

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

**THESIS**

*Submitted as Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement to Obtain the Strata One  
(S1) Degree in English Department*



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**2020**

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The Exploitation of Migrant Workers In

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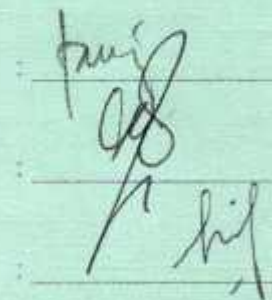
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## ABSTRAK

**Setiawan, Arnold.** 2020. The Exploitation of Migrant Workers in Atticus Lish's Novel *Preparation for the Next Life* (2014). *Skripsi*. Jurusan Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris. Fakultas Bahasa dan Seni. Universitas Negeri Padang.

Skripsi ini merupakan analisa dari novel *Preparation for the Next Life* (2014) karya Atticus Lish. Permasalahan yang diangkat dalam analisa ini adalah eksploitasi dari pekerja-pekerja imigran yang dialami oleh karakter dan representasi dari pekerja-pekerja imigran. Tujuan penganalisaan ini adalah untuk menemukan sejauh mana kontribusi elemen fiksi seperti karakter, plot (konflik), dan *setting* dalam membantu untuk mengetahui eksploitasi dari pekerja-pekerja imigran. Analisa ini dikaitkan dengan konsep *exploitation* dan *alienation* yang dikembangkan oleh Karl Marx dan juga didukung oleh text-based dan context-based interpretation. Hasil analisa ini menunjukkan bahwa pemilik industri telah melakukan berbagai macam tindakan eksploitasi dari pekerja-pekerja imigran. Hal ini dapat dilihat dari dua cara, yaitu memanipulasi sistem-sistem kelola dan pemotongan upah.

**Kata kunci:** *eksploitasi, pekerja-pekerja imigran, eksploitasi, alienasi.*

## ABSTRACT

**Setiawan, Arnold.** 2020. The Exploitation of Migrant Workers in Atticus Lish's Novel *Preparation for the Next Life* (2014). *Thesis*. English Department. Faculty of Languages and Arts. Universitas Negeri Padang.

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.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

In the name of Allah SWT, The Beneficent, The Merciful. All of honors are just for Allah SWT, the writer is eventually able to finish his Thesis entitled “*The Exploitation of Migrant Workers In Atticus Lish’s Novel Preparation for the Next Life (2014)*”. The writer also sends *shalawat* and *salam* to the prophet Muhammad SAW as a leader of human being.

In this very special occasion, the writer would like to express deep gratitude and appreciation to Leni Marlina, S.S., M.A. for the valuable advice and guidance during the accomplishment of this thesis. Thank you for her personality, professionalism, patience, encouragement, suggestion and critiques that guide the writer to open the writer’s mind and finishing this thesis. The sincere gratitude is also addressed to examiners: Dr. Muhd. Al Hafizh, S.S., M.A. and Dra. An Fauzia Rozani Syafei, M.A. for their suggestions and critiques. Furthermore, the writer’s gratitude is aimed to Dr. Hamzah, M.A. Thank you for being my academic advisor and for his guide to introduce me about the system of the studies. The writer also would like to express many thanks to the Head of English Literature Study Program in English Department UNP, Desvalini Anwar, S.S., M.Hum., Ph.D. The writer also thanks to all lecturers of English Department who taught and guided me during my education in English Department.

Padang, February, 11, 2020

The writer

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of Study

The attraction of American Dreams has lured millions of immigrants from all over the world to the United States with promises of prosperity and happiness far beyond attainable in their native country. America is also known as the land of opportunity for the immigrants. Moreover, America provides employment, a better life, and luxury. Immigrants move to America for seeking their dreams. Some of them come to America legally, but most of them do it illegally. They usually come from the third world which is belongs to the developing countries. These immigrants work as labors and stay temporary in the country or region in which they work to achieve their American Dream. Some of them are skilled and success, but the migrants who come illegally are unskilled and uneducated. Due to unforeseen circumstances, their identity as undocumented immigrant leads them to the failure because they have no skill, uneducated and power.

