

The Milieu of Marxist Criticism: Leninist to Althusser and the Stages of Materialism

Wan Anayati^{1*}, Muhammad Kiki Wardana²

English Department, Faculty of Language and Communication, Universitas Harapan Medan, Indonesia

*Corresponding author

Wan Anayati

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Abstract: This paper attempts to elaborate the milieu of Marxist criticism by exposing the types of Marxist movements and ideologies occurred throughout the history. The objective of this study is to present various milieus of Marxism that can be incorporated in the realm of literary discussions. Therefore, the authors utilized the qualitative descriptive approach by selecting various texts that encompass the existence of Marxism criticism. The authors believe that the exploration of this research brings a comprehensive alternative toward Marxist as one of the school of literary criticisms taught in every English department. Marxism is a scientific theory of human societies and of the practice of transforming them; and what that means, rather more concretely, is that the narrative Marxism has to deliver is the story of the struggles of men and women to free themselves from certain forms of exploitation and oppression (Eagleton 12). Furthermore, it is safe to say that Marxism needs more exposure in terms of integrating it into the academic that eventually makes it a worth discussing and researching topic.

Keywords: Marxism, Leninist, Engelsian, Althusser, Stages of Materialism.

INTRODUCTION

Marxism is not trying to brag the grandiose ideology about how man shall live with all the justice system, in fact Marxism has been so widely accepted as the motor to think, talk and act about the predicament of oppressed classes that had to struggle amidst the unfortunate situations around them.

Marxism in a way is sort of a tool to narrate the story of how class struggle becomes the main tenet of it and how the oppressed class has to endure the exploitation. Marxism envisages the progress in the emergence of power within social classes. The perception of seeing history in the point of view of class struggle (political dynasty as a continual process of attaining power) is ignited by the different spectrums such as the competition for economic, social and political advantage.

Then what is the aim of Marxism in literature? Does in the same way it represent the same ideology that Marx and Engels are trying to showcase? Even though Marxism is highlighted through its alienation of any kind of art due to the core beliefs of materialism which puts the weights only how man shall labour themselves to put what is best in fulfilling the basic needs and to think only the idea of classless society and to avoid to believe any affiliations of forces beyond natural world around us due to its firm beliefs on something which must have concrete, scientific, logical and observable foundations but still Marxism exemplifies the heights on historical point of view which in some clear ways is a classic form of narrating. "The aim of Marxism is to bring about a classless

society, based on the common ownership of the means of production of the means of production, distribution, and exchange. Marxism is a materialist philosophy: that is, it tries to explain things without assuming the existence of a world, or of forces, beyond the natural world around us, and the society we live in" [1]. Therefore, to be committed saying that Marxism can be traced in any historical accounts or in any literary works is valid, since the core of every historical account or literary works is the society which is considerably or inconsiderably tainted by the materialist philosophy, either a man with all his predicaments that sourced from the base then eventually affects his superstructure or the plight of the society that revolves around the superiority of the ruling party or the inferiority of the subjugated.

Leninist Marxism Criticism

Back in 1920's when the Russian revolution sprang, the attitude toward art and literature were much talked and appreciated as well as experimented. This attitude gave rise towards Russian contemporary style or modernism which then halted a decade later in 1930 where the state erected to seize everything including literature and arts as well. One of the highlights of this period was the banning of experimental due to the new imposing of Lenin's idea of new orthodoxy despite

marx and engels view on particular liberations. In the conjunction of the literary maxim, Lenin whose argument about literature in 1905 says "Literature must become Party Literature...Literature must become an instrument of the party. Literature must become part of the organized, methodical, and unified labours of the social-democratic party" [1].

