

SOCIAL INJUSTICE TOWARD RUTH'S IN JODI PICOULT'S SMALL GREAT THINGS

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SOCIAL INJUSTICE TOWARD RUTH'S IN JODI PICOULT'S *SMALL GREAT THINGS*

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Abstract

¹ This research aims to discuss ¹⁶ the issue of social injustice reflected in the novel *Small Great Things* by using sociological perspective. The ¹² objectives of this research is to identify the form of social injustice conflict experienced by Ruth in Jodi Picoult's *Small Great Things*, to describe the causes of social injustice conflict experienced by Ruth in Jodi Picoult's *Small Great Things*, to analyze the effects of social injustice conflict experienced by Ruth in Jodi Picoult's *Small Great Things*. This study uses referen⁷s from books, internet article that can support this research. The data analysis technique of this research is descriptive qualitative research. The result of the study shows that: (1) The form of social injustice conflict experienced by Ruth Jefferson in the novel is discrimination by a Caucasian people to a African-American labor nurse. (2) The causes of social injustice conflict experienced by Ruth Jefferson in the novel are stereotypes, prejudice, oppression, African-American racial slur and marginalization. (3) The effects of social injustice conflict experienced by Ruth Jefferson in the novel are Ruth's being blamed for the death of a Caucasian child, Ruth's losing her job, Ruth's getting the suspicion of store employees to the African-American, Ruth's looking for justice and Ruth's feeling hopeless.

Keywords: Social Injustice, Sociological Perspective, *Small Great Things* novel

1. INTRODUCTION

Life in the midst of society will not be free from problems. Injustice is one of the big problems in the world. Injustice varies as political injustice, economic injustice and social injustice.

According to Dogra (2014: 1) state that the ¹ social injustice is a phenomenon which has occurred in society for long time ago. The social injustice issue happens in social life such on society. It is discuss too in literary area such as sociology. According to Damono (1984: 2) says that sociology is a literary approach that considers all aspects of human social life.

The main problem of this study is social injustice toward Ruth ¹⁵ in *Small Great Things* novel by Jodi Picoult's. Ruth work in Mercy West Heaven hospital for twenty years old. She has small family. Ruth begins routine checkup for Davis. Only a few minutes later, she has been checked to another patient. The parents are white supremacists and ⁶ not want Ruth to touching their child. The hospital complies to Davis parents. Davis get cardiac distress while Ruth is alone in the room. Davis died and the parents demanded lawsuit against Ruth and the hospital.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Sociological Approach

7 According to Swingewood and Laurenson (1972:13) distinguish that Sociology of the literature into three kinds: First is sociology of the society that focuses on the social condition of the author in where he/she lives. Second, sociology of the author is the writers life has an important role to create his literature work. Third, sociology of the reader is the response of the reader after reading a literary work.

1 Social Injustice

Social injustice is an unfair or unequal treatment experienced by marginalized communities. For example in poor communities, adopted children, women, and someone with disabilities.

Types of Social Injustice

The types of social injustice such as racism, age, sexism and also discrimination.

The Causes of Social Injustice

The causes of social injustice are that it happens because of stereotypes, prejudice, oppression, marginalization, and racial slur.

The Effects of Social Injustice

Social injustice has some effects on its victims. Below are the effects of social injustice is poverty and human right.

3. METHOD

In research design used descriptive qualitative. Qualitative research is about learning to understand and interpret new things of people perception by interpretive and naturalistic approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

In literary approach, the writer applies the extrinsic and intrinsic approach in analyzing the novel. The extrinsic approach means that the study appies Sociological Approach. The intrinsic approach is also applied because the discussion of the study based on the elements of the novel itself. This research uses primary data from the *Small Great Things* novel and secondary data from books and online articles.

4. ANALYSIS

This chapter deals with sociological analysis. The analysis aims to find the relationship between *Small Great Things* novel and it is social background. This chapter consists of (A) The Form of Social Injustice conflict experienced by Ruth Jefferson in the novel, (B) The Causes of Social Injustice conflict experienced by Ruth Jefferson in the novel, (C) The Effects of Social Injustice conflict experienced by Ruth Jefferson in the novel.