Although they work hard, not all of migrant workers achieve their dreams. Mostly, undocumented immigrants or illegal immigrants often struggle because of their status. This happen because most of migrant workers often experience injustice by company. They usually work in mining, manufacturing, agriculture, construction, restaurant and any kind of low paid jobs. They work hard by using their physical and mental for gaining the money. Therefore, many of migrant workers get exploit by the company. According to Marx in *From Marx to Myth*:

*The Structure and Function of Self-Alienation in Kafka's Metamorphosis* (1983)

human self-alienation is not restricted to factory work, but includes any kind of work in which an individual engaged merely for the wage or income it brings them. The worker dehumanized wherever his work fails to involve his creative urge and desire. It means mostly migrant workers get exploit by the company. Some of them may be have skills or unskilled. In truth, not all of them obtained a lot of wages and better treatment by the company. Most of them face inequitable treatment.

According to Kiss L in *Human trafficking and labor exploitation: Toward Identifying, implementing, and evaluating effective responses* (2019) Global estimates suggest that about 25 million people are subjected to “modern slavery” in the form of forced labor or human trafficking. These men, women, and children are often migrant workers who are exploited in diverse sector, such as agriculture, mining, fishing, factory work, domestic work and forced sex work. It means the migrant workers become the slave or object of the company. The migrant workers who are not have a power and as minority forced to work based on the company's desire. According to Kiss L in *Human trafficking and labor exploitation: Toward Identifying, implementing, and evaluating effective responses* (2019) serious consideration must be given to the structures and practices that enable exploitation and leave individuals with extremely limited ability to alter their circumstances. For example, complex structural factors exist and interact to drive labor exploitation, including growing income inequalities, the increasing power of corporations alongside diminishing power of workers, extortionate labor

recruitment practices, and governance structures that favor businesses or employers over worker's right.

Despite the migrant workers' right have been protected, but they still faces challenges in life. This happen because the industrial owners or company taking control the migrant workers role. They have full authority toward migrant workers. They forced to work hard by using their physic to finish their job. Even though they have been finished their duty, they still get inequitable treatment by the company. The rules that company apply is to create a lot of profits from the workers and exploit them as an object to gain money.

For the company, the migrant workers are only as an object to gain many profits. They 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. The company also makes the migrant workers live in misery. 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. They cannot fulfill their needs due to the impact of company.

The issue about the exploitation of migrant workers is the phenomenon that can be found in the real life. There are many literary works such as novel, short story, drama and poetry that reflects about issue the exploitation of migrant workers. One of them is exposed in the novel by Atticus Lish entitled *Preparation for the Next Life* (2014). This story is important to be analyzed since it shows the problems of migrant worker exploitation. This issue is not even a new thing for the migrant workers all over the world. A lot of these things happen to every

migrant workers out there. They surely encounter a lot of different problems. The migrant workers treated unfairly and living in misery.

## **1.2 The Exploitation of Migrant Workers**

There are two keywords to form the terminology of this study. They are exploitation and migrant workers. The first word is exploitation. In Merriam-Webster (2019), exploitation means an act or instance of exploiting. Moreover, exploitation in Oxford Dictionary (2019) is the action or fact of treating someone unfairly in order to benefit from their work. The second word is migrant workers. In Oxford Dictionary (2019), migrant workers means the person who move to another country or area in order to find employment, in particular seasonal or temporary work.

In this analysis, the exploitation of migrant workers refers to the bourgeoisie's way of exploiting the proletariat in order to take a lot of profits. The company forces them to work without thinking about their health condition. They work over fourteen hours a day every day. They receive low payment. They cannot fulfill their needs due to the impact of company. The migrant workers represented by the protagonist and other migrant workers who become the victim of the company.

## **1.3 A Brief Description of the Author's Biography**

Based on People Pill website in *AtticusLish: Writer- Biography, Life, Family, Facts* (2019) Atticus Lish is an American novelist. He was born in Manhattan in 1972. He was born from an author family. He is the son of the American writer, Gordon Lish. Lish was dropped out from Harvard University

after two years. Lish also worked in several jobs, including Papaya King and in a factory in Gardena, California. Lish joined US Marine Corps and was honorably discharged. Lish began married his wife, Beth, a school teacher, in 1995. At the age mid-30s, Lish returned to Harvard and graduated with a thesis on Ascoli's theorem. Lish began took a fiction course and focus on writing. In 2015, Lish and his wife taught English in China's Hubei Province. During his teaching in China, he became inspired for his protagonist in his novel. He began to write *Preparation for the Next Life* in 2008 and spent five years on writing. Currently, Lish lives in Sunset Park, Brooklyn with his wife.

