

A Clash of Social Classes in Margarita Morris' *Goodbye to Budapest* (2019)

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Article history: accepted: December 10,2021 revised: January 12,2022 approved: February 08,2022

ABSTRACT

Goodbye to Budapest (2019) is a novel by Margarita Morris. The novel is set in Hungary in the 1950s during the Stalinist regime. The novel portrays the sufferings of lower-class people caused by the regime's cruelty. On the other side, the novel also briefly portrays the good life of *nomenklaturas* or the upper-class people who supported the regime. Dissatisfied with the regime's cruelty, the lower-class people rose against the government, including the *nomenklaturas* that were close to the government. Thus, the *nomenklaturas* which were once being upper-class became the most hated social class.

Keywords: social class; society; revolution; Hungarian Revolution.

I. BACKGROUND

The post Second World War era globally has moved nations in the world to the conflicting polarity of ideology. The SSoviets had occupied the eastern part of Europe to liberate the German-occupied countries. Joseph Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union at the time, reportedly stated "whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his social system. Everyone imposes his system as far as his army can reach. It cannot be otherwise" (Djilas in Naimark, 2004). So, there shouldn't be any opposition against the sovereign power of the regime. Thus, Stalin had imposed the communist systems on the occupied territories in some parts of Europe, by launching an ethnic cleansing, even after the war was ended, along with revolutions and various attempts to restore the previously sovereign government. Soviet foreign occupation and intervention in the local politics in the region played a major role in expanding the Soviet influence, for example, in 1945-1955, the Soviet occupation of Austria, in 1945-1946, the magnificent Bornholm Island, in 1948-49, of the Berlin blockade to make Germany weak and was cut from the West European countries, England and the United States, Moreover, the victory over resettling Albania to switch alignment from Yugoslav to Soviet, and in 1948, in the Italian elections, the pro-Soviet faction had

won the seat in the parliament under the leadership of Palmiro Togliatti (Naimark, 2004). However, the Soviet occupation was not considered to bring much betterment to the occupied countries by some of the citizens. Those who opposed the occupation would rise to protest against the occupiers with various movements from small-scale protest rallies to a large-scale revolutions.

Revolution can change some social aspects of society. The word "revolution" refers to an often-violent movement to overthrow an old regime, creating a complete change in the fundamental institutions of the society (Neitzel, 2006). There are many causes the many causes catch as poverty and the oppression of certain groups, which eventually lead to dissatisfaction with the old regime. To end these sufferings, the citizens will rise against the regime through speech, civil disobedience, and eventually violence. Brinton (1965) stated that a revolution starts with a single event. The majority of the events that led to the revolution were violent and chaotic. The French Revolution, for example, began with the storming of the Bastille (Acemoglu, et al., 2009), and the Haitian Revolution began with a slave revolt against their masters (Rand, n.d.). The event triggered the ruling power to react against the rebels that were considered endangering the government. Some revolutions are even backed by foreign forces, which makes the revolutions lengthy and more

violent. The main reason why foreign forces intervene in revolutions is to gain support and influence over the territory that is in a revolt. The main goal of revolution is governmental change, hoping to create a new governmental structure that satisfies the citizens. Overall, revolution radically uprooted many aspects of the post-revolution government, such as the banishing of former government officials by expelling or exterminating them, and as a result, revolution can change the social structure, such as a change in the social class.

II. RESEARCH AND METHOD

Social class is a large social group that shares common socioeconomic characteristics with a particular social position such as the lower and working classes (Revillard, n.d.). Drudy (1991) argued that the concept of social class from a theoretical perspective is about relationships to property and the ability to command various resources, such as income, and wealth. The more resources a country may generate, in other words, may enable to command, will somehow lift opportunities for the higher social class. This would be opposition to those who do not belong there. There is an inevitable issue regarding social class, and the issue is inequality. The common examples of social inequality around us are: wealthy vs. impoverished, and educated vs. uneducated. By these inequalities, which commonly exist, we would be aware that social inequality issue is a rampant issue and will remain a prevailing issue in society. Before the 21st century, social class inequality was even organized and sponsored by the government, for example, feudalism in monarchy states, and *nomenklatura* in communist states. Durante & Fiske (2017) argued that social class inequality is maintained and reinforced by these stereotypes, wealthy vs. impoverished and educated vs. uneducated. It worsens the social class inequality and makes it more inevitable. For example, lower-class people are always stereotyped with demeaning characters, such as unintelligent, incompetent, or incapable, and upper-class people are stereotyped with exalting stereotypes, which is the opposite of the lower-class people. Even on the utopian ideology, such as Marxism, which blatantly promotes an establishment of a classless

society, the social class inequality issue is still unable to be solved in practice. There is a new class in communist society called *nomenklatura*, which is an upper-class equivalent to those that held key positions in the government's bureaucracy and got better treatment from the government. Overall social class inequality remains an inevitable issue in a society, even in a so-called equal society such as in a socialistic society.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Margarita Morris' *Goodbye to Budapest* (2019) portrays the violent clashes between two social classes in society, that is the *nomenklatura*, or the upper-class people, and the lower class. The novel is set in Stalinist Hungary in the 1950s. The Hungarian government at the time strictly oppressed the freedom of the citizens, such as oppressing free speech and free thought. These limitations were enforced by the law enforcement agencies that were helped by the collaborators, and the result of which was making Hungary a police state. Those who violate the restrictions will be harshly punished with torture, forced labor, and execution. Even some of the arrests were arbitrary. Márton Bakos, one of the main protagonists, who was a nuclear scientist, was incarcerated by AVO (*Allamvédelmi Osztály*), or the Hungarian secret police. The allegation was that he was accused by Vajda, an AVO officer of leaking the government's plan to build a nuclear reactor, which was part of Prime Minister Ernő Gerő's five-year plan. Then he was forced to confess the crime that he never did and sign the letter of confession, of which the first line stated:

I, the undersigned, freely confess to my crimes of betrayal and treason against the Party and the State. (Morris, 2019).

Then he was sentenced to twenty-five years of hard work for them the labor camp. In the labor camp, he met Béla, and András, both victims of AVO's arbitrary arrests.

Béla was arrested because AVO did not like that he corrected the faulty design of the Soviet-designed gun.

Béla: ‘Me? Oh, I was chief engineer in a gun factory. We got a big order to supply weapons to Russia, but the Soviet design was faulty. If we’d made the guns according to their specifications, they wouldn’t have shot in a straight line. So I corrected the error. But I made the mistake of telling my boss and the Ministry in Moscow what I’d done.’ (Morris, 2019).

Andras was arrested. He was accused of singing a forbidden song by the barman who disliked him because he kissed his daughter.

András: ‘I was in the tavern with some friends. They were singing forbidden songs. I wasn’t joining in though. I’d gone outside to see the barman’s daughter, Hanna.’ (Morris, 2019).

András: ‘The others all got off with a warning for singing banned songs. But I think the barman made out I was the ringleader because he found me kissing his daughter.’ (Morris, 2019).

Not only the arrests were random, but the input of the inmates was also allowed indiscriminately, as the three of them were sentenced to forced labor. During captivity, they endured so many sufferings, both mentally and physically.

The reno student protest initiated the revolution that demanded reforms in the government.

After that the suggestions come thick and fast: the removal of Soviet troops from Hungary; free elections; a minimum living wage; freedom of the press and the right to free speech; the release of political prisoners; the removal of the giant statue of Stalin from the City Park. (Morris, 2019).

The background of the protest is indeed the dissatisfaction with the government which acted capriciously towards the citizens and less sovereign because Hungary was being a Soviet satellite state and secured by the presence of the Soviet troops.

András, an ex-convict took part in the early stage of protest by typing the students’ demands, copying them, and distributing them as well, and was accompanied by Anna, his lover. Then the students went to the street of Budapest to protest against the government. After a series of protests, eventually escalated into a full-scale revolution. The revolution was not only the conflict between one ideology with another but also between one social class with another, in this case, the conflict between commoners against *nomenklaturas*.

Afraid of the rebel’s toenail, the communists, including the *nomenklaturas*, and AVO officers, went into hiding to avoid being lynched, Tamás, Gábor, and Vajda. and the other officers went into hiding inside the AVO headquarters and also repelled the mobs by firing at them.

AVO men entrenched at Party Headquarters are firing at anything in the square that moves. (Morris, 2019).

The Nováks, a family that lived a lavish life and was privileged to enjoy many benefits from being close to the Communist Party, were afraid of their possessions being destroyed in the hands of the rebels.

Everything that Ilona Novák has worked so hard to achieve is going to be destroyed: their nice house; their comfortable life; their good standing with the Party; her husband’s job as a university professor. She’s afraid, and who can blame her? (Morris, 2019).

However, they refrained to do so because the road was blocked by the rebels; they only hope the order to restore.

At Móricz Zsigmond Square they are forced to turn around because the square is barricaded by a roadblock made from cobblestones ripped from the road. Rebels bang on the car and tell them it’s not safe to be driving around. They should join the revolution or go home. (Morris, 2019).

In contrast with the *nomenklaturas* who lived a lavish or at least a decent life, the lower-class people lived an ordinary life under the shadow of oppression by the government which was under the Soviet influence at the time.

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 began as a protest in support of the Poles participated by students and intellectuals (Glaberman, 1989). As the result of the revolution, the Hungarian Workers Party, which is the ruling party, dissolved and reconstituted as the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party. The government was led by Imre Nagy, a liberal communist, and Janos Kadar led the party (Glaberman, 1989). The disbandment of the ruling party might seem promising for lower-class people because their demands could be fulfilled. Although the rebels initially won the revolution, the Soviet Army went back to Hungary to restore the order that was previously overthrown. The Soviet Army went back *en masse* in early November, and on 4 November, they attacked Budapest, then on 11 November, the rebels lost the revolution (Glaberman, 1989). The rebels' defeat devastated the hope of government reforms that many lower-class people demanded during the first stage of the revolution.

IV. CONCLUSION

Revolutions bring radical changes to society. Examples of revolutions that changed society are the French Revolution, the Haitian Revolution, and the Russian Revolution. A social class can be completely altered during a revolution (LueberingLuebberingnnica, 2020). It may even lead to the abolishment of the upper social classes entirely. The Bolshevik-led Russian Revolution of 1917, for example, brutally abolished nobility and massacred the Romanovs, a ruling house at the time. The failed Hungarian Revolution of 1956 did not bring any betterment for the common people, showing that the conflict might be just mere vain. This example is the real fact of a revolution that will not last. Those who were from the formerly high social class in a revolutionary society will be omitted for a certain time. It may encourage them to flee the country to survive, leaving behind the people

together with the winning party till it is safe for them to return. Ironically, the revolution can create a new high-class social group that is mostly dominated by the people who have benefited from the revolution.

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