4.1. The Form of Social Injustice Conflict Experienced by Ruth Jefferson

4.1.1. Racial Discrimination

In *Small Great Things* novel, discrimination is depicted in some conflicts like some people experience rejection, and accusation for the mistake that they do not do, and also humiliation. It occurs on a African-American labor nurse who is rejected by her patient because of her skin color. It can be seen from Turk Bauer's treatment toward Ruth Jefferson. Turk is a Caucasian supremacy. He takes his wife to the hospital for labor. The nurse who takes care of the baby and the mother after the birth is Ruth Jefferson. Ruth is a descendant of African-American. Turk rejects Ruth to take care of his baby. ¹⁰ That nurse (is Ruth Jefferson), I do not want Ruth to touching my son again or anymore who looks like her touching my son." (Picoult, 2016:24)

Turk tells Marie to replace Ruth. Turk does not want all of the African-American nurse in the hospital touching his son. Marie approves a request from Turk, then she is ¹⁴ t announcement paper on the check table that stuck in the door of Davis's room. "NO AFRICAN-AMERICAN PERSONNEL TO TAKE CARE FOR THIS PATIENT." (Picoult, 2016:51)

From quotation above is intended for all of African-American labor nurses. However, it is only Ruth who is an African-American nurse in the maternity ward. It indicates that there is discrimination toward African-American nurse in the hospital.

4.2 The Causes of Social Injustice Conflict Experienced by Ruth Jefferson

Ruth is accused and imprisoned of killing the child of Turk named Davis. When her case is brought to the court, she gets a lawyer. The lawyer is Ms. McQuarrier and she is a Caucasian lawyer.

4.2.1 Stereotypes

Stereotypes is people's opinion who judge a group through their thoughts toward a person without knowing the fact. In this novel, there are Ruth stereotypes.

³ "Now Adisa lives near the train track in New Haven in a neighborhood where drug deals go down in broad daylight and young men shoot at each other throughout the night. She has five kids, and she and the father of her children have minimum wage jobs and barely scape by." (Picoult, 2016:62)

From the quotation above tells about the African-American who live in the New Haven neighborhood have a minimum wage from their work. In addition, they are also regarded as a person who do violence to solve problems. It shows that both Caucasian and African-American have a common thought about the stereotypes that occur in their society.

4.2.2 Prejudice

Prejudice is a positive or negative thinking to someone. The researcher finds negative thinking is Turk Bauer.

⁵ "I lean forward. "I don't have questions. I know what happened. That Ruth killed my son. I saw her with my own eyes, beating in his chest. I told her supervisor that I did not want Ruth touching my baby, and what happened? My worst fear come true." (Picoult, 2016:102)

Turk meets the hospital's lawyer. He says that Ruth killed his son by beating his chest. At that time, Ruth helps Davis to breathe by doing CPR to him, but Turk considers it as an act to kill his son. He has a negative thinking from the other nurses in the operating room. They say Ruth beat Davis chest too hard.

4.2.3 African-American Racial Slur

The term N-word is a humiliation used against African-American. The slur comes in the form of the word "nigger" refer the term. African-American do not like to be called N-word because is a term used during the period of the American homicide. Therefore, the N-word word is a statement of racial discrimination.

"One day, I sit in the common room with a bunch of White guys when a gang shooting came in the middays news. The anchor on the TV is talk about how the bullets sprayed, how many people had been hit by accident." (Picoult, 2016:106)

From the quotation above tells about most people in the prison are African-American so in prison Turk must associate with them. In the prison he has an African-American friend named Twink. Nevertheless, one day when Turk is watching TV in a common room, he accidentally says that the African-American guy is stupid and nonsense. Twink hears it and looks unhappy. African-American hate the N-word term. It is not only African-American who hate that term, but other people who have concern for other races do not want to hear the N-word either.

4.2.4 Oppression

Oppression is a violence and threat against others. In this novel the oppression takes place on Ruth.

2
"My joints crack as the policeman who is holding me down suddenly yanks me upright by my wrists, pulling my body in a way it doesn't want to go. The other policemen file behind, leave the contents of my kitchen cabinets, my bookshelves, my drawers in heaps on the floor." (Picoult, 2016:145)

In the middle of the night the police come to Ruth's house to arrest him for murder charge against Davis. They come and banged on Ruth's door so hard. The policeman came to the house and immediately arrested Ruth and Edison. Both of them are tied up, even though the purpose of the police just to catch Ruth. Their house is a mess because of the police. Then, Ruth is dragged out to be taken to the police station. From the quotation above indicated that there is violence which means it is suppression toward Ruth as African-American.

