

TRANSGRESSION IN STEVEN KNIGHT'S MOVIE SCRIPT *DIRTY PRETTY THINGS* (2002)

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Abstrak

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah; (1) menganalisa sejauh mana skrip film ini merefleksikan transgresi dan (2) menunjukkan kontribusi elemen fiksi (karakter, setting, dan konflik) dalam mengungkap transgresi dalam skrip film ini. Data penelitian ini adalah teks tertulis yang dikutip dari skrip film. Kutipan teks tersebut kemudian diinterpretasi dan dianalisa berdasarkan teori transgresi yang dikemukakan oleh George Bataille dan teori zona psikis yang dirumuskan oleh Sigmund Freud. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa protagonis melakukan tindakan-tindakan transgresi untuk mencapai tujuannya. Keinginan kuat untuk mencapai tujuan tersebut menyeret dia untuk melakukan tindakan yang melanggar aturan, nilai moral dan kemanusiaan, serta mencoreng nama baik dan kredibilitas profesinya.

Kata Kunci: transgresi, imigran, keinginan, hukum, etik, moral.

A. Introduction

Every community has a set of rules that have to be obeyed by its members. It is a set of policies and guidelines established by the community itself to describe appropriate practices, clarify principles, resolve conflicts, and create a free and reliable social life. However, there are certain individuals whose personal interest might be contrary to the communal interest. For these people, the rules are considered as barriers that hinder their effort to fulfill their aims. Therefore, they transgress those rules in order to achieve their own goals.

Transgression refers to the actions of trespassing the boundaries or limits. Jenks (2003) defines transgression as actions of crossing over, exceeding, or going beyond the bounds or limits set by a commandment or convention. In other words, the act of transgression transcends either written or unwritten rules. The written rules refer to regulations established by authorized people among the society and agreed by all of its members. Trusted (2002) states that the written rules signify a system or law that clarify and enforce these moral principles.

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However, not all rules are made to support moral principles. Some of them are created for cooperative behavior. Therefore, there are unwritten rules shared by a society based on the tradition. O'Donnell (2007) says that these rules are neither static nor universal; they might be change and vary in different culture or social groups. Trusted (2002) adds that once the rule has been decided then it does become a matter of morality as others will be inconvenienced, and perhaps endangered, if the rules are ignored or broken.

Transgression plays an important role in the cycle of social life. Bataille (1986) says "Transgression is complementary to the profane world, exceeding its limits but not destroying it." He clarifies that transgression does not damage the rules or the sacred of social conducts, rather it exceeds them. Furthermore, Jenks (2003) adds that transgression is related to various aspects of social life. It exists across various aspects in social space, such as relationships, family, health, spiritual, financial, work, or education. It means that transgression can be done by any person, in any circumstances, and even leads to destructive actions, such as chaos, anarchic acts, vandalism, madness, or crime.

One of the examples of transgression happened in India which was internationally famous for its organ trade, especially kidneys. Many doctors in India transgress the International Code of Medical Ethics, established by World Medical Association (2006) to gain personal interests. Robinson in TIME (2008) reported that many doctors in India purchased human organs such as, kidneys and corneas, in a very low price. They then resell them in multiplied price. Kumar (2001) added that there is a residential in south India called Villivakkam is better known as 'Kidneyvakkam' because almost every residents who live there has sold their kidney for money.

Transgression is an interesting issue to be explored since it is not only found in reality but also in literary works. One of the literary works which expose transgression is a movie script entitled *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002). It is written by Steven Knight. He was born in Marlborough in 1959 and grew up in Birmingham. He studied English Literature at University College London. He started working in advertising and radio upon graduation from college. He worked as a copywriter for a Birmingham advertising agency and as a radio producer at Capital Radio in London. In the late '80s, he worked as a freelancer for television. This job gave an important contribution for him to write movie script latter.

His first movie script, *Dirty Pretty Things*, opened London Film Festival in 2002 and won the South Bank Award for Best Cinema Film in 2003. This movie gained him a nomination in the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay category (2003) and won the Evening Standard British Film Award for Best Film (2003). *Dirty Pretty Things* also earned him the British Independent Film Award for Best Screenplay (2003) and Edgar Alan Poe Award for Best Motion Picture Screenplay (2004). This screenplay was also nominated for several other awards including the Oscar for Writing Original Screenplay (2004) and the British Academy of Film and Television Art Awards for Best Screenplay (2003).

