



## **THE EXPLOITATION OF MIGRANT WORKERS IN ATTICUS LISH'S NOVEL *PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT LIFE* (2014)**

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### **Abstract**

This thesis is the analysis of a novel which written by Atticus Lish entitled *Preparation for the Next Life* (2014). It explores the issue of the exploitation of migrant workers which reflected by the main character and representation of migrant workers. It is also intended to find out the contribution of fictional devices such as character, plot (conflict), and setting in revealing the issue of the exploitation of migrant workers. This analysis related to the concept of exploitation and alienation which developed by Karl Marx that is supported by the text-based and context-based interpretation. The result of this analysis shows about the industrial owner acts of the exploitation of migrant workers. It can be seen in two ways, manipulating the managing systems and cutting wages.

**Key words:** *exploitation, migrant workers, exploitation, alienation.*

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

A novel entitled *Preparation for the Next Life* (2014) by Atticus Lish reflects the issue the exploitation of migrant workers. The exploitation of migrant workers refers to the bourgeoisie exploits the proletariat. In this case, the bourgeoisie represented as the industrial owners and proletariat as the migrant workers. The protagonist on this novel cannot attain her expectations and goals. She gets exploited in the work place. They live and work with exploitation under the system. This issue experienced by the main character Zou Lei, represented as a proletariat or migrant workers. She is an Asian and an illegal immigrant from western China. She makes her way to New York City in order to work and change her life. She has to struggle in her ways. She demands freedom, finds a job, surrounded by the industrial system and failed. In this analysis, they forced to work overtime and the industrial owner only taking a lot of profit. In this analysis, the exploitation of migrant workers can be seen in two ways, manipulating the managing systems and cutting wages.

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First, the migrant workers work over fourteen hours a day every day. The company forces them to work without adequate equipments. They do not have break time and quality time with their friends. They cannot get the day off.

Second, the migrant workers receive low payment. In order to take a lot of profits, the company cut their salary. They work overtime to get the salary and minus taxes. They cannot fulfill their needs due to the impact of company.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

The analysis of novel *Preparation for the Next Life* (2014) by Atticus Lish is done through text and context-based interpretation. Text-based interpretation is done by analyzing character, plot or conflict and setting. These fictional devices give the contribution in revealing the issue in the novel. Character and plot are used to reveal the act of exploitation of migrant workers by analyzing the character's reaction towards the conflict. Then, the setting deals with circumstances and atmosphere which experienced by the protagonist. In addition, this analysis is dealing with the concept of Exploitation and Alienation by Karl Marx.

## **C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter discusses the issue of the exploitation of migrant workers in *Preparation for the Next Life* (2014) by Atticus Lish. This analysis also uses some fictional devices, such as characters, setting, and plot (conflict). This analysis show the company ways in exploiting the migrant workers in order to get a lot of profits. It can be seen from the character who work as labor under the industrial system. They forced to work overtime. In this analysis, the way of exploitation of migrant workers can be seen in two ways, manipulating the managing systems and cutting wages.

### **1. Manipulating the Managing Systems**

The company exploits the migrant workers in the way of managing the systems. They force them to work without adequate equipments. They work over fourteen hours a day every day. They do not have break time and quality time with their friends. They cannot get the day off.

The first point is the industrial owner forces the migrant workers work over fourteen a day every day. This situation can be seen in the following quotation below:

She knew how to say okay. When they pointed at the menu, she got it fine. In Nanuet, they wanted the all-you-can-eat. She could understand that. You need to get some more of this. Okay. She knew how to hurry up and get something, to work because she had to, to work fourteen hours a day every day until the tenth or eleventh day, until they got a smoking day, as the boss

called it, because it was better than picking through the trash in the brigade field south of the river. (p.1)