4.2.5 Marginalization

Marginalization is to get rid of some people from their life need. As in this novel, African-American are marginalized. There is an area that is only inhabited by African-American. Those who live in the region have poor settlements. Most of the African-American in that area are live in poverty. It is not only poverty but there are also many cases of drugs selling so Ms. McQuarrie has many clients from that region.

"The Hill neighborhood of New Haven is among the most notorious in the city. I have had dozen of clients from there. Mostly involved in selling drugs near the Church Street South low income housing. There is also where Adisa, Ruth's sister lives." (Picoult, 2016:468)

From quotation above tells about marginalization happens to African-American in the Hill neighborhood of New Haven. The people who are marginalized only have minimum wage jobs. They should take a dangerous job like selling drugs, in order to fulfill their necessities of life.

4.3 The Effects of Social Injustice Conflict Experienced by Ruth Jefferson

4.3.1 Ruth's Being Blamed for the Death of a Caucasian Child

Davis's death makes Turk angry and sad. Then Brittany is also very stressed. They believe that the death of their son is caused by Ruth. Moreover, because of his hates against African-American, he also wants someone to compensate for Davis's death. Then he blamed Ruth on charge of murder and work careless.

¹⁰ "Ruth is Black that, rubbed Turk a white supremacist. He can not stand black and he ¹¹ set into motion a chain of events that will lead to Ruth becoming a blame for the tragic death of his son." (Picoult, 2016:488)

Ruth is the last one with Davis in the operating room when he experiences breathe difficulty. Truk Bauer and the lawyer of hospital accuse Ruth of a murder. The hospital lawyer does not want the hospital's name to be bad, so the lawyer of hospital advises to Turk Bauer to blame Ruth.

4.3.2 Ruth's Losing Her Job

Davis dies in the hospital after circumcision surgery. Ruth is the last person who stays with Davis. At that time, Davis has difficulties breathing then she is confused between two choices. Whether she has to help him or not.

¹³ ⁶ "When I look down at the bassinet again, Davis has stopped breathing. Immediately I reach for him, pressing my stethoscope against his heart, tapping his heels, unwrapping his swaddling blanket.... then my head catches up to my hands: no African-American personnel to care for this patient." (Picoult, 2016:72)

Ruth thinks that if she helps Davis, she will lose her job because she does not obey her superior's order. If she does not help Davis, he will die. In the end, she helps Davis.

4.3.3 Ruth's Getting the Suspicion of the Store Employees to the African-American

Ruth intends to invite Ms. McQuarrie to go shopping in the store to choose a gift for Ruth's mother. In the store she is super⁴ sed by the shopkeeper. Ruth wants to show Ms. McQuarrie that social injustice exists. "The manager hovering, in case of shoplifting. The wariness of the cashier. The fact that out of a dozen people leaving T.J.Maxx at the same time, Ruth was the only one whose bag checked." (Picoult, 2016:301)

From the quotation above tells about there are two acts of social injustice that Ruth gets in the store. First, she is always watched and followed by the shopkeeper when she is choosing goods. The security also checks her bag when she leave the store.

4.3.4 Ruth's Looking for Justice

At the first trial, Ruth gets a parole from the court. She does not want to come back to jail anymore. She selling her house for her freedom and Ms. McQuarrie helps her in every trial that she faces in the court. To fight for her justice, Ruth gets a lawyer. The lawyer is Ms. McQuarrie. She has been working in the public defender's office for about four years. She handles a particular case like robbery, criminal offenses and identity theft but it is the

first time she handles a murder case. It is Ruth's case and she has dreamt of Ruth twice and she feels this is a different case, so she wants to help Ruth by becoming her lawyer.