The script of *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002) exposes transgression. It is the action of exceeding the boundaries triggered by a very strong will to actualize a desire. It is a violation toward the formal rules, moral principle, or social limit.

The transgression in this script is done by the protagonist, a Nigerian doctor whose conscience against a political persecution. He is forced to fly away from his country and leave his family. His efforts to gain money and passport in order to get back to his family make him susceptible and easily tempted to transgress the boundaries. The act of transgression is done through transgressing the law and transgressing his professional ethic codes.

The first act is transgressing the law. His effort to achieve his goals leads him to transgress the law which is established by the local government. He falsifies his identity in order to avoid the authorities, gain access, and flexibility. He works illegally by sharing fake work permit and license in order to survive. Since his income from the job is not sufficient, he steals medical equipments to earn extra money. He even gets involve in immoral crime of illegal organ trafficking. He found that he can earn a lot of money and get a convincing fake passport through this black market operation. He, then, joins this operation in order to obtain money and a passport.

The other act is transgressing his professional ethic codes. It is the act of exceeding the limits of the professional boundaries and taking unfair advantage from the clients. As a doctor, the protagonist tends to abuse his medical proficiency to achieve his goals. He conducts illegal medical practices in order to gain money and passport. He also performs medical treatment beyond his certified specialization and exploits his patients to gain personal advantages. Furthermore, he fails to maintain the highest standard of medical procedures and puts his patients in great dangers by treating them along with unqualified persons.

This analysis is intended to reveal the issue of transgression in the script of *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002) and to investigate to what extend the fictional devices such as character, plot (conflict), and setting give contribution in disclosing this issue. There are two studies that give contribution and inspiration in disclosing this issue and interpreting the fictional devices of the script. The first one was written by Chris Ewart (2010), entitled *Dis-Ordering the Body in a Pretty Dirty Economy*. It discusses the issue of illegal organ trafficking in *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002). In this analysis, Ewart focused on the character and plot. He states that globalization is a key factor that trigger organ trafficking. The need for a citizenship document forces the illegal immigrants to engage in organ trafficking, as the perpetrators or as the commodity.

The other study entitled *Moral and Ethical Issues in The Scarlet Letter*, written by Carol Joy Fider (1999). It analyzes the impacts of transgression on the transgressors and their relationship with others. In this analysis, Fider focuses on character, plot, and setting. He exposes the transgression which is done by two characters, Hester and Dimmesdale, by having an affair. Hester's confession of guilt allows her to move on with her lives and gain a salvation. In contrary, Dimmesdale conceals his sins for years. This leads him to the deterioration of both mental and physical health.

This study employs the concept of transgression by George Bataille and psychic zones by Sigmund Freud. Bataille (1986) defines that transgression as the actions of exceeding the boundaries. It is divided into two forms. The first one is *organized transgression* which refers to excessive actions which are accepted as a

necessity of a society. Basically, it is forms of communal negativity which are stable. The other form is *unlimited transgression*. Bataille (1986) insists that this transgression is potential to bring harm to the society members and threatens the stability of the social order.

Bataille claims that the transgression consists of two fundamental elements. The first element is *savoir* (knowledge). It refers to the understanding toward a particular subject which is generated through experiences. It is an understanding toward the rules, how the rules become barriers, and how to overcome these barriers. The main purpose of transgression is to claim a *Jouissance* (bliss). It is the other element of transgression. It refers to the goals that people want to achieve in their life. People would do anything to achieve it, even actions that against the existing regulations.

This strong will to actualize the desire is reinforced by an impulse within individuals or community. Bataille in Jenks (2003) asserts that there is an impulse called *inner experience* that encourages an individual or a community to commit transgression. This impulse blurs the line between rational and irrational. It persuades people to prioritize their goals and consider the rules as obstacles. It is related to Freud's theory of the psychic zones called the *id*.

There are three psychic zones in human mental process proposed by Freud. They are *id*, *ego*, and *superego*. Freud in Hall (1993) states that the *id* is a distinctive drive that creates pleasure principle which strives for immediate fulfillment of all desires. Freud in Guerin (2005) states that the *ego* works based on reality principle. It governs the impulse of the *id* so that they can be released in reasonable and acceptable manner. Freud in Guerin (2005) states that *superego* works based on the morality principle. It contains the sense of morality which provides guidelines for making judgments.

