
The Proletariat Class Struggle Portrayal In AKMU'S *Dinosaur*: Marxism Approach

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ABSTRACT

This research discusses the portrayal of the proletariat social class in AKMU's song entitled *Dinosaur*. This descriptive qualitative research focuses on finding out the class struggle suffered by the proletariat class in South Korea due to the 1998 monetary crisis portrayed by the lyrics of *Dinosaur* by AKMU, from the Marxism theory by Karl Marx. The song title *Dinosaur* itself is a metaphor in the context of debt collectors. On that account, the view of the proletariat social class put forward by Karl Marx (1867) is a propitious match for a song analysis in *Dinosaur* by AKMU. Data were collected by observing the lyrics, music videos, and related interviews with AKMU as the writer, composer, and singer. The data was flocked together by the note-taking approach to discover data to latch onto valid information related. The conclusion shows that *Dinosaur* by AKMU portrays economic conditions between the proletariat and the ubiquitousness of debt collectors in South Korea due to the 1998 monetary crisis. The solidity of the debt collector industry was bolstered by the emergence of families from the lower middle class who have entangled in the instability of the poverty rate in South Korea at the time the song *Dinosaur* was released.



Introduction

South Korea gained its independence from Japan in 1948 August. Facing various obstacles to rebuilding the economy, South Korea also experienced a monetary crisis in 1997. South Korea was on the brink of bankruptcy in November 1997. On December 3rd, South Korea and the IMF signed a three-year Stand-By Arrangement. The arrangement included financing for a total of US\$58 billion from the IMF, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and a group of countries—the most extensive rescue package in the history of the IMF. Stepped into the heyday, now South Korea is included in the list of countries with the best Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2022, ranked 10th, according to globalpeoservices.com. However, this glory has a massive price for the country and its people.

A sibling singing duo from South Korea, AKMU, has shared their childhood stories which coincided with the times that were still affected by the 1997 monetary crisis. The article *Marx's Class Struggle* proposes a definition that class struggle is a class conflict looked at from any kind of socialist perspective. Marx introduces two classes that include the big majority of the population; the proletariat social class and the bourgeoisie social class. Marx's ideology also affected the production of the literary outcome, resulting in various artists lively voicing the reality of social inequality through works of art. Walter Benjamin's point of view in *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory* (1985:85), shows that 'The Artist as Producer' argues that a truly revolutionary art must break radically with traditional form since even works which use conventional techniques to attack capitalism will tend to merely be consumed by the bourgeois audience.

The song *Dinosaur* was released in 2017 as the title track of the album SUMMER EPISODE. This song describes the life of their family, *Lee Chan-Hyuk* and *Lee Su-Hyun*, as a harmonious but poor family. The title *Dinosaur* itself is a metaphor for debt collectors. The clear picture of social class stamped on their family is depicted in the strokes of simple words in the lyrics of the song, on that account, the theory of the proletariat social class put forward by Karl Marx (1867) can be a tool for song analysis in *Dinosaur* by AKMU. The light rhythmic beat of the song *Dinosaur* may fascinate our hearing senses, but the existence of social class that is depicted in the lyrics of the song is the result of the social class phenomenon that is currently happening in South Korea. This is related to Marxism and the social class system that occurred in South Korea and what underlies the creation of the song *Dinosaur*. Therefore, the paper entitled *The Proletariat Class Struggle*



Portrayal in AKMU'S Dinosaur: Marxism Approach. This research aimed to be a study of the lower class society in South Korea which is alluded to in the theory of Marxism. The research has reviewed 5 studies related to the topic discussed,

The first research entitled Marxist Analysis of Oppressions in SpongeBob SquarePants Episode Drive Thru (Suwandi: 2020). This research aims to find the oppression presented by Mr. Krabs in the tv series and to reveal the illustration of the bourgeoisie capitalist method upon the proletariat according to Marxism theory. The Marxism theory used for Suwandi's research study is focusing on the bourgeoisie class's behavior toward the labor class or equal to the proletariat class. Oppression portrayal existed and shows the superiority behavior that gives negative interaction, between the brogues and the proletariat class. Differences from this study, where the depiction that this research finds are the life experienced viewed from the proletariat class perspective. Conditions are a continuation of the impact of the creation of social inequality due to capitalism and the exerted influence of the oppressive behavior of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. Differences compared to this research rely on the characteristics of life that lead to a picture of the proletariat being highlighted, whereas, in Suwandi's research study, many signs of an individual as part of the bourgeoisie class existed.