Atticus Lish has made two works. The first work is *Life is With People* is a book of drawing that was published by Tyrant books in 2011. The second is *Preparation for the Next Life* (2014) is his debut novel. The book won several awards such as PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction 2015, Plimpton Prize for Fiction 2015, Carla Furstenberg Cohen Literary Prize (given to authors of first or second books) 2015 and New York City Book Award (Presented by the Society Library) 2015.

Atticus Lish has a great passion with his writing. He creates his book with his dedication. He also did research and interview on the field to create his work. As said in *An interview with Atticus Lish in Vice* (2014):

“A lot. It sort of fell into two categories: Things that I experienced or things that I researched more traditionally. It would be a mistake to say that this is solely a work of imagination. I plucked most elements from the world around me. I know what it's like to be arrested. Parts of the immigrants house Zou Lei lives in when she arrives in New York based on a place a guy took me to in Flushing. I also lived, though not for

long, in an immigrant house in Boston's Chinatown. I saw up close how the living quarters are like a changing room where the ceiling is open and the guy in the compartment next to you is breathing a few feet away. Other parts required different research, as I've never experienced war directly. One thing that inspired me was the memoir *House to House* by Sergeant Bellavia, recounting his experiences in Fallujah. I also interviewed a lot of people. The NYPD does not want to talk to you, by the way. I spoke with a number of soldiers and lifted a phrase from a vet I met in the Atlanta airport: "turn and burn". Some people's voices was clear in my head, and I had a few people I had the luck of overhearing. I heard two guys talking on the subway coming from Coney Island, and there's no way to describe their conversation except to call it mayhem"

From the quotation of this interview, it can be explained that Atticus Lish wrote the *Preparation for the Next Life* with a lot of preparation. He came to the field and investigated the places, conditions, and people in order to get the actual thing that happens in real life. he also wrote this book based on some of his experiences. He collected the data and began to write it on his book. He also said that the protagonist in his book related to the situation of the immigrant that he met.

#### **1.4 *Preparation for the Next Life* (2014)**

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 who are undocumented and unskilled. 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.

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.

### **1.5 Problem of Study**

This analysis is focused on the exploitation of migrant workers in Atticus Lish's novel *Preparation for the Next Life* (2014). Thus, there are two research questions that give contribution in analyzing the issue of the exploitation of migrant workers:

1. How far do the characters expose the issue of the exploitation of migrant workers in Atticus Lish's novel *Preparation for the Next Life* (2014)?
2. To what extent do other fictional devices; such as character, plot (conflict), and setting contribute in revealing the issue of the exploitation of migrant workers in Atticus Lish's novel *Preparation for the Next Life* (2014)?

### 1.6 Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to expose how far the character reflects the issue of the exploitation of migrant workers in Atticus Lish's novel *Preparation for the Next Life* (2014). It is conducted to figure out the role of character, plot (conflict), and setting in the novel revealing the issue of the exploitation of migrant workers in Atticus Lish's novel *Preparation for the Next Life* (2014).

### 1.7 Previous Study

The study about the exploitation of migrant workers in Atticus Lish's novel entitled *Preparation for the Next Life* (2014) has not been found yet. However, two articles related to this analysis and give a contribution in analyzing this novel. The first study entitled *Pivot to Asia: Iraq War Literature and Asian / American Women* by Daniel McKay (2018). The second study entitled *New York City as Dwelling Place: Reinventing the American Dream in Steven Millhauser's Martin Dressler, Joseph O'Neill's Netherland, and Atticus Lish's Preparation for the Next Life* by James P. Zappen (2016).