The quotation above shows the character as a migrant worker has to work fourteen hours a day every day as the industrial owner's demand. The industrial owners exploit the migrant workers by forcing them to work fourteen hours a day. Generally, working hours only take six until eight hours a day. Working fourteen hours a day can make a lot of profits for the company, because the workers have to spend more hours for producing a product for them. The industrial owners utilizing the workers power by forcing them to work more than eight hours for gaining extra loot. Even at night, until tenth or eleventh they are still working. They have been spending half of their time each day only to work. It can be seen from the utterance *to work fourteen hours a day every day until the tenth or eleventh day, until they got a smoking day, as the boss called it* in this utterance reveals that they have to do their work because it is the instruction that the industrial owner's order. They also pretend to ask the worker that the work is better than anything else. It can be seen from the utterance *because it was better than picking through the trash in the brigade field south of the river* they exploit the worker for spending their time to produce something as long as they can and it can make many products that give a lot of profits to them.

Moreover, the industrial owner also forces migrant workers to work without adequate equipments. They only pay attention to the profits and ignoring the workers' condition. This condition can be seen in the following quotation below:

The factory produced polyethylene derivatives, without safety equipment except for surgical masks. If you put your head up, the Taiwanese bosses would make sure your head got pushed back down again. He did not have to pay you. You were an illegal immigrant in your country, you found out. That's how big china was.

They would be sick, their own food would make them sick, bacteria in the water, unidentified meat on the tables along the surfaced road, flies and blood. (p. 23)

The quotation above shows the conflict that migrant workers have to face injustice treatment. The company does not treat them as it should be. They cannot get facilities such as the safety equipments. It can be seen from the sentence *The factory produced polyethylene derivatives, without safety equipment except for surgical mask* the sentence reveals about the migrant workers work with minimum equipments. The company does not care about this issue. The way company creating a product is by minimizing funds. They do not facilitate the equipments in order to spend less money. If the company gives them better equipments, it will cost a lot of money. As the result, the workers have to work with the minimum facilities and struggling with this situation. Another quotation which strengthens this statement can be found in the following quotation below:

The factory smelled like old wood and cardboard. There was cardboard under the machines down with their bare feet to catch the oil from the Juki sewers furred in the dust, strips of lucky red fabric tied to the spindle bobbins.

There were about seventeen women working, a few in their twenties or thirties, most appearing older. A large number of them wore glasses. They did not look at her, keeping their eyes on the work, back hunched, the impression of a brassiere strap visible across their hunched backs. It was hot and they favored sleeveless rayon blouses or t-shirts. She saw them going gray. (p.314)

The quotation above shows through the setting about the system in the factory. The industrial owner does not care about the equipments of the workplace. The workplace is dirty and smells bad. It can be seen from the utterance *smelled like old wood and cardboard* from this utterance it can be seen that the workplace is not provides adequate equipments. It is based on the company's goal by not spending a lot of money. The company provides bad equipments because it does not take a lot of money. It only spends less money. The company only thinks about the profits from their workers.

The next point is the migrant workers do not have break time and quality time with their friends. Also, they cannot get the day off. It can be seen from the following quotation below:

On her break, she did not exercise. There was no time anyway. She put her chopsticks in the shared tub and lifted out a west nest of greens and dropped them on her rice and sucked them up into her mouth and kept sucking rice and chewing with her head down in the time allotted. (p.130)

The quotation above shows that the character as a worker cannot do anything else except working. What they have to do is to make sure that they have completed their duties. This situation happen because of the company has full of authority on their system on the workplace. From the sentence *On her break, she did not exercise. There was no time anyway.* reveals about the way company setting up the system by forcing the workers that have to be a forced labor. Due to this situation, the company loots an advantage toward the workers because the workers working continuously and do not have to take a break. The worker's break time has been robbed. In this case, the massive profits will come to the company as well. Another quotation which strengthens this statement can be found in the following quotation below:

She asked Skinner what he was doing today.

Chest.

Oh, he said. Your chest?

Yeah. Chest and shoulders.

You can go to gymnasium?

Yeah, he was. He had to go, he said.

I also go to gymnasium.

You do?

Not now, will be! I will be soon. For now, I will exercise by my work. You can tell? She squatted up and down fast and picked up a chopstick, winked at him and flipped it into a bucket.