B. Research Method

This analysis is supported by text-based interpretation which examines the interrelation between fictional devices. The fictional devices are character, plot (conflict), and setting. These devices are inseparable since they support each other. This analysis is going to reveal transgression by analyzing the character's behaviors, thoughts and actions which are shaped by conflicts that he faces. Furthermore, both character and plot (conflict) are supported by the setting which deals with the situation and condition. It influences the development of characters and plot (conflict). These devices are analyzed based on the concept of transgression by Georges Bataille and psychic zones by Sigmund Freud.

C. Discussions

The protagonist, who is a doctor, refuses immoral request from the government. Unfortunately, this refusal is a beginning that forces him to commit other transgressions. This situation is revealed through the quotation below:

OKWE

A government official was shot. I was told to destroy the evidence. When I refused, my house was firebombed. My wife was still inside. The police charged me with her murder. I had to run, but my daughter

stayed. Valerie. She's with my sister in Lagos.

A pause. Senay looks at Okwe and knows that Okwe is not coming with her.

SENAY
How old is she?

OKWE
Seven. I must go to her. (Page 106)

The text reveals that the protagonist illegally immigrates because of a political persecution. The setting refers to the situation in which the protagonist tries to defend his conscience and keep moving on the correct path. However, the conflict rises as his good intention unpredictably separates him from his family. He realizes that he needs to survive for his family. Therefore, to release this conflict, he decides to avoid the government. He eventually transgresses the immigration law and flies away to London. This illegal immigration, then, leads him to commit other transgressions toward the law.

There are several actions that are done by the protagonist in transgressing the law. The first action is falsifying identity. As an illegal immigrant, the protagonist's real identity is not only useless, but it becomes a threat when it is discovered. He has no choice except concealing it and making up the new one in order to survive and get back to his country. It is unveiled through the following quotation:

Guo Yi produces a photo ID card from his pocket (similar to the genuine ID Guo Yi is wearing).

GUO YI
Take it. Last time you were lucky.

Okwe studies the photo. It is of a black man about Okwe's age. Okwe angles it to compare likeness. Guo Yi shrugs.

GUO YI (CONTINUED)
Black is black.

Okwe clips the ID card to his uniform and he and Guo Yi enter.
(Page 93)

The text exposes that the protagonist uses an identity card provided by one of his fellow immigrant, Guo Yi. He knew this is illegal and against the law. He precisely knew the consequences if he get caught. The setting refers to the situation he faced as an illegal immigrant who lives in constant fear of being captured by the immigration. This situation triggered a conflict which refers to his need to cover his real identity in order to survive. Obtaining the fake ID card is the solution to release this conflict. It is deliberately provided that it looks identical to him. It is done since photograph is one of the most important features on an ID

card that will be noticed by others on the first contact. By using this card, he gains people's trust, blends with them easily, and reduces the risk of being detected by the authority.

The other act is working illegally. It is done by using illegal work permit. The protagonist has no chance to work in his learned profession or even obtain a legal work permit because of his status as undocumented immigrant. Therefore, he has to share the license with other illegal immigrants to conduct a job. It is demonstrated in the following quotation:

A dimly lit doorway opens onto a smoke filled room which is penetrated by thin bars of winter sunlight through a grilled window. The controller fills in his lottery ticket behind wire mesh... and the sagging furniture is occupied by a dozen African drivers, all laughing and smoking. Okwe enters, exhausted from a hard day at the wheel. Okwe takes out 'his' driving license and hands it to another driver, along with his car keys. The other driver takes the license, pockets the keys and goes to depart. Okwe stops him and takes hold of his gold crucifix.

OKWE

Your name is now Mohammed.

The driver realizes and removes it and thanks to Okwe before he departs into the sunlight. Okwe goes to the wire mesh grill and begins to hand over a percentage of his earning. The controller emerges from behind his wire mesh and beckons Okwe towards a back room. Okwe looks puzzled. (Page 3)

This quotation shows that the protagonist uses an interchangeable work permit. He shares it with other illegal immigrants since he cannot afford it legally. The setting refers to the situation he faced as undocumented immigrant who lives in a severe fragmentation of working life where his options are limited. This situation raises the conflict which refers to the contradiction between his need for a job and his status. Thus, he uses alternative license that can be shared with other illegal workers in order to overcome this conflict. In fact, it is the company itself that transgresses the law by providing fake licenses and allowing its workers to use them interchangeably. However, the protagonist also transgresses the law by using that license. The utterance *Your name is now Mohammed* implies that he knew that the company is running in illegal procedures. However, he needs get a job earn money in order to survive. Instead of resisting, he joins the company and works for it by using the fake license. There is a kind of agreement among them not to question the license. He denies the law by using that license order to get the job.

