



BRUTALITY IN HAN KANG'S NOVEL *HUMAN ACTS* (2014)

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Abstract

The purpose of this analysis is to expose the issue of brutality in novel *Human Acts* (2014) by Han Kang. It is also intended to find out how the implied author contributes in revealing the issue of brutality. This analysis is related to concept of *Power Relation* by Michel Foucault that is supported by the text and context-based interpretation. The result of the analysis shows that the brutality that is committed by military government in maintaining their domination done through two strategies: enforcing regulations and utilizing state apparatus.

Key words: Brutality, Power, Strategy

A. INTRODUCTION

Government is an essential element of a country. It is considered as the institutionalized process through the public order. The government is understood to encompass the whole executive apparatus of the state including the political leadership, the public service and other government instrumentalities. It means the concept of government is purposed to create public policy and to control over the society by means of ordered rule. Government should provide the safety of and order, protecting citizen from each other and from foreign foes. Ideally, the idea of government as protector and provider requires the ability to provide good service and guard the citizen from crime. However, there are the governments who oppose this requirement. They act brutally and against their society. It usually happens in military system. Thus, people live under the suppression and terror of military. Even worse, the government tends to ignore human rights of people. Instead of operating military system to stabilize the country, the state apparatus precisely create chaotic conditions. One of the examples this brutality is in Gwangju South Korea under the Chun Doo-Hwan military system.

According to *New York Times* (January: 2017), it is explained that Gwangju troops brutally and indiscriminately assaulted not only protesters but also bystanders. However, Gwangju residents forced out the military and for five days in May and the city practiced self-governance. The military system of

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government caused people to suffer and killed the civilians. Besides, in maintaining their position, the government can act inhumanly to protect their power. They instruct the soldiers to shoot and do massacre in country. As the result, hundreds of civilians were massacred by soldiers in the south-western city of Gwangju. Moreover, the civilians rose up to tight the military rules. This brutality drew outraged ordinary citizens into the struggle. It forced them creating a mass movement of resistance which forced the military to retreat from the city for five days and leaving the city in full control of the residents. The authoritarian political system of military government in South Korea was the worst period in Korean history. In this condition, human ambition has crossed the line and tends to be pointed to brutal act.

This thesis analyses the issue of Brutality which refers to the act that is done by the government. This act is done by acting brutally to societies who fight against them. The government also takes control over the media and soldiers strictly. The state apparatus used as a tool to protect them from mass demonstration. They instruct the soldiers to shoot and kill society. The result is hundreds of people suffer. The government do not concern about the destiny of victims and their families. They just keep doing whatever they want, even inhumanly act.

The issue about brutality is interesting to be analyzed because this issue happens in our real life. The novel *Human Acts* (2014) exposes this issue through the history of Gwangju 1980 in South Korea. Even though this novel's setting is South Korea, the problem of the truth, justice and freedom are universal. It depicts how human can act inhumanly in maintaining their domination. This phenomenon happens in reality and tends to be ignored. It is important to be discussed because it is dangerous for many people. Moreover, the topic has a correlation with the politic and history in our life.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The analysis of novel *Human Acts* (2014) by Han Kang is done through text and context based interpretation. Implied author as a strategy is used to reveal the meaning of the novel. It reflects the issue of brutalizing authority examining narrator's confession as the victims under the brutal act of military government. Implied author can be understood in two ways; reconstructing the problem in the text and bringing description and interpretation together. This analysis used the concept of power relation by Michael Foucault.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the issue of brutality in Han Kang's novel *Human Acts* (2014). Brutality in this analysis refers to the wrong doing act committed by government in maintaining their existence. In other words, this chapter explores more about the strategies in seizing their power unlawfully. Implied author is applied in uncovering this issue. Brutality is reflected through two ways; enforcing law and utilizing state apparatus.

2.1 Enforcing Law

This topic focuses on discussing about brutality committed by the government. The way government act in wrongdoing is enforcing law toward the citizens. It is observed from implied author. It can be seen through two ways. Firstly, public torture; the government imprison the rebellion protester; they torture the laborers, they do massacre. Secondly, restricting the media; media is prohibited to publish bad issues and falsehood manuscript is written for a play performance.