The main feature of Leninist Marxism theory is on its strong beliefs that literature or art should be horizontally juxtaposed with the leftist political ideology which means every piece of art works is intended to obviously against the rightist and should mirror extensively the ideology of Marxism While Englesian Marxism believes that there should be a freedom of art which alienates it from any kind of political determinism. The writers of Leninist tend to inclusively assert their own social class status without a detailed textual reference and very generic. One of the most much cited of this work is Christopher Claudwell's *Illusion and reality* [2]. The term of vulgar Marxism that coined later exemplifies how the Leninist Marxism criticism is only within the boundary of seeing and analyzing the reality within the periphery of social class only. So somehow this point of view is too narrow and only narrating the effect of the struggle without putting more justice the causes of the struggle.

Engelsian Marxist Criticism

Engelsian Marxist Criticism gives birth to the famous Russian Formalism which emerged and flourished in 1920s. Unfortunately they began to be seized by the Russian government which at that time favoured Leninist theory. The basic tenets of this Marxist are they believe literature and art contains their own power, history and influences and the technique of close reading is heavily emphasized and used. The Russian formalist group consisted of prominent figures like Victor Shklovsky, Boris Tomashevsky, Boris Eichenbaum, Yuri Tynianov, Vladimir Propp, Grigory Gukovsky. This group believes that literature is scientific hence needs a particular and distinctive ways to interpret the poetic language of literature. Roman Jakobson described literature as "organized violence committed on ordinary speech." Literature constitutes a deviation from average speech that intensifies, invigorates, and estranges the mundane speech patterns. In other words, for the Formalists, literature is set apart because it is just that: set apart. "Their ideas included the need for close formal analysis of literature (hence the name), the belief that the language of literature has its own characteristic procedures and effects, and it is not just a version of ordinary language, and Shklovsky's idea of 'defamiliarisation' or 'making strange' (expounded in the essay 'Art as Technique', which Lemon and Reis reprint), which claims that one of the chief effects of literary language is that of making the familiar world appear new to us, as if we were seeing it for the first time, and thus laying it open to reappraisal" [1].

Defamiliarization itself described as a technique to make the work of literature becoming something that never seen or happened before. Another prominent feature of Russian Formalism that popularized by Vladimir propp and Victor skhlovsky is that there is a prime distinction between Story (fabula) and Plot (Sjuzhet). Story (fabula) according to them is a narration which is chronologically entrenching the order of the story line. In the other hand, Plot (Sjuzhet) is the packaging of how the story is being built up. Peter Barry asserts that "story is an actual sequence of (perhaps imaginary) events as they would have occurred, while plot is the artistic presentation of these events, which might involves reordering, juxtapositions, repetitions, and so on, in order to heighten their effect in a work of literature" [1].

Althusser Marxism

The recent development of Marxist criticism is widely known as Althusser Marxist. He himself is an Algerian born –French Marxist whose critic is mostly appreciated for its *overdeterminism* ideology. *Overdeterminism* which also found in freud's psychoanalysis, revolves around the creation of one single effect which triggered by various causes. This situation is to elaborate that there is no one to one correspondence concept between base and superstructure which means one element in the superstructure of Marxism concept is not necessarily taken or retrieved from one cause in the base system. As peter bary says "this concept too is a way of attacking simplistic views of a superstructure entirely determined by the nature of the economic base" [1].

Another prominent element in althusser is *ideology*. It is actually a widely used terminology in Marxism. Marxism sees ideology as a concept that strongly relates Marxism with the basic idea of culture and particularly about literature and ideas. The challenge is there are 3 broadly circulated pre-assumption of ideology which is very common in Marxist writing. According to Raymond Williams in Marxist and literature, ideology is "a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group or a system of illusory beliefs-false ideas or false consciousness – which can be contrasted with true or scientific knowledge or The general process of the production of meanings and ideas" [3].

Marxism criticism is not merely 'sociology of literature' with how novel gets published and whether they mention the working class. "Its aim is to explain the literary work more fully" [4]. The core of Marxism criticism is not only focusing on its historical tenets toward literature but more likely a fully comprehending of the history itself. Eagleton illuminates "Marxist criticism is part of a larger body of theoretical analysis which aims to understand ideologies—the ideas, the values and feelings by which men experiences the society at various times. And certain of those ideas,

values and feelings are available to us only in literature” [4].