The first study by Daniel McKay (2018) entitled *Pivot to Asia: Iraq War Literature and Asian / American Women* shows about the stereotype between Iraq War veterans toward Asian Women. The focus on this study is about the secondary character, Skinner, his white masculinity is initially reinforced by the fact that the main character, Zou Lei, is neither a native English speaker nor a legal resident of the United State. This study used the concept of Orientalism by Edward Said which in this study the main character who is an Asian has been positioned as a powerless figure.



Another study by James P. Zappen (2016) entitled *New York City as Dwelling Place: Reinventing the American Dream in Steven Millhauser's Martin Dressler, Joseph O'Neill's Netherland, and Atticus Lish's Preparation for the Next Life* shows about how the American Dream as the opportunity of every newcomer. This study related to the American Dream concept by James Truslow Adams which for living, working, and freedom. The aim of this study is to show that the characters' hopes in New York City as a dwelling place which brings them to a hopeless future. The study also describes the failure of the character which turns them no longer have an American Dream.

Both of these studies give contributions and inspiration in analyzing the novel *Preparation for the Next Life* (2014). Unlike those previous studies, this analysis focuses on the issue of the exploitation of migrant workers by using the concept of Exploitation and Alienation by Karl Marx. This study focuses on the way the upper class (bourgeoisie) is exploiting the migrant workers (proletariat). This analysis also explores fictional devices such character, plot (conflict), and setting to reveal the issue of the exploitation of migrant workers.

### **1.8 Theoretical Framework**

The analysis about the exploitation of migrant workers in this novel is related to the concept of Exploitation and Alienation by Karl Marx. According to Marx in Ritzer (2010), exploitation and domination reflect more than an accidentally unequal distribution of wealth and power. As Marx states in Ritzer's book, *Sociological Theory, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition* (2010:60), says:

“Exploitation is a necessary part of the capitalist economy. All societies have exploitation, but what is

peculiar in capitalism is that the exploitation is accomplished by the impersonal and “objective” economic system. It seems to be less a matter of power and more a matter of economists’ charts and figures. Furthermore, the coercion is rarely naked force and is instead the worker’s own needs, which can now be satisfied only through wage labor”

The quotation above explain that the workers in a capitalist society are exploited insofar as they are forced to sell their labor power to capitalist for less than the full value of the commodities they produce with their labor. In this analysis, the industrial owner rules the system by owning the property and exploits the migrant workers by paying the workers less than they deserve and by providing them with a poorer work environment. By exploiting the migrant workers, the industrial owner is able to get more profits and not spending much money for creating the products.

This analysis is also relates to the concept of Alienation by Karl Marx. According to Marx in Oliver Christ (2015) the individual is a creature who acts in relationship to his own species and to human society. Under the conditions of private ownership and exchange, the individual alienates himself from his species-being and his fellows, whom he views solely as a means of achieving personal objectives. Alienation is caused by exploitation. As Marx states in Barry’s book *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (2002:157):

“The exploitation of one social class by another is seen especially in modern industrial capitalism, particularly in its unrestricted nineteenth-century form. The result of this exploitation is *alienation*, which is the state which comes about when the worker is ‘deskilled’ and made to perform fragmented, repetitive tasks in a sequence of whose nature and purpose he or she has no overall grasp”

The quotation above explains the result of the exploitation makes the workers no longer have their right as human being. The commodities that the workers produce through their labor is not their own, but it belongs to another and produced for another. In this analysis, the migrant workers produce a product for the company and dedicate their work without getting paid. They got nothing except being separated from their product. The migrant workers also do not quality time with others because they have to follow the demand of the company.

Furthermore, the alienation toward the migrant workers also affects their activities as a whole. Even the workers will be more suffer when they obtain more profit for the company. Karl Marx on his book, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto* (1988:73), says:

“the more the worker produces, the less he has to consume; the more values he creates, the more valueless, the more unworthy he becomes; the better formed his product, the more deformed becomes the worker; the more civilized his object, the more barbarous becomes the worker, the mightier labor becomes, the more powerless becomes the worker, the more ingenious labor becomes, the duller becomes the worker and the more he becomes nature’s bondsman”

It means that the upper class alienates the workers in the way to take workers’ time and physical needs. They cannot get the benefit from the product that they have been produce. Even though they dedicate his work for the product, but they cannot get the payment. The profits they make only for the company, but not for themselves. The capitalist is not only taking the benefit such as material, but they also take freedom of workers as a whole. They have to work more than 14 hours a day without getting paid and certainly feels lost and misery. They spent their time for working in order to change their life. Ironically, they got nothing except profits

for the company. They completely exploited by the industrial owner. They cannot get what they produce or service. This is happened because the company considered them as commodity to earn profit, not as human being.

