Broken Compass: A Screenplay Exploring Economic Inequality in Indonesia's Education System

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ABSTRACT

Good quality education should be accessible to everyone, regardless of their economic status. Unfortunately, often better education in Indonesia comes with a heavy price tag that eliminates working class people from accessing it. This thesis attempts to find out why the working class people are economically discriminated against and how they face the discrimination. Using screenplay and young adult dystopian genre, this thesis tries to show the side effects of said economic inequality if taken to the extreme. With Pierre Bourdieu's theory of school as cultural reproduction, the working class students, including the protagonist Thalia, are discriminated against because they are seen as threats to their resources. To reciprocate, Thalia challenges the system, which sparks a rebellion inside the school. The worldbuilding aspect of the genre is based on Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of social space, capitals, and agency. Thalia from the working class utilizes her agency to face the discrimination.

Keywords: Indonesia's education system; economic inequality; discrimination; screenplay; young adult dystopian

INTRODUCTION

Discrimination, unfortunately, is present in many aspects in today's system. More specifically, in Indonesia's education system, economic inequality has been happening for a long time. Although it should be accessible to everyone, a good education in Indonesia comes with a price tag that eliminates the working class students from accessing it. More often seen in Indonesian private schools, the pricier it gets, the better quality of education is (Musayyidi, 2020). For example, this can be seen in the school fees gap in Indonesian schools. In big cities such as Jakarta, high school students are required to pay at least Rp. 3,000,000 on top of other existing fees (Idris, 2010). Over the years, the price has grown significantly – in 2017/2018, schools charge parents Rp. 6,500,000 on average to enter their children to high schools (BPS, 2019 as cited in Kusnandar, 2019). This causes many students to drop out because they are unable to continue to afford their education, often leading them to poverty. This issue may be disruptive to Indonesia's future especially in its human resources quality, and the fact that education is a chance for economically and socially marginalized people to leave poverty and have good lives (UNESCO, 2022). With the system favoring the dominant class with the means to access good quality education, the working class students are defeated from the start. More often, the working class students struggle in school not because they are not capable academically, but rather because they cannot afford the education.

Since Indonesia is a big country, the location of the schools also has a big impact on its quality. Schools located in urban areas are significantly different from those in rural areas. For example, schools in urban and rural East Java have contrasting IPM numbers (*Indeks Pembangunan Manusia*) which is based on the people's health, education, and ability to have quality lives (Mahendra et al., 2016). In 2014, all high IPM numbers came from schools in urban areas of East Java, while the low numbers came from schools in rural areas, meaning that

schools in urban East Java are more developed in terms of their infrastructure and economic conditions (Mahendra et al., 2016). Although there are many Indonesian public schools that are funded by the government, the lack of funding puts many of these schools in an insufficient condition – such as unequipped classrooms, lack of books and materials, and lack of good quality teachers. According to a survey of Political and Economic Risk Consultant (PERC) in 2016, Indonesia placed 12th place out of 12 countries in Asia in its education quality, because of many factors such as low teacher quality, difficult access to education for those struggling economically, and uneven education quality in Indonesia (Rahmat, 2018). Therefore, many Indonesian students will be eliminated from the global society due to lack of skills – trapping them in a cycle that is difficult to break through.

The creative work is a screenplay in the young adult dystopian genre. A screenplay is "…a story told with pictures, in dialogue and description, and placed within the context of dramatic structure" (Field, 2005, p. 20). A screenplay can show emotions through its many elements such as dialogues and setting, and if produced, filmic elements such as camera movement, colors, editing, sound design etc. can instill more emotions and details into the story. Dystopian works often contain "…overly structured societies and repressed free will…" (Fitzsimmons & Wilson, 2020, p. 37). In general, dystopian works show the consequences of a horrible event such as oppression and brutality. Such as in popular dystopian films titled *The Hunger Games* (Ross, 2012) and *Divergent* (Burger, 2014), the characters are put on the edge where the core is about survival – making the audience think about the current realities.

This thesis uses secondary research for the methodology. Information and resources are gathered from the Internet such as journals, articles, and YouTube videos. Several film references are searched from films of the same genre, then continued by reading about the story analysis. From deciding the topic and doing research, the process developed to creating story structure while trying to apply the theories into the story aspects. From there, the story kept developing through several minor and major changes as the characterization was finalized. Since the genre requires a strong worldbuilding, said aspect was the priority to lead where the story and characters developed. Through reading key elements in the genre, the story got filled with important details such as the setting and the background of the dystopian world.

To connect more with the topic, it is found that the core of discrimination is the notion of competition. When there is a rise in a minority group's number, they become seen as a threat in competition of jobs and resources – resulting in more economic discrimination against the minority group (Semyonov et al., 2002). According to this notion, the rising number of minority group members make them appear as threats to rewards and resources, which results in increased hostility and discrimination towards the minority. In the screenplay, one of the conflicts is based on discrimination, where the leader named The Archruling sees the working class (Nether) students as threats to their resources. From small discrimination such as the different qualities in uniform and food, the discrimination grows bigger to increased hostility when The Archruling wants to kill all Nether students.

To emphasize on the economic inequality and social classes, the creative work uses the theory of School as Cultural Reproduction by Pierre Bourdieu including social space, structure, and agency. Bourdieu states that reproduction of structures analyzes the complex relations of social structures and group habitus which shows dominance and how necessity shapes beliefs and materiality. Habitus itself means a particular way of living, including dispositions such as tastes and skills which are established in the family then continued in the education system – where social classes play a big role in. Bourdieu explains the deciding component of habitus in social classes as capitals: economic, cultural, and social. Economic capital is monetary assets that can be accumulated and used as class strategy (Shirley, 1986). The more economic capital a family has, the better education they can provide for their children. Next, cultural capital refers

to cultural knowledge one has to improve their position in the social classes (Joppke, 1986). There are two kinds of this capital, educational degrees and habitus. Finally, social capital refers to "…the membership in social groups and the profits that can be appropriated by the strategic use of social relations in order to improve one's position" (Joppke, 1986, pp. 59 – 60). In the screenplay, the concept of capitals is used as how the school system sees value in each student. The economic capital is their currency called Phuria, which the students can accumulate. The cultural capital is shown as Paths, where students go after they finish their final grade. The higher Phuria and intelligence one has, the better Path they can go to. Finally, the social capital is in the classes the students are divided into. From the highest, there is Utmost (Gold and Silver) and then Nether (Bronze and Copper). The Utmost students have better lives than Nether, such as better quality food, uniforms, and education in general.

Bourdieu states that classes do not exist in society, what exists is called a social space – which emerges in society due to distinctions in groups of people, based on their capitals. Within it, agents are divided based on their capitals which determines their chances of profit in a field. The social field is, then, "…a multidimensional space of positions such that every actual position can be defined in terms of a multi-dimensional system of coordinates whose values correspond to the values of the different pertinent variables" (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 197). Agents can mobilize in the social space, but it is difficult. Therefore, the division in society is maintained. In a social space, agents have power according to their symbolic capital which they can utilize to impose their view of divisions in society, whether to keep or change the society. One possibility is to show resistance against the society, which can be from internal or external. The former is done from within the system, such as done by teachers or students themselves. The external is "…constituted by the students' families/communities…" (Fernandes, 1988, pp. 176 – 177). This also includes the students' habits which they get from their family. According to the social space concept, the students in the screenplay are divided into groups based on their capitals (Utmost and Nether), where each student has different powers according to their symbolic capital. Their symbolic capital is in the form of an object they achieve when they get into their Path – the higher the path, the more powerful the object is. Then, throughout the discrimination, the students as agents utilize their agency to