He wanted to know when she was getting off work so he could meet her. (p.172)

The quotation above shows through the setting, it can be seen that the worker cannot get quality time with friends and family. The industrial owner forces the worker to focus on the jobs instead of having time with their colleagues. Full time job that applied by the company is to make the workers have to stay in working. It can be seen from the utterance *Not now, will be! I will be soon. For now, I will exercise by my work* it shows about the company oppressing the workers not to focus about the outside of working place. They limiting the workers by focusing on working and ignoring the other activities such as having quality time with others. Because of this situation, the company does not have to worry about their workers not to take other activities.

Furthermore, the migrant workers also cannot get the day off. They have to work continuously and not given holiday or day off. It can be seen from the following quotation below:

The summer would be celebrated by people of every nation in the city. People marauding after work, discontented. Thugs surfing on the sides of cars, flagging. Going into the garbage cans and throwing the bottles on the street. Immigrants working, forever working, watching people going by who have days off, time off, while they don't. (p.254)

The quotation above shows the conflict that migrant workers face is truly under pressure. The workers have to work every day in the company. Most of their time is dedicated only for the profit of the company and not skipping a single day of

working. It can be seen from the sentence *Immigrants working, forever working, watching people going by who have days off, time off, while they don't* means that the company not giving the workers time to take a day off. It proves that the company taking their days off thus, gaining extra time for the work and maximizing the profit. Due to the busy schedules, the worker can produce a lot of products which the benefits come into the company. The result of the product itself is the main goal of the company.

Briefly, the company exploits the migrant workers in a way manipulating the managing systems. The industrial owner forces the migrant workers work over fourteen hours a day every day, they utilizing the workers power by forcing them to work more than eight hours for gaining extra loot. The industrial owner also forces migrant workers to work without adequate equipments. The way company creating a product is by minimizing funds. They do not facilitate the equipments in order to spend less money. The migrant workers do not have break time and quality time with their friends. They loots an advantage toward the workers because the workers working continuously and do not have to take a break. They do not get the day off, so they oppressing the workers not to focus about the outside of working place. They limiting the workers by focusing on working and ignoring the other activities such as having quality time with others. Due to this situation, the workers are being exploited in a way of manipulating the managing systems. The way industrial owner exploit the migrant workers related to the concept of exploitation, alienation from economic activity itself, alienation from human as species being and alienation from other individuals.

## **2. Cutting Wages**

The company exploits the migrant workers in the way of cutting the wages. They do anything to get much profit by selling the workers' power. They exploit the workers by spending less money in salary and equipments then hire the immigrant workers to get massive profits. They do not grant adequate salary compared to the work that they receive. There are four points to show that the company has been exploiting migrant workers in a way of cutting the wages. They receive low payment. In order to take a lot of profits, the company cut their salary. They work overtime to get the salary and minus taxes and they cannot fulfill their needs due to the impact of company.

The first point is the migrant workers receive low payment. The migrant workers are exploited by the company. However, the industrial owners are the agent who able to command the workers. The workers' salaries are under decision of industrial owners. The workers have to receive low payment and exploited by the rules of the company. It can be seen from the following quotation below:

A woman asked her if she knew what she was doing.  
Can you make this noodle? Do you understand this  
flavor? One bowl sell one dollar. Nobody buy the cost,  
nobody has money. I don't make money, so what I pay  
you with? You don't make nothing working here. This

the miscellaneous, pull the trash and dump it. We don't use meat. Waste the money. Everything vegetable, you take a look, kabocha. Not like the one they have at home. Customer don't care anyway, so I don't care. He pays a dollar, already he knows it won't be anything special. Just to hurry, eat, goodbye. All they care is the dollar. We sell the southern taste as thin as hair-the noodle- you see that one. One hundred, I get fifteen, make right here in the Brooklyn. By the time I sell, maybe three times the cost, I still make next to nothing. How cheap you work? (p.45)