Marx in Oliver Christ (2015:555) said about four dimensions of alienation:

“Alienation differentiates between four different dimensions of alienated labor; the alienation of worker from the product, alienation from the economic activity itself, alienation from humanity as a species-being, and alienation from other individuals”

Karl Marx categorized four different dimensions of alienated labor. They are alienation from product, alienation from economy activity itself, alienation from humanity as species-being and alienation from individuals. First, the alienation of worker from the product means that the workers force to produces something that has value and do not know how much money they will get from the product. They only forced to produce it as the boss' orders. Second, the laborers alienated from the economic activity itself means that they do not know about the economic system in that company. They are doing the work for the company, not for themselves. They forced to work overtime without realize that they have been exploited through the system. The third dimension is alienated from humanity as a species-being. This dimension means that they cannot get their right as human being, such as the company does not give the workers break time and the day off. The fourth dimension is alienated from other individuals. It is means that the workers alienated from their society, because they have to focus to produce the product and less socialize with others except the costumer who become the profits for the company.

In this novel, the concept of exploitation refers to the act bourgeoisie as exploiter while proletariat as the victim. Meanwhile, the concept of alienation refers to the proletariat is alienated from their activity by the bourgeoisie and no longer feel as human being. The protagonist of this novel was the victim of the bourgeoisie. The company forced them to work without thinking about adequate equipments. They work over fourteen hours a day every day. They receive low payment. They cannot fulfill their needs due to the impact of company. The migrant workers represented by the protagonist and other migrant workers who becomes the victim of the company.

The analysis of this novel is supported by text and context-based interpretation. According to Guerin (2005), text-based interpretation means the approach that is based on the analysis and interpretation of the text itself and context-based interpretation is the approach that based on the circumstances of culture, history, politics, and social. It means the analysis of this novel does not only focus on the text itself, but also involves the phenomenon that happens in the world which is related to the story. The analysis of this novel is also contributed by fictional devices such as character, plot (conflict), and setting.

The first fictional device is character. Character gives a big contribution to reveal the meaning in the novel. Abrams in *A Glossary Literary Terms* (1999) states that characters are the person represented in a dramatic or narrative work, who are interpreted by the reader as being endowed with particular moral intellectual, and emotional qualities by inferences from what the persons say and their distinctive ways of saying it—the dialogue—and from what they do—the action. In literary works, the character helps reader to understand and reveal the

meaning of the work. The way to analyze the character is to focus on the protagonist's action, thought, and conversation towards conflict and circumstances.

The second fictional device used in this analysis is plot (conflict). Plot is a sequence of events for the things that happen in the story. According to Abram and Harpham (2012), plot is constituted by its events and actions, as these are rendered and ordered toward achieving particular artistic and emotional effects. It shows how plot gives a contribution to revealing the meaning of the story by actions and emotional effect. In this analysis, the protagonist's action has a significant pattern to bring the meaning of the conflict.

The last fictional devices that give contribution is setting. Setting is not only about time and place taken in a story. It is also strongly related to situation, condition, and atmosphere or mood. According to Abram and Harpham (2012), setting is the general locale, historical time, and social circumstances in which its action occurs; the setting of a single episode or scene within the work is the particular physical location in which it takes place. In this analysis, the story takes place in New York City, America. The protagonist has to face exploitation in the workplace or the company. In fact, all of migrant workers have to get exploited in the workplace.

## 1.9 Methodology

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 a contribution to reveal the issue in the novel. These devices are related to each other. Character, plot (conflict), and setting are used to reveal the way of upper class (bourgeoisie) treatment by exploiting the migrant workers (proletariat). Then, the setting has the function to shows the atmosphere, situation and condition faced by the protagonist. It gives the contribution in the process of analysis by giving help in revealing the meaning. In addition, this analysis is dealing with the concept of Exploitation and Alienation by Karl Marx.