Enforcing regulations is one the government's strategies to get total control both society and citizen. It can be portrayed from how the government seizes the law to do brutal act toward citizen. The government seizes the law to control citizen activities. It can be reflected from the following text:

Those who hadn't been carrying a gun at the time of their arrest were classified as mere accomplices, and were released in batches up until June, leaving only the so-called 'violent elements', those who had been caught in possession of firearms, still in the military academy. That was when the programme of torture entered a different phase. Rather than brutal beatings, our captors now chose more elaborate methods of inflicting pain, methods that would be not be too the back and a large piece of wood inserted between the bound wrist. . . Before, they'd tortured us in order to extract the particulars of actual crimes. Now, all they wanted was a false confession, so that our names could be slotted neatly into the script they had already devised. (p.78)

From narrator's statement, it can be pictured the condition in the prison are very miserable. This sentence "*those who had been caught in possession of firearms, still in the military academy*" emphasizes the notion the government is afraid to face this condition. Citizens who carry a gun are considered as a threat for them. They are jail ed and forced to admit a crime that they did not commit. The sentence "*our captors now chose more elaborate methods of inflicting pain*" stress that the prisoners are tortured more brutally, not only physically but also mentally. It raises fear to the prisoners. Implicitly, from implied author, the government is in fear. They seize law illegally to torture the prisoner in order to protect their power and their domination. The government attempts to cover their guilt by distorting facts. It pushes the prisoners to keep silent and not to talk about their depravity to public. If the public know the truth behind, the government authority will be vanished. Even more, the government seeks for another strategy.

They force the prisoners to hide the real condition. The prisoner is forced to confess what they do not ever do. This condition can be seen in the following sentence “*Now, all they wanted was a false confession*” It can be analyzed that the government have managed the situation. They want to show the public that they are in the right way, whereas the prisoners are absolutely fault. Furthermore, they attempt to convince public as if they run the law well.

The following statement supports this condition:

There, the only name by which you were referred to was ‘*Red Bitch*’, because you used to be factory girl, and had been involved in the labor union movement. Their script decreed that the four years you’d spent at a dressmaker’s in what they called ‘a provincial city’ had been a mere cover, that you were a spy sent down from the communist North. It was to elicit the confession that would confirm these accusations that they had you lie down on the table in the interrogation room, day after day. (p.109)

From implied author, it can be understood that people who speak up bravely to fight for their rights are considered as agitators. The laborers are labeled as communist part. It can be said that anyone who oppose the military government system is regarded as out of part the country. Even worse, they will be arrested to the prison and interrogated as if they commit the crime. Ironically, during the interrogation, citizen cannot speak what really happened in the country. The government has managed the condition in order to expedite their strategy to maintain their authority. This case is emphasized in the sentence, “*It was to elicit the confession that would confirm these accusations that they had you lie down on the table in the interrogation room*” Implicitly, the labourer is the victim of military government system. The government does not accept demanding of rights from citizen. It seems the right of giving opinion from public is prohibited. The citizens who join the labours union movement is in danger situation. They not only get physical violence but also verbal violence. It must be very painful for the labourers mentally. Unfortunately, the victim cannot tell the truth due to cruel punishment that they will get if they speak up.

The military government torture the public in order to nobody will do demonstrations and protests anymore. In this case, the laborer who bravely demands their rights is violated by the government. It is evidenced in this following quotation:

“Those were fifteen-hour days with only two days off per month. ‘Weekends’ were non-existent. The wages were half of what the men got paid for the same work, and there was no

overtime pay. You took pills to keep you awake, but exhaustion still battered you like a wave. The swelling of your calves and feet as morning wore into afternoon. The guards who insisted on body searching the female workers every night before they went home.” (p.101)

The quotation above describes the condition of laborers are very painful especially for the female laborers. It explicitly shows how the citizens suffer under the military government. They feel helpless to fight against the government. Moreover, the sentences “*The wages were half of what the men got paid for the same work, and there was no overtime pay.*” indicate that there is no justice in the country. The female laborers are forced to work hardly but they do not get appropriate salary. Moreover, when they take a break for a moment, they will get violence even sexual harassment. This condition is emphasized in the sentence “*The swelling of your calves and feet as morning wore into afternoon.*” Through implied author it can be examined that the government resorts punishment to control citizens activities. Even in the citizen's life. They act brutally to torture the citizen. It seems the workers do not have human right. The citizens have no choice. In order to fulfill their needs, they have to work. The legal authority of the military government makes them violates the laborers without hesitate.

