



Figure 1. Screenshot of the scene in 00:14:47

Man: Step forward, merchant. Make your offer and this special price shall be yours. Do I hear second offer? Third? Sold!

Slave trade became a very common thing, as seen in figure 1. Moreover, slaves in the era of ignorance were considered as the most profitable merchandise. The markets in the Arabian Peninsula were always filled with slaves as a main commodity (Nasution, 2015, p. 97). The markets in the Arabian Peninsula were always filled with slaves as a main commodity, while the Quraysh were people who enjoyed the most from the advantage of slave trade.

Further, to make money again from another source, Umayya and friends create situation to make people believe that idols were god in order to make them need buying idols and worshipping. Whereas, they themselves know that idols were not God just inanimate object. They do so because they want to gain profit from that. This is in accordance in with Tyson (2006, p. 54) who said that obtaining and maintaining economic power is motive behind all social and political activities, including religion, philosophy, education, government, art, technology, science, media, and so on. This is shown when Okba raised his merchandise up high and offered it to every passing passerby. He continued to mention the advantages of those idols.



Figure 2. Screenshot of the scene in 00:07:34

Okba : Idols for sell! They come in all colors and shapes. They make your wishes come true! Idols for fame Idols for strength.... Idols for fertility.... Idols for beauty!

Besides, Umayya and friends also asked several men to influence people to worship idols. These men promised prosperity and happiness to anyone who pray to idols and vice versa, these men frighten those who do not worship idols into living in sadness and misery. Then, people got influenced and ended up throwing their money at the idols.



Figure 3. Screenshot of the scene in 00:09:13

Men : The idols see all. The idols know all. Spread that into dessert sands. Let the harsh playing of it wrath. Come and enter! **Prove your faith with wealth and gifts. A fear of idols and gods.. or else... you'll be burned.**

Unluckily, most of the people who are trapped by the men's words are ordinary people who do not come from rich families. Umayya and friends deceive society to make people believe that idols are God that worthy of worship so they can get money from those who believe and pray. They keep influencing society for personal gain because they want enriching themselves. This situation is in accordance with what Marx and Engels (1845, p. 41) mentioned, people whose economic is strong could control society. This makes the difference in economic level between the rich and the poor even more significant. Therefore, the rich became richer and the poor became very poor. Whereas, the poor people back then were the poor at that time were vulnerable to being slaves. Therefore, slavery became more and more rampant.

One day, the news that Islam, the religion that was spread by the Prophet appeared. Islam recommends to believe in Alloh and the elimination of the slavery system. Therefore, Umayya and his friends refused it firmly because it would harm those who were accustomed to enjoying the benefits of slavery system. It will also cause them loosing money from those who used to worshipping idols. Even Al Hakam said that the only God to him was money. This is really shows how greedy Umayya and friends were. The rejection of Umayya and his friends towards Islam is depicted in the following picture



Figure 4. Screenshot of the scene in 00:50:53

- Al Hakam : What about the talk of freedom. Do you worry about that?
- Umayya : What are you talking about?
- Al Hakam : **They say we are praying on people desperation. They say that the real God would never ask for a man's fortune.** What happen to our business?
- Umayya : And how long do you think the other merchant will tolerate such a Message? They will soon left out of the town.. or someone will crack a deal with them.. we'll see.. Look around! **There is only one God, and that is money.**

However, after Umayya heard the news that Islam was developing, Umayya knew that Bilal, one of his slaves, had practiced Islam. Bilal also acknowledged this and he loudly stated that now he was a free man, just like Umayya. This made Umayya angry. He immediately tortured Bilal to make Bilal afraid and returned to being his slave and left Islam. This was done to prevent Islam spreads to other slave. This can be seen from the following scene:



Figure 5. Screenshot of the scene in 00:59:20

- Umayya : I'll get you back on track with a little secret. See.. I never believe in these Gods. No, no, no, I'm not a fool. The truth is, we are both slaves, Bilal. The difference between us is I worship whatever empowers me. You... worship something that will destroy you...
- Umayya : Should I take off this chains? What do you say, Bilal?
- Bilal : My chains are already off ...
- Umayya : Stop talking in riddles. Do you know how much favor you in? I can have you kill right now.
- Bilal : It doesn't matter what you do to me.. and there's nothing you can give me. I am... already free

That is the relationship between economy and religion with slavery in Bilal: A New Breed of Hero. The rich there wanted to maintain a system of slavery and wanted people to continue to worship idols for their personal gain. Therefore, they rejected Islam, the religion that recommends the abolition of slavery since they considered it would only harm them materially

The Relationship of Economic and Religion with Slavery in 12 Years A Slave

In the film 12 Years A Slave shows that Solomon Northup became a slave to a master in Louisiana. Northup's master name was Epps. At that time, he was developing his cotton production so he forced Platt and the other slaves to work very hard so they could collect a lot of cotton a day. Epps did so because he wanted to gain a lot of profit. Epps applied a punishment system on the slaves in order to make they obey and hit the target.