Stages of Materialism

Marxism divides the history of materialism into 6 stages called primitive communism, slave society, feudalism, capitalism, socialism and communism. Each stage is presumed to be the failure version of the previous ones which indicates according to Marxist theory that every of it is evolving and finding itself inappropriate for the emerging needs in its own respective span of time.

Primitive communism emerges in a small community where everything belongs to everyone. The early human's settlement recorded that primitive communism could be found in the pattern of ancient community's way of life. This kind of historical materialism's stage postulates that individual belonging is abolished and communal property is advised for the sake of survival. The mode of the survival is mostly by hunting and gathering which obviously a salient feature of human's way of living in the prehistoric. Sense of communality is very strong and everyone in the community shall contribute the effort to make the fulfilment of basic needs going on. The downfall of this stage is when the individual property begins to nourish and the desire to at least having something to possess has overtaken the compulsory to share

The second stage is slave society. This stage is completely different from its predecessors which emphasizes on the communal view. Back in the history, slave society has been very notorious in the Roman Empire, Ottoman Empire, Africa continent, even until the wave of indenture labour which considered as modern society. This stage is the beginning of privatization. People had realized that they ought to earn and posses something, hence the class society appears in this stage. When the class society entrenched, the division of class is inevitable. The domination of one class over another will definitely create problems such as disparity and unnecessary suffering of poverty. Configuring this concept into Marxist theory is not simply as saying that Marxism concept could eliminate the problem that is created by the class society system but more likely a demonstration that there is a possible way out. Erik Olin Wright in his book about social class says:

The central task of the theory is to demonstrate first, that poverty in the midst of plenty is not somehow an inevitable consequence of the laws of nature, but the result of the specific design of our social institutions, and second, that these institutions can be transformed in such a way as to eliminate such socially unnecessary suffering. The concept of class, then, in the first instance is meant to help answer this normatively laden question [5].

From the statement above, the stage of class society is actually the gaining momentum of capitalism which according to Marxist theory is responsible for the fiasco of the world. Historically, this stage has been there for centuries where the possession of private property went viral. It was the Roman Empire that initially managed to raise the slave society for more than five centuries with the skilled and unskilled peasant as the backbone of the huge plantation. The peasants were also expected to become the army that defends the empire when the wartime explodes. There was a very common pattern that the peasants who later became the soldier would seize the war's victim or simply defeated enemies to replace them becoming the slaves working in the plantation. Over the generations, the army or soldiers who once peasants would transform to be master class and those slaves who remained very devoted would become the soldiers. That's how the pattern of maintaining slave population went on.

The increase of production in all branches – cattle-raising, agriculture, domestic handicrafts – gave human labour-power the capacity to produce a larger product than was necessary for its maintenance. ..Prisoners of war were turned into slaves. With its increase of the productivity of labour, and therefore of wealth, and its extension of the field of production, the first great social division of labour was bound, in the general historical conditions prevailing, to bring slavery in its train. From the first great social division of labour arose the first great cleavage of society into two classes: masters and slaves, exploiters and exploited [6].

The practice of slavery has been widely viewed as inhuman and cruel. But the reality it has imprinted in the world history. The very core of Marxism thinking aroused from the plights and the predicaments of slave society which in some extents has become the embryo of the class struggle. Right after the era of slave society fades it doesn't necessarily the slave society dismiss. The slavery had changed into a bigger and more organized phase as the establishment of monarch system where kings, lords, serfs and of course slaves mushroomed. This is called as feudal society. Feudal society's poignant element is agriculture. The ownership of huge land and the possession of serfs which nonetheless is another form of slavery had perpetuated to become the salient feature of this society. The difference between the feudal society and slave society is on its humanistic value. Feudal society still acknowledges the basic's human rights and existence while in the slave society; people were subjugated at its worst.