The government restructures the informational system. They manipulate the real information that happened in the country. This case is reflected in the following statement:

. . .That autumn, when you were twenty-one, a factory girl even younger than you died at a sit in at the opposition party's headquarters. The government's official report stated that she had cut her own wrist with the shards from a bottle of Sprite ad jumped from the third floor. You didn't believe a word of it. Like piecing together a puzzle you had peer closely at the photographs that were carried in the government controlled papers, to read between the lines of the editorials, which condemned the uprising in incensed, strident tones. (p.103)

The text above proves that the government restructures the informational system. In sentence “*You didn't believe a word of it.*”, the word “It” refers to the false information that share by government. They distribute information that condition looks normal. “*The government's official report stated that she had cut her own wrist.*” The text states that government seems care to the victim. In contrast, through implied author, it can be known that the government attempts to cover up

their brutal action. The sentence *“the government controlled papers”* indicates the censorship of false information that control by government. They want to convince public as if the victims murder themselves. Even worse, they want to minimize the public opinion about their system that run unlawfully. It is aimed not only to restrict the information but also to build good image of government throughout the country.

Another statement that supports the nation about the government restructuring the information can be seen in this following quotation:

Submitting the manuscript proofs to the censor’s office, then calling back on the appointed day – she’s been through this same process every month since starting work at the publisher’s. After checking to see which sections of the text had been crossed out with a black line – usually three or four, a dozen at the most – she would return to the office feeling somewhat deflated, and send the corrected proofs off to the printers. (p.50)

Through implied author, it can be noticed that the government attempt to cover up their mistakes by restructuring the information. They control over the society activities especially in media. The editors and journalists who work in media are forced to let the government intervene their job. It can be seen how they do censorship before the information is disseminated. The government afraid if the real information will be known by citizen around the country. This condition is *“...After checking to see which sections of the text had been crossed out with a black line – usually three or four, a dozen at the most –..”* The text proves the government cunning scheme to put media under their control. The essential messages are deleted. As the result the real situation which wants show is not conveyed. The journalists cannot inform the society what happen in reality.

This following quotation supports the idea the government control over the media:

. . .You pieced together the newspapers’ oblique strands of misinformation in order in Busan and Masan. You were convinced that those smashed phone booths and burnt-out police boxes, the angry mobs hurling stones, formed a pattern. (p.103)

The quotation above indicates the government not only restricts the mass media but also the tool of communication. The sentence, *“You were convinced that those smashed phone booths and burnt-out police boxes, the angry mobs hurling stones,*

formed a pattern.”, describes the chaotic situation in the city. Mass media in this case refers to print media, publishing, news media, and broadcasting. The tool of communication such as telephone and network communication are restricted. As the result, the condition in the city becomes chaos. It affects to all activities of citizen. Their daily activities will be disrupted. Even worse, it affects to all aspect of life, including economy, politic, health, and education. Workers in the office, doctors and nurse in hospital cannot work as well and the citizen cannot call their family outside the city. Unfortunately, the police also cannot stabilize this chaotic situation.

The concept of power relation by Foucault is pictured in this analysis. In term of disciplinary power, it can be seen how the military government controls the citizen by seizing the law. Disciplinary is a technique conducted by the military government to maintain the authority in society. In this analysis it consists of a self-control over the citizens. The way the military government control the citizen is depicted from how they torture the citizen and restrict the information. By using the law, the military government observes the circulation of their power in a society and the effect of the law toward the citizens.