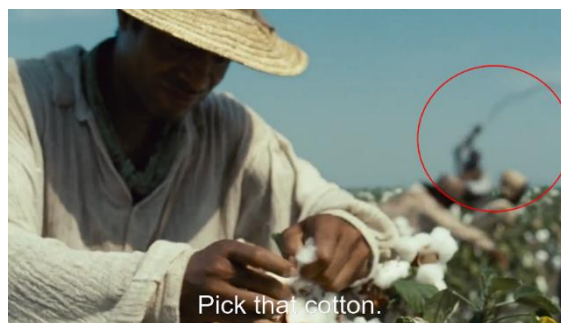


Figure 6. Screenshot of the scene in 00:55:47

The overseer hurled the whip

The overseer: Pick that cotton! Move along now! Come on now!

However, when this scene played, it shown Northup's hands were shaking due to fear. Instead of concentrating, the sound of the whip bothered him. In the end of the day Northup and several slaves collected less cotton than Epps asked.

After that, there was one scene that showed Northup and two of his friends were being whipped. Even this scene was deliberately left blurred by the filmmaker, but there was sound of whipping and people screaming. Here, sound

plays a prominent role because it builds another level of emotional stimulation to the viewers (Boggs & Petrie, 2008, p. 257). So, with this sound, the researcher believes this scene is showing that Northrup is being punished, even though the image was blurred by the filmmaker. The scene when Northrup and his two friends were being whipped are as in the screenshot below



Figure 7. Screenshot of the scene in 00:58:13

Next, the relationship of religion with slavery in this film is represented when Mr. Epps, were reciting Bible verses in front of his slaves. Somehow, Mr. Epps only highlighted verses that mentioned the obligation of a slave to be obedient to his Master. While some verses which stated that a master must have treated his slaves well were never mentioned by him.

Epps quoted verses about slaves who must obey their masters as an attempt making slaves on the track they wanted. Thus, when the slave no longer fear to the master, the master believe Bible could handle it. This is portrayed in this following picture

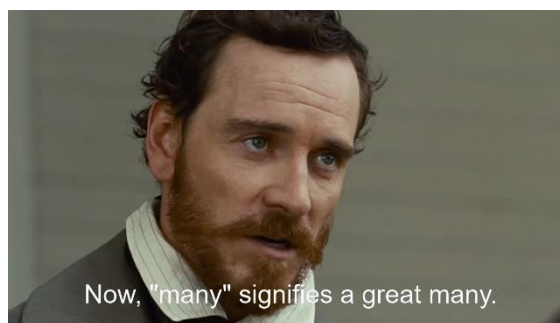


Figure 8. Screenshot of the scene in 00:55:19

"And that servant which knew his Lord's will...WHICH KNEW HIS LORD'S WILL and prepared not himself...PREPARED NOT HIMSELF, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes..." D'ye hear that? "Stripes." That nigger that don't take care, that don't obey his lord - that's his master - d'ye see? - that 'ere nigger shall be beaten with many stripes. Now, "many" signifies a great many. Forty, a hundred, a hundred and fifty lashes... That's Scriptor!

When slaves heard that verse, of course they would hear it as God's utterance. Then they would come back obedient for their Lord's sake. This is in accordance with Sylvester who argued that at Sunday services, the slaves were gathered and sat listening to the master's sermon while nodding his head and saying

"Amen" to the verse that the master emphasized (Sylvester, 1999, p. 183). Because slaves seemed to be in control of at least one thing in their lives— their own souls. And for guidance, many slaves turned to the Bible.

Further, he also mentioned that there would be lashes applied for every slave who broke the rules. From this scene, the researcher interpreted that Mr. Epps was trying to frighten his slaves of punishment from God so that the slaves would obey him. This situation is in accordance with what Tyson (2006, p. 59) that, indeed, the Bible has been used successfully to justify and promote the enslavement of Africans in America.

CONCLUSIONS

The interesting things as conclusion found after trying to answer the research questions is that Bilal in the movie is not in accordance with what Karl Marx's theory that said 'someone will not contemplate about mental production such as religion, philosophy, and ethics (morality) before he fulfils his economy and basic needs, because maintaining economic power is the motive behind those things'. Bilal does not represent this theory because he is not materialist. Besides, he embraced Islam firmly, so even he was a slave and economically he had nothing, but he chose to prioritize religion (which is included in mental production) before economy (material production). He even preferred to starve to death as a Muslim, rather than accept the offer of a house and two horses from his master but later live as a non-Muslim. While Umayya, who was rich already and his material production had been properly fulfilled, he still thought that money was the most important thing without thinking other things such as religion and moral.

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