The quotation above shows the character has paid with the low wages. In order to cover up the economic condition of the industries, there are many tricks that they applied in production. It can be seen from the sentence *We don't use meat. Waste the money. Everything vegetable, you take a look, kabocha* reveals about how the company manages not to waste much money for producing a product. They do not care about the quality of the product as written from the sentence *Customer don't care anyway, so I don't care* in this condition, the company setting up the workers become a cheap labor. The products that company sells are cheap. The company cut corners in their production such as substituting meat for cheap vegetables. In fact, the migrant workers paid below the average of products itself. Another quotation which strengthens this statement can be found in the following quotation below:

The other guys were homeless drug addicts in True Religion jeans. The man who operated the crew wore a gold chain and had no voice. He was completely and permanently hoarse. She outworked the others, but he didn't pay her any more than them. He talked on the same level with the other guys. On the way back in the van they would talk about buying a bottle. (p.111)

The quotation above shows the conflict that the migrant workers face is treated unfairly by the industrial owners. The workers dedicate his work to create services and products for the company. It can be seen from the utterance *She outworked the others* means the workers have to endure tremendous load on producing product. They work overtime only for producing a good product or service which is valuable. But the company exploits their labor power unfairly. The workers do not receive an appropriate payment by the company compared with their services to the products. The company is pressing the outcomes as minimum as well. It proves from the utterance *but he didn't pay her any more than them* the way industrial owners' think that it is not their problems. They only have to think how much money that they get.

The next point is the industrial owners cut the workers' salary in order to take a lot of profits. The industrial owners cunningly cut the workers wage for getting advantages. This situation can be seen from the quotation below:

Why do you say your pay is incorrect?

It's not enough, it can't be. What about the added hours? To make more that's why I came here. You know-she tried to say-there had to be something she could do. Working hard is not the problem.

He let her talk.

May I have little Zou's permission to speak? Have you learn the menu? You do not know it. Sasson say you have not learn the menu. Why not? So that is one. There is two. Two is, the next step is serving on the line. In society, we are one step, another step, another step, another-very orderly. The gentle motion of his large, smooth, long-nailed hand. It is not chaos. He laughed, How can you not understand? I am here, he showed her, making a claw. I am one jump to top of mountain-one jump to sky-to heaven! You think it is real? No. no such.

She disagreed, saying that she had been working on the line but the Sasson kept sending her to the back. (p.247)

The quotation above shows the character exploited by the industrial owners. As the workers, they have been manipulated. From the statement *It's not enough, it can't be. What about the added hours?* means that their salary is as volatile as the contract of the workers. It proves that the workers being exploited by cutting their wages. They have been deceived. The industrial owners also explain about the unacceptable reason about the cut wages. From the sentence *Sasson say you have not learn the menu* reveals that the industrial owners only making an illogical reason. They do not explain about the truth, but they utilize the workers for working with extra hours. The result, the workers have been wasting their hours and not gaining the paid based on the agreement.

The migrant workers also have to work overtime and minus taxes. In this situation, industrial owner selling the labor power by putting them working eight hours a day. They also exploit them by cutting the workers' payment to pay the taxes. This condition can be seen from the quotation below:

How about you job, is the job money? Zou lei asked.

No, no much money. Poquioto money. You has working papers?



Zou Lei said, Take a guess. You think so?

No. They both laughed.

Maria taught her a handshake. Zou Lei showed her the ad in the Sing Tao where it said you could buy a social security number.

By knocking on a steel door, she found a job working eight-hour days putting clutch plates in cardboard boxes, the best money she had ever made: \$9 an hour minus taxes. (p.5)

The quotation above shows through the dialogue of the character they have been exploiting by the company. From the utterance *she found a job working eight-hour days* reveals that the workers work overtime in one day. If the workers work eight-hours a day, the value of production will increase for the company. The workers just like a machine which can generate a lot of money. Not only extra time, the workers have to split their salaries for paying the taxes for the company it can be seen from the utterance *the best money she had ever made: \$9 an hour minus taxes*. This condition is not beneficial for the workers. Generally, with this kind of work, the workers receive about 10 dollars an hour and not minus taxes. However, their main salary is still low paid. It is getting worse when they have to deduct taxes from it. They totally exploited by the authorities of the company.