2.2 Utilizing State Apparatus

Another topic in this analysis is utilizing state apparatus. It is consider as an effective strategy to oppress and control citizens who protest the military government. State apparatus in this analysis is soldiers. Utilizing state apparatus can be seen from how the military government instructs the military to suppress the citizens and utilizes them as a tool to protect the government domination.

First, the military government instructs the army to suppress the demonstrators. It is portrayed in this following text:

”But the generals are rebels, they seized power unlawfully. You must have seen it: people being beaten and stabbed in broad daylight, and even shot. The ordinary soldiers were following the orders of their superiors. How can you call them the nation?” (p.8)

Through implied author, it can be understood that the government gives negative instruction to the state apparatus. The word “*generals*” in the quotation refers to the soldier. They got the command from the government to suppress the citizens. This condition is emphasized in the sentence “*The ordinary soldiers were following the orders of their superiors.*” It seems legal for the soldier to treat citizens like an object in brutal way. The citizen becomes a victim of military government harassment. They ignore that accident may affects citizen psychologically and mentally. As a result people will get bad memory in their entire lives, trauma, and scar in their bodies. Moreover, the soldier as a state apparatus should preserve the citizens and keep the stability of the country. Ironically, in this case, the soldier precisely commits the brutal violence toward

the citizen by beating, shooting, and even killing them. It clearly can be categorized as an extra ordinary crime. The following statement supports this idea:

“Paratroopers from the Special Warfare Command, with their tanks and machine guns – you really think they’re quaking in their boots at the thought of a bunch of civilians who only have clapped-out rifles that haven’t been fired since the war? You think that’s why they haven’t re-entered the city? They’re just biding their time and waiting for orders from higher up. If you’re here when they return, you’ll be killed.” (p.16)

The text above shows the strategy of government to eradicate anyone who dares to fight them. Through implied author, it can be analyzed that the government make the strategy to fight the citizen. The words “*Paratroopers from the Special Warfare Command, with their tanks and machine guns*” can be examine that the government takes the best soldier in order to save their authority. The soldier who joins the government should have good capability and loyalty. In contrast, it can be assumed that people who join the army actually those who are not loyal. They do not want to be a victim in the country. They fight the country to save themselves. Furthermore, the sentence “*They’re just biding their time and waiting for orders from higher up. If you’re here when they return, you’ll be killed.*” can be analyzed that brutal act is a strategy of government to cover up their mistakes. Almost every action of mass demonstration will be against by killing them. Therefore, there are nobody can against them. It can be said that they are the one who can do anything since they have power. This conditions is supported by the following text:

I heard a story about one of the Korean army platoons that fought in Vietnam. How they forced the women, children and elderly of one particular village into the main hall, and then burn in to the ground. Some of those who came to slaughter us did so with the memory of those previous times, when committing such action in war time had won them a handsome reward. It happened in Gwangju just as it did on Jeju Island, in Kwantung and Nanjing, in Bonsia and all cross the America continent when it was still known as the New World, with such a uniform brutally it’s as though it is imprinted in our genetic code. (p.88)

Through implied author it can be analyzed that the government utilizes military service to suppress the citizens. They give reward to the army who did the most brutal act. It makes the army feel loyal to the country. The army tends to do violence act to rebel person. Their power becomes stronger since they have rights from the government in harassing citizens. This situation is pictured in following sentence “*when committing such action in war time had won them a handsome reward.*” The text says that the government gives appreciation and award to the army. They show their respect to the state apparatus. On contrary, from implied author it can be known that the government uses the military as a tool to protect them. This affects the army to compete each other to be the most brutal army. Ironically, the more brutal that army the more rewards it makes the army become proud of the wrongdoing that they committed. In this case, military not only fail to protect the poor from violence but they are violent predators themselves.