The feudal society appropriates more in terms of cultivating the small scale agricultural. This is to create the production which has less capital but more outcome or production. The workers were given the full rights to manage the lands. The form of economic activity was

basically relied on the system of manorialism which emphasizes on the relationship of the dominant land owner with the less dominant one. Usually this is understood as master and serf's relationship. People and Land were the primary elements in Feudalism. The hierarchy was like a pyramid where kings possess lots of lord masters or fiefs as well as military aids in the form of battalion of soldiers. Lord Masters functioned as the land owners of the mass while soldiers were the protectors of the kings they were called as vassals to kings. Then these lord masters owned peasants who worked for them in the land for providing food for them and the kings, these workers were guarded by a set of knights which supervised under the responsibility of king's soldiers. They were dubbed as vassals to lords.

Obviously the bottom position was the serfs or peasants who worked for the three classes above them namely knights, lord masters and the kings. During the feudal society era, the competition amongst land owners was so fierce and deathful. Many times waged wars on the battle over the seized lands where serfs got killed. That's why serfs or peasants were in dire need of protection from the knights though they had to pay some tribute or taxation to the land masters who hired the knights. The feudal society degenerated mainly due to the development of the huge success of certain land masters in gaining more properties and started to build Economy Empire. This had become the embryo of capitalism. Other than that reason, the peasants also started to realize their basic needs and demands had changed over period of time. Countries like England and Germany at that time had changed their prime economy sources from land based economy to money based economy which resulted to the circulation of huge capital. These factors were responsible for the changing of feudal society to capitalist society.

Capitalism indeed is the real foe for Marxism. Karl Marx himself spent most of his time to go deep and explore the capitalism. After the revolution of the bourgeoisie in France in 1789, capitalism which initiated by the bourgeoisie had soared high, remarking that feudal society was no longer applicable for the demands and need of the people. Politically the aim of this revolution was to create the equality for everyone to have the property and to build the business. This is in accordance with the previous stage (Feudal system) where the property was only dominantly belonged to particular group of people (Lord Masters). Economically the France revolution was aimed to create a free platform for everyone to develop their own business and to dismiss feudal dues and heavy levy of 10 percents on agricultural property; rent, interest and profit to be the only legitimate forms of non-work income.

Capitalism in Karl Marx's point of view is inevitably progressive and will be halted due to its internal fraction and the revolution which is poignant is

like a bomb. Marxism believes that capitalism has always been there to exploit the maximum profit taken from the human capital which is human workforces. It also believes that a solely private monopoly enterprises or private ownerships in productions are only giving injustice to the labour or workforces and only enriching 'The Have' at the expense of the labour. The flow of the capital in capitalism system would only bring damage to the social class because instead of investing the profit in the welfare of the labour, the capitalist invests the fresh money which actually retrieved from every drop of labour's sweat in establishing new factories. As Lenin says that capitalism is the highest state of imperialism, it is not exaggerating to say that capitalism also ignites a new form severe exploitation. "Imperialism is the eve of the social evolution of the proletariat" [7]. This indicates that whatever the revolution that bursts in this world is caused by no other than the proletariat.

CONCLUSION

It has always been interesting to highlight Marxism in an intellectual discourse. Myriad of theses, essays and texts that have ever produced, circulated and revolved around how men talking about a great idea so called Marxist theory that emerged in the mid 19th century could possibly change the face of the oppressed world. What compels the most from Marxist theory is its classical idea of restructuring history. Marxism has a very decisive view on history which based on materialism. Its beliefs that it is materialism that firmly shapes the tenet of humans' relationship with one and another. This has given rise to the comprehension of materialism as the key factor for people realizing their identity, society, and culture. Interestingly, Marx and Engels view on society in the future is based on their belief that there would be no market oriented society, which is very speculative. It is widely known that Marx's goal on socialist is to see human being unattached from the effects of exploitation and oppression. He also dreams on the classless society with no boundaries and differentiation. The premises of Marxist criticism vary from Leninist to althuser eventually unite one prime ideology, that is to depict the class struggle in society and its impact toward the humanity. Nevertheless, today's real and majority of the society regards Marxist criticism can only be viewed through the looking glass. That obviously means Marxist critics can just only see the reflection without really touches the reality.

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