The other act is getting involve in human organ trafficking. The protagonist gets involve in this organ commoditization in order to gain a lot of money and obtain a convincing fake passport. In this crime, he acts as the surgeon as well as the seller. This phenomenon exposed in the quotation below:

The doctor is sitting in his car. Then a door from the kitchen opens, shedding light into the loading area. Senay holds the door and Okwe emerges carrying the box that contains the kidney. Juliette follows. The doctor leaps out of the car and Okwe hands him the box.

DOCTOR
Where's Senor Juan?

Okwe gestures at the hotel.

OKWE
He's drunk.

The doctor smiles and takes the box. He quickly opens the lid and shines a torch inside. He spends a moment checking the merchandise then replaces the lid. He settles the box beneath a blanket on the back seat of his car and then produces a large envelope stuffed with cash. Okwe takes the money. The doctor is about to get back in the car but then peers at Okwe, Senay and Juliette. They are standing in a line in front of him.

DOCTOR
How come I've never seen you people before?

Okwe smiles.

OKWE
Because we are the people who you do not see. We are the ones who drive your cabs. We clean your rooms. And suck your cocks.
(Page 103)

The text shows that the protagonist directly involve in illegal organ trafficking. He extracts the kidney and sells it to the broker in order to gain a large amount of money in a short time. The setting refers to the situation in which the protagonist needs money and a passport to get back to his family. This situation is also supported by his medical skill. The conflict arises as his effort to gain the money and passport is restricted by his position as an illegal immigrant. He decides to join the illegal organ trafficking in order to reduce the conflict and reach this goal. The utterance *How come I've never seen you people before?* reflects that the protagonist, who is officially 'unseen', surprisingly involved in this illegal activity. While most of illegal immigrants are involved as 'the donor', the protagonist involves as a perpetrator. It is because he is not just a common illegal immigrant; he has a skill that can be utilized. Unfortunately, the encouragement of this uncontrolled desire eventually leads him to misuse this skill and engage in the illegal organ trafficking. Although he is actually an educated man with a noble profession, the encouragement of his *id* drags him into this dehumanizing organ trade. This action is prohibited by the law since it harms the value of moral and deprives the value humanity.

The desire to earn the money and obtain a passport also eventually leads the protagonist to transgress the ethic codes of his profession as a doctor. There are several actions that are done by the protagonist in transgressing his professional ethic codes. As an illegal immigrant, the protagonist has to find extra income in order to fulfill his needs. His situation as an illegal worker, who works under the pressure from his employer, leads him to a chance to earn the extra money by providing illegal medical care. He is forced to deny his ethical code that expects him to conduct any medical activities in legal procedures. This situation is unveiled through quotation below:

CONTROLLER

Look. They say you're a doctor, right? You get me something now.
I can't piss fire another day.

Pause. Okwe washes his hands in cold water.

OKWE

I am a driver.

CONTROLLER

It's for my wife's sake, you know what I mean?

Okwe is forced to dry his hands on his trousers. He sighs...

CONTROLLER (CONTINUED)

OK, so I give you all the jobs in South London.

Okwe sighs. Finally, as he goes to leave...

OKWE

I'll see what I can do...

CONTROLLER

Let me kiss you Okwe... (Page 4-5)

The text exposes that the protagonist provides medical treatment for his employer illegally. The setting refers to the situation faced by the protagonist as an illegal immigrant who struggles to survive. Since his income from the menial jobs is not sufficient, he has to look for other ways to earn more money. The chance to earn the extra money comes as his employer demands his medical service in exchange for a better income. However, the conflict rises as his status restricts him to conduct any medical practices. Even though he is qualified, he realizes that he cannot perform any medical practices since he is not officially registered as a medical practitioner. His utterance *I am a driver* implies that he tries to maintain and obey the ethical codes of his profession. However, his employer offers him a reward that is hard to be refused. He finally gives up on his survival instinct, and then fulfills the employer demand and accepts his offer. In order to increase his income, he complies with the additional demands of his employer.

The next act is the exploitation toward the patient. The first way is by taking advantages from patient's poor situation. He gets the information he needed from the patient in exchange for the treatment. He gives the medical care to the patient, and then forces him to give information of the organ trafficking and fake passport. Through exploitation, the protagonist violates the patient's right of confidentiality in order to gain personal advantages. This situation is disclosed in the quotation below:

OKWE

Ask him which hospital he went to to have the kidney removed.