The government and municipal offices had reopened, as had the schools. The shops had shutters back up and had resumed trading. Since martial law was still in effect, no one was permitted to be out in the streets after 7p.m. Soldiers also set up checkpoints arbitrarily throughout the day, and anyone who had crossed out without their ID card was hauled off to the nearest police station. (p.116)

Explicitly, this quotation shows the government instructs the military to save citizen from dangerous circumstances in the city. From implied author, it can be implied that the government controls over the citizen activities. They do not let citizen to know the strategy that they prepare to maintain their domination at night. This condition is portrayed in following sentence “*Since martial law was still in effect, no one was permitted to be out in the streets after 7p.m.*” The government wants to expedite their strategies. Moreover, they are also afraid towards foreign people. This statement stresses the notion “*Soldiers also set up checkpoints arbitrarily throughout the day, and anyone who had crossed out without their ID card was hauled off to the nearest police station.*” It can be understood that the government prevent the real situation do not spread widely around the country.

In maintaining their position, the government utilizes the state apparatus as a weapon to preserve their power. They can easily command the soldiers to do massacre throughout the city. The citizens who join the demonstration are reputed as the enemies and dangerous people. This idea can be pictured in this following quotation:

I found out later that the army had been provided with eight hundred thousand rounds that day. This was at a time when the population of the city stood at four hundred thousand. In other words, they had been

given the means to drive a bullet into the body of every person in the city twice over. I genuinely believe that, if something had come up, the commanding officers would have issued the order for the troops on the ground to do just that. (p.77)

The text above explains the soldier is under the instruction of the military government. It implies the government ignores human rights of citizen. They push the military to do massacre throughout the city. This sentence, "*they had been given the means to drive a bullet into the body of every person in the city twice over.*" reflects that the government and their military system who should be saviors for the citizen, on contrary they become the rivals. Ironically, not only the demonstrator but also the innocent people become their victims. The phrase, "*every person in the city*" refers to all citizens. It seems like the government does not care about citizen's life. The citizens are not considered as human. They are killed and shoot like objects. They seemed have no right and dignity.

The government instructs the policemen to arrest the activists, especially the leader of the citizen movement. It can be described in this following quotation:

The labor union voted against the company-dominated union by a large majority. On the day the strike-breakers and policemen came to arrest its leading members, the hundreds of factory girls who were on their way from their dormitories to the second shift of the day formed a human wall. . . . There must have been around a hundred policemen, heavily armed with helmets and shields. Lightweight combat vehicles whose every window was covered with wore mesh. The thought flashed through your mind: what do they need all that for? We can't fight, we don't have any weapons. (p.102)

The quotation above shows how the government protects their domination. The citizen are not allowed to protest and demanded for their rights. They use their power to punish the rebels. As a result, the political activity is unstable. The government has arranged the situation. They act as great authority. In reality, the politic is only one side of government. This sentence, "*The thought flashed through your mind: what do they need all that for? We can't fight, we don't have any weapons.*" emphasizes the notion that government is afraid if the activist will destroy their existence. Through implied author, it can be implied that the government feels threatened to confront the factory girl activist. The weapon of these activists is their knowledge, thoughts and ideas. Moreover, their

intelligences make government become afraid if the activist will create the bigger mass demonstration to fight against their domination. The government cannot restrain the rebellion from society. To smooth their mission, they eliminated the rebellious activists.

The government utilize the state apparatus in guard their authority. It is pictured in this following text:

. . .You never forgot that the government actively trained and supported the strike-breakers, that the peak of this pyramid of violence stood President Park Chung-hee himself, an army general who had seized power through a military coup. (p.103)

From the narrative voice above, it can be known that the government who break the law. All officers shall be trained in use of violent means. Ironically the military government as the leader carries out the contrary. This condition is stressed in the sentence "*the government actively trained and supported the strike-breakers*". It can be determined that the government has bad intention towards the country. In the same time, they embed ideology to the state apparatus that violence act is the best way to handle the muddle in the city. It also creates bad influence to each army. They will think that the effective way in preserve the stability of country by violating people. Furthermore, this condition is supported in the next sentence, "*the peak of this pyramid of violence stood President Park Chung-hee himself*". It shows an irony condition. How the government rigorously does not oppose and combat violence acts. The conflict appears due to the leader commit the wrong doing actions. This condition is supported by the following evidence:

. . .The soldier mostly went away during the day, just a couple stayed behind to guard us. I assumed they went back into the city centre to crack down on any remaining demonstrators. In the evenings they were drunk by the time they got back to us, then there'd be another round of disciplinary beatings, and woe betide anyone who did anything other than cower in absolute silence. Anyone who lost consciousness would get kicked into a corner, then the soldier would grab them by the hair and pound their head against the wall. Once they actually stopped breathing, the soldiers would splash water over their face and take a photo, the order them to be stretched away. (p.94-95)

The text above shows how much the citizen suffer under the military government. The citizen feel helpless to fight against the military system. The soldier under the command of military government act brutally to torture the citizen. It can be seen from their action toward the citizen. The treatments of the military for

citizen who oppose their military system are so barbaric. Instead of being guilty after assassinating people, they precisely become proud and amused to do that cruel treatment. This condition is very ironic. The sentence “*Once they actually stopped breathing, the soldiers would splash water over their face and take a photo, the order them to be stretched away.*” implied that the soldier as the state apparatus in this case is proud of being brutal. They will take a photo of the victim when she or he died. It is aimed to give the evidence to the military government that they have done their order well. It also implied that when many victims are killed or gotten beat until died, it means nobody will expose their brutality to the public. The victims as the witnesses are dangerous threat if they not be destroyed. This condition stresses how human can act inhumanly to others. Moreover, the statement “*In the evenings they were drunk by the time they got back to us, then there’d be another round of disciplinary beatings*” describes how military service is used to defend the country from military government.

The concept of disciplinary and sovereignty power appear in this analysis. It can be seen from how the army is used as the tool for the military government. Both of them are the result of the disciplinary technique utilized by the government. There are ways to control one’s conduct, behavior, and attitude. Consequently, this technique gives impact toward the citizens. In this analysis, it can be examined how the soldiers have to follow the command from the military government. Furthermore, the concept of sovereignty power can be seen from the application of power toward the citizens. In this analysis, sovereignty power is applied in how the military government torturing public toward the citizens. They do physical harassment and verbal violence as the punishment. Most of people who oppose the government are sent to prison.

D. CONCLUSION

The issue brutality can be reflected in a novel *Human Acts* (2014) written by Han Kang. Implied author contributes in revealing the meaning beyond the novel. Text-based and context-based also plays the crucial role in uncovering the issue brutality. This analysis also deals with *Power Relation* concept developed by Michel Foucault. Brutality in this study refers to the brutal act committed by military government towards the citizen in South Korean. The novel was taken place in 1980. In this novel, the issue brutality is narrated by several characters: students, activists, journalists and workers. The characters are the citizens as the victim of the brutal act military government. The state apparatus in this analysis refers to the army and police under the command of military government. Through implied author it can be examined that there are two main strategies to maintain their authority; enforcing law and utilizing state apparatus.

In term of enforcing regulations, the military government the activist will be jailed. The government imprisons the citizen who fights against their system. The rebellion citizen is regarded as their enemy. It threatens their domination. The law is seized to. They block the tool of communication in order. They have managed the condition to preserve their reputation and avoid bad image of the

leader in public. They against the journalist who attempts to uncover the true case. Instead, they do censorship to hide their guilt.

In term of utilizing state apparatus, the government instructs the army and police to do brutal act towards the citizen. There is a fear of government about their domination in the country will be destroyed. The government stands behind the army and police. The state apparatus is utilized as the tool to guard them from citizen who opposite them.

In this analysis, the issue of brutality committed by military government happened in South Korea. It can be seen from conflict and chaos that is confronted by society in the country in the novel. The citizens live in danger and chaotic circumstance day by day. Through the theory of power relation proposed by Michel Foucault, it can be reflected the way military government maintain their existence. Human act is the act of human. In this novel, each of the character shows how human act in reality. It also portrayed how human can act inhumanly. The governments who comprehend the law and understand how to encompass the whole executive apparatus on the contrary do not care about the proper system. They act brutally and tend to ignore human rights and dignity of people. The citizens are also under the control over the government, even their daily activities are controlled by the government. Even though many rejections of the society, they have power and supreme authority to determine the policy.

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