"Kennedy walks toward the jury box and turns so her back is facing them, so that she is watching the witness with them. "Doctor, if Davis had MCADD, and if no one at the hospital knew it, and if the medical protocol was to have him fast three hours prior to his circumcision like any other infant without the disorder, and if an acute metabolic episode occurred in his little body, isn't there a chance Davis would be dead even if Ruth Jefferson had performance every conceivable medical intervention?" the medical examiner looks at me, his gray eyes soft with and apology. "yes" he admits." (Picoult, 2016:424)

In fact, there are some factors, why Davis could die at the age of three days. Indirectly, Ms. McQuarrie explains it in the court. The basic factor why he can die is he has MCADD, and if the hospital notices it early, maybe Davis can live until then. The quotation above tells about there is a Caucasian lawyer that also cares to the African-American.

4.3.5 Ruth's Feeling Hopeless

Christina is the daughter of Ruth mother's boss. She is a Caucasian and becomes Ruth's friend also as her sister. She wants to help Ruth, but her husband would nominate as a local official and they could not deal with any scandal thus she could give only some money to Ruth.

"Suddenly she bolts from the table and comes back a moment later, emptying the contents of her bag. Sunglasses and keys and lipsticks and receipts scatter the surface of the table: advil tablets, loose in the bottom of her bag, spill like candy. She opens her wallet and takes a thickwad of bills and presses it into my hand. "take this" Christina says. "just between the two of us." (Picoult, 2016:245)

Ruth rejects the money that given by Christina. She thought, if she accepted the money she would disregard herself. Actually, she needs it. She also wants to look for a job to earn money for her family. Ruth gets a moral support from Wallace Mercy. "He smiles. He has the most even white teeth I have seen, stark against the darkness of his skin. I realize that up close he is more younger than I expected. "I have come to tell you that you are not alone." (Picoult, 2016:256)

Wallace Mercy is a public figure. He is an African-American and a famous pastor among African-American. He wants to support Ruth, so she does not give up struggling for her case. He also gives some money to Ruth. After Wallace left her house, she rejects the money and hid it in the plant pot. Two quotations above tell about some people who care and believe Ruth that she is a good and innocent person.

5. CONCLUSION

The researcher finds that there are three conclusions to answer the problem statements. First, the form of social injustice conflict experienced by Ruth Jefferson is discrimination. In *Small Great Things* novel, discrimination depicted in some actions like some people experience a rejection, accusation for the mistake that they do not do, and humiliation. It occurs to an African-American labor nurse who is rejected by her patient because of her skin color. She experiences humiliation and refusal to occupy a house. It can be seen through Turk Bauer's treatment of Ruth Jefferson. Turk is a Caucasian supremacist. He takes his wife to the hospital for labor. The nurse who takes care of the baby and the mother after the birth is Ruth

Jefferson. Ruth is a descendant of African-American people. Turk rejects Ruth to take care of his baby. It indicates that there is discrimination between a Caucasian supremacy and Ruth in the hospital. Moreover, Marie as Ruth's friend is also involved, because she approves the request of Turk Bauer to replace Ruth with another nurse.

Second, the causes of social injustice conflict experienced by Ruth Jefferson. First is stereotypes, there are two stereotypes is about African-American and Caucasian. Second is prejudice, the researcher finds negative thinking in the characters of Turk Bauer and Adisa. Third is African-American Racial Slur, the term N-word is a humiliation used against African-American. The slur comes in the form of the word "nigger" or commonly refer to term. African-American do not like to be called N-word. Next is oppression, In this novel the oppression takes place on Ruth. She faces a violence and coercion when the police come to her house. Last is marginalization, the researcher find African-American are marginalized. There is an area that is only inhabited by African-American. Those who live in the region have poor settlements.

Third, the effects of social injustice conflict experienced by Ruth's Jefferson: First is Ruth's being blamed for the death of a Caucasian child, Davis's death makes Turk angry and sad. Then Brittany is also very stressed. They believe that the death of their son is caused by Ruth then he blamed Ruth on charge of murder and work careless. Second is Ruth's losing her job, Ruth thinks that if she helps Davis, she will lose her job because she does not obey her superior's order. Third is Ruth's looking for justice, Ruth gets a parole from the court. She does not want to come back to jail anymore and she selling her house for her freedom and got help from a lawyer. Ms. McQuarrie helps her in every trial that she faces in the court. Next is Ruth's getting the suspicion of store employees to the African-American, she is always watched and followed by the shopkeeper when she is choosing goods and the security also checks her bag when she leave the store. Last is Ruth's feeling hopeless, some people who cares and believes Ruth that she is a good and innocent people.

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