Okwe already knows they didn't go to a hospital but asks the question for maximum effect. While the girl translates, the mother joins them, hovering at the friends shoulder, their anxious faces lit by the light of a votive candle. Shinti speaks. The girl translates.

GIRL

He says they didn't go to a hospital.

OKWE (DEADPAN)

Ask him where they did this.

GIRL (TRANSLATING)

In a room.

Pause. Okwe's eyes burn.

OKWE

He had his kidney removed in the hotel, yes?

OKWE (CONTINUED)

How much did he get for risking his life?

Pause. Shinti mumbles and the girl translates.

GIRL

He is English now.

Okwe turns to Shinti.

OKWE

He swapped his insides for a passport. (Page 52)

Instead of consulting the significant of the patient's medical condition or the treatment, the protagonist asks questions to track down the information related to the organ trafficking and the illegal passport. The setting refers to the situation in which the protagonist struggles to gain the illegal passport since it is the only way for him to get back to his country. The first step is collecting the information of this passport from those who have experience on selling their organ for the passport. The conflict rises as the victim would not simply share such confidential

information of the clandestine surgery to the others. Therefore, in order to release these conflicts, he exploits and takes advantages from the situation of the victim who needs immediate medical care. By giving the treatment, he put this man into a situation in which he would give him anything to repay, including the secret information of this cruel organ removal.

The other way to exploit the patient is by performing medical treatment without patient's approval. Unlike the previous case, this exploitation is intentionally done to cause harm to the victim and take benefits from him. He ignores patient's rights and preferences to accept or refuse treatment. It is supported in the quotation below:

Senor Juan is now staring glassily at Okwe and swaying. Sneaky slumps forward a little and Okwe leaps forward to grab him before he falls.

OKWE
Senay!

From the white sheeted sepulcher Senay emerges, wide awake. Okwe takes the bottle of drugged beer from Sneaky's hand and pours it away. Senay and Okwe then lift Senor Juan onto the bed and Okwe prepares another syringe. Okwe administers an injection in Senor Juan's arm and then begins to undo his tie. Okwe puts the oxygen mask over Sneaky's face. (Page 98)

The text exposes that the protagonist make the decision without any consent of the patient. He intentionally sets up the hotel manager, who is one of the perpetrators of the illegal organ trafficking, to be 'the donor'. The setting refers to the situation in which the protagonist, who is now involved in the organ trafficking, tries to save his fellow immigrant and get the money and passport at the same time. He traps the perpetrator to replace his friend as 'the donor' since he still needs a kidney to be sold for money and passport. The conflict is raised as the hotel manager, who is expected to be the replacement, would not give his kidney voluntary. As a professional physician, the protagonist surpasses the limit of professional relationship between patient and doctor by omitting this patient's rights and preferences to accept or refuse the treatment. Furthermore, he violates the values of moral independence and human dignity by taking and selling his kidney. It is his desire to gain passport that tempts him to engage in this human organ commoditization. He disobeys the ethical code that prohibits medical practitioners to involve in any actions against human rights.

D. Conclusions

The script of *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002) written by Steven Knight uncovers transgression. The transgression is done by the protagonist, a Nigerian doctor who flees from his own country for political persecution. The first act is transgressing the law. The setting refers to his condition as an illegal immigrant who struggles to gain money and a passport which are required to get back to his family. This condition raises various conflicts as the law, which is established by

the local government, restricts him and hinders his efforts. In order to release these conflicts, he utilizes his knowledge and experiences to transgress the law. The second act is transgressing his professional ethic codes as a doctor. The setting refers to situation faced by the protagonist as a doctor who lives as an illegal immigrant. This situation emerges conflicts in which his status and professional ethic codes obstruct his efforts to achieve his goals. He eventually decides to transgress these ethic codes in order to release the conflicts.

The practice of transgression is not only found in literary works such as movie script. It also can be found in real life since various situations and boundaries could trigger the conflicts which hinder people to achieve their goals. Some of them might desperately transgress those boundaries in order to release the conflicts. They choose to do 'dirty things' in order to achieve the 'pretty things'. Even those with golden heart and noble profession might arrive at a choice to abuse their superiority and ruin their own credibility.

Note: This article is written based on the Abdul Rahman's thesis under the supervision of Dr. Hj. Kurnia Ningsih, M.A., 1st advisor, and Delvi Wahyuni, S.S., M.A., 2nd advisor.

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