The last point, the migrant workers cannot fulfill their needs due to the impact of company. The way company exploits them by not paying them as well. It can be seen from the following quotation below:

Yes, thank God. Now I'm trying to fix my identity.

You don't have the....

No. I have to fix this problem, she said. And she began to let her worries out for him to hear, since he was willing to listen. I cannot make money. I have to pay the lawyer. The lawyer is more money. It's bad for me.

What's your work?

Restaurant.

Chinese restaurant?

Yes. She cried a little talking about it. and wiped her eyes. My boss take the money. (p.295)

The quotation above shows through the conflict it can be seen the company does not paid the workers. They are working hard for a better income. From the

sentence *She cried a little talking about it. and wiped her eyes. My boss take the money* reveals about the company has power to cut the worker's wages. They take their salaries and not paying them. They even treat them bad and unfair. However, the migrant workers as the powerless person have to take follow the orders from the company. Another quotation which strengthens this statement can be seen from the following quotation below:

And money.Money. She was running out of money. If I can't pay a rent, then what? She lifted her foot and held the instep of her sneaker to stretch her thigh and a tremor such as you might see on a horse's flank shot down her leg.

Above all, she wanted to do something she could control. She wanted to reject every solution that involved going through a government office. It wasn't realistic, but she wished she could reduce everything to the simple physical test of running away. (p.318)

The quotation above shows the character is exploited in a way of cutting the wages. It can be seen from the utterance *Money. She was running out of money. If I can't pay a rent, then what?* reveals their wages have been cutting by the company. The company cut it because their identity in the workplace is entirely lower class, minorities and powerless. So, they can utilize the workers' power for benefits. They do not have to paid them and saving much money for their goals.

Briefly, the company exploits the migrant workers in a way cutting wages. The company has been exploiting the migrant workers by cutting their wages. They receive low payment. The company does not pay the workers proportional with their hard work. In order to take a lot of profits, the company cut their salary. The company utilizes the workers as an object for the advantages. It makes the workers cannot get their right such as not getting paid according to the agreement of the payment. The migrant workers work overtime to get the salary and minus taxes. They must split their salaries to the taxes which is given back to company. They also cannot fulfill their needs due to the impact of company. They exploit the workers by not paying them. All of the methods the industrial owners use to exploit the migrant workers related to the concept of exploitation, alienation from product, alienation from economic activity itself and alienation from humanity as a species being.

#### **D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

The novel *Preparation for the Next Life* (2014) by Atticus Lish, reflects the issue of the exploitation of migrant workers. It refers to the way the bourgeoisie exploits the proletariat. In this case, the bourgeoisie represented as the industrial owners and proletariat as the migrant workers who are undocumented and unskilled. This analysis is done through text-based and context-based interpretation by focusing on fictional devices such as character, plot (conflict),

and setting. The analysis of this novel deals with the concept of exploitation and alienation by Karl Marx. It can be seen from how the character who work as the migrant workers in the company or the workplace. The exploitation of migrant workers can be seen in two ways, manipulating the managing systems and cutting wages.

First, the migrant workers work over fourteen hours a day every day. The company forces them to work without adequate equipments. They do not have break time and quality time with their friends. They cannot get the day off.

Second, the migrant workers receive low payment. In order to take a lot of profits, the company cut their salary. They work overtime to get the salary and minus taxes. They cannot fulfill their needs due to the impact of company.

The whole novel shows the exploitation of migrant workers is done by the industrial owners or bourgeoisie. The company treats the migrant workers extremely bad. The workers are considered as commodity not as human being. They live in misery. They do not get their rights. They have been exploited by the company. Moreover, they have been alienated from their human nature or individuals. The result, the migrant workers never get a chance to fix their life into better condition. In overall, the novel entitled *Preparation for the Next Life* (2014) by Atticus Lish tells about migrants who are struggle to prepare for their next stage of life. Furthermore, the analysis of exploitation of migrant workers is related to the title of the novel which is tends to struggle to make their life better. Ironically, they are not prepared as well and the industrial owners exploit them. They live in misery and cannot achieve their goals.

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