The second literary entitled Social Class and Marxism in Twenty-One Pilots' Trench (Huhtamella: 2020). This research analyzes two social classes discovered in the songs, the bourgeoisie class and the proletariat class. The conclusion leads to the creation of evidence for the discovery of the social gap as mentioned by the subordinate class doubting the ruling class and their ideologies along with the cultures. The difference between the research conducted by Huhtamella and this research is in the aspects studied. In this second literary, there is an in-depth discussion of ideological clashes and cultural differences between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. This research does not examine the ideology aspect nor the response of the proletariat class's deep grudge implied against the bourgeoisie class. This research assuredly uses the Marxism approach, but the focus taken in this study is to portray the life lived by the proletariat as the impact of the capitalist economy.

The third literary is Class Exploitation in Ron Rah's Serena Novel: A Marxist Criticism (Nurman, Kuncara, and Mujahir: 2021). This research aims to findings related to the depiction of class distinction and labor exploitation. The novel



presented the bourgeoisie as the owner and the proletariat as the labor worker. Based on six indicators of labor exploitation, this research found four indicators mentioned in the novel (excessive working hours, substandard salary, bad accommodation quality, and perilous tasks). Compared to the research done by Nurman, Kuncara, and Muhajir, their research finds signs of exploitation experienced by the proletariat class, whilst this research aims to depict the proletariat family economic life as the impact of capitalism. Despite using the same Marxist approach, the difference in aims in both pieces of research is quite distinct.

The fourth literary is Children and Their Rights in Heal the World, Love Will Prevail, and Atouna El Toufoule Songs (Nasrum, Dahlan, and Ningsih: 2021). Discussing the unfulfilled rights of children in the songs titled Heal the World by Michael Jackson, Love will prevail by Maher Zain, and Atouna Ela Toefoule by Remi Bandali. This research used a psychological and Marxism approach and presented that children need the right to proper accommodation, protected life, affection, and a proper sense of respect. The utilization of the Marxist approach by Nasrum, Dahlan, and Ningsih is different compared to this research. They analyze the same type of data with this research, as mentioned in the form of a song. The contrasting point is that it is the aspect of economic poverty that is the main focus of their research, not the obvious use of studying phenomena that occur as a result of the impact of capitalism.

Lastly is a literary entitled Class Struggle as the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic as Seen on Pasukan Anti Prei Songs: Marxist Criticism Perspective (Budianto, Martano, and Wiryawan: 2022). The researchers dig deep into the economic class struggle of the low-class people as portrayed in the Pasukan Anti Prei music video using Marxist criticism as the theory embodied in a form of descriptive qualitative research. Concluded from that research, the breadwinner of the low-class family in the music video work all day long to upgrade their social status. This research uses similar aspects to the research. The first to point out is the data used. The method of research was also done similarly. The idea of a proletariat class individual wanting to upgrade their social status is resemblant, but the contrasting point relies on the data processing and findings. This research found that AKMU experiences the stage of trauma which develop into resentment towards their fate as being intertwined with the rudeness of the bourgeoisie class, whilst the fifth literary focuses on the effort by the breadwinner to upgrade their social status.



In research, in this case, the data analysis method used is descriptive qualitative, which describes the condition of the subject or object of research when the research is carried out based on quality facts (Moleong, 2005: 280). In literature, the source of the data is in the form of a script. Data used as the basis of this research is tangible words, sentences, discourse, and text found in the lyrics of the song analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of a literary work (Peck and Coyle, 1984:149). The data is gained by watching the music video and listening to the song Dinosaur. The method used is reading and recitation from articles related and songs, also note-taking is the approach used to analyze this data of research.

This research aims to dissect the meaning of the song where the song is very clear to the situation of socio-economic issues in general. This song has a strong basis with a hypothesis based on the theory pioneered by Karl Marx (1867). On this basis and the guidance obtained from studying previous research, it can be concluded that this research is very compatible with the techniques of literary criticism concerning the theory of Marxism.

Marxism approach means examining economy and social class-related phenomena or issues. It studied social status classification and people's common perspective that intersect with the movement of the economy around. It analyzes the class relations within society influenced by the growth of capitalism. Marx provides theories as an analyzing tool in literature and works to unfold any prejudice of justice in the economic relationship as the source of social class issues. The main focus of the analysis is the struggle experienced by the rural class or as well as mentioned as the proletariat class.

The song Dinosaur was released in 2017 as the title track of the album SUMMER EPISODE along with another track titled My Darling. On this basis and the guidance obtained from studying previous research, it is concluded that this research is very compatible with the techniques regarding Marxism theory. This song describes the life of their family, Lee Chan-Hyuk and Lee Su-Hyun, as a harmonious but poor family. The title Dinosaur itself is a metaphor for debt collectors. This song has a length of four minutes and one second, while the music video duration is four minutes and forty-four seconds.

Discussion



The introduction has shown a glimpse of this research's main analysis. Dinosaur is a song that tells how AKMU (*Lee Chan-Hyuk* and *Lee Su-Hyun*) lived their childhood lives. The first verse of the song is;

“In my old neighborhood’s basement villa, four members of my family got along. Got along and lived happily, bellow the bathroom door a mouse had made a hole. Every night, father tossed and turned. No problem, because I didn’t know anything“

According to the simple diction of this first verse, as a reader or listener, the song casually spins a yarn about how the AKMU siblings' home environment was when they were little. Based on the condition of their family which is the proletariat in the case that has been put forward by Karl Marx, it is very possible that their family belongs to a group of families who are underprivileged or even below the poverty line. What's more, in 1998 South Korea was really caught up in a monetary crisis that had an unimaginably severe impact on its people.

The 1997 monetary crisis that hit Asia, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and South Korea, was a very rare and dramatic political economy phenomenon at the end of the second millennium. Not long ago, in 1945, when South Korea had just announced its independence. Of course, those years were a period of development for South Korea, they had just managed to achieve economic stability, and without any significant warning, they had to experience a monetary crisis that returned South Korea's economy to zero until it owed fantastic amounts of debt to other countries.

In South Korea, a semi-basement house (*Banjiha*) is a place to live with the cheapest rent and tends to be loved by poor families, especially in the city center. Referring to the article released by theguardian.com, in the news entitled Seoul to phase out Parasite-style semi-basement flats after storm deaths, it was explained that *Banjiha* is a symbol of the growing inequality in South Korea, Asia's fourth-biggest economy. Even though it is said that they are a family of four who has to squeeze together to live in a narrow house called *Banjiha*, they are still happy.

Even though the house was so dirty that mouses often visited it, they, from the singer's point of view, didn't have a problem with it because they didn't understand anything about their social strata at that time. This is because they are still children and only care about the fact that they live with their families. Clarified again by the fact that they were at that time too young to understand their family situation, not even to feel afraid, the pre-chorus sounds:



“I remember it like yesterday. I was too young to be afraid, but what made me jump...”

Instead of fear, they were shocked. “Dinosaur!” all parts of the chorus that are repeated 3 times, are filled with that word. Looking back at the singer's background, *Lee Chan-hyuk* was born in 1996, and *Lee Suhyun* was born in 1999. It is possible that they symbolized something scary or shocked them as Dinosaurs. This speculation was triggered by the trend of foreign fantasy films from America which dominated South Korea in 1993, *Jurassic Park*. That film won three technical awards at the 1994 Oscars, according to screenrant.com. The film depicts Dinosaurs as creatures whose screams can make those who hear them shudder and flinch. On that basis, the hereinafter lyrics of this song may support the speculation of the Dinosaur metaphor, a tragedy, or something traumatic by someone. Post-chorus and the second verse of this song written as;

“When I was little, I dreamed about a Dinosaur.” & “I woke up with a scream. All four of us were wide awake. My warm blanket, I kicked off my warm blanket. Mom took me in her arms, I couldn’t hide my tears. She said, watch TV and calm down. The screen kept flickering, flickering the dark room”

Once again, the indications of the social class of the proletariat are clearly displayed. In this part of the song, the lattice of the emergence of debt collectors is symbolized by the word Dinosaur. The word Dinosaur itself has become a stigma for children that these animals are dangerous animals so the lyrics of the song imply that the mother is trying to protect her child by diverting her attention to watching TV.

The TV is even described as a TV that often shows a screen display that is not smooth, usually, a TV with such highlighting does not indicate a good quality TV. This shows as proof that the family of the AKMU siblings is not from among the wealthy and belongs to the proletariat social class. This song has lyrics that tend to use repetition techniques except for the bridge part where this part has different lyrics and does not experience repetition in any verse.

Overall this song was created with simple lyrics and did not try to use sentences and diction that were difficult to understand. The possibility existed that AKMU wants to tell about their quite traumatic and unhappy memories in a



storytelling style as a simple and easy listening song to be accepted by society. Editing the word debt collector's job was changed into a Dinosaur metaphor which is very rarely used as a song with a market other than children's songs. The song uses a wrapper that implies childhood but with the aim of conveying the deep meaning of a traumatic real experience. The bridge part in this song conveys an important clue to the justification of the Dinosaur metaphor;

“You broke down our window, you roared at my family. If I see you again, then I’m going to shout louder than you”

Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), a private broadcast station in South Korea, conducted an interview with the AKMU siblings on the Human Documentary program in 2019. There, they stated that they used to be very poor and debt collectors often came to their house. Unable to live with the proletariat social class, his father, who worked as a missionary, finally moved to Mongolia. Even there they could not afford to go to school because there was no money.

Indication related to economic issues above existed in this song along with the music video, it's clear that this *Dinosaur* refers to a debt collector. A debt collector is a person or organization who is collecting the debt on behalf of your creditors and can include lawyers who do this on a regular basis. Referring back to the fact of South Korea's economic situation that has been attached in the introduction, South Korea adheres to a mixed political system; democracy and capitalism. The social class gap in South Korea is an embodiment of unbalanced capitalism as Marxism theory has predicted.

Conclusion

The song lyrics in AKMU's *Dinosaur* are an instrument that can be used as an example of depicting the severity of the life of the social class proletariat in South Korea in the 20th century. Not only described their harsh life, but this can be a source of concern for both parties, the proletariat, and the bourgeoisie. The debt collector phenomenon will not appear without a need and supply. In accordance with what was conveyed by the theory of Marxism that capitalism could lead to feudalism, in the end, this theory led its supporters to carry out social-political practices that were too beautiful to materialize, namely communism. Whatever a country's view of a political system, nothing will be the most perfect, depending on how the leader chooses decisions that are more profitable for the country. We have to look again at the role of people's representatives who should prioritize the



welfare of the people in that country, where a country as yet has songs with hidden messages for defending injustice between the bourgeoisie social class and the proletariat social class.

Refereeing to that, it shows that there where the imbalance in the rotation of a country's economy is reflected. Prospering people equally is certainly difficult to achieve, but if people's misery can be seen significantly, of course, there is a parliamentary structure that is responsible for it. Karl himself put forward the theory of communism on the basis of an imbalance of people's rights in the topic of class struggle, the gap that was too far caused Karl to create a desire whereby the state was able to equalize the level of welfare of its people. The results of the analysis of the lyrics of the song Dinosaur show that literature can be a good tool for literary criticism. The use of simple but precise words is an attraction that can make the audience immediately understand the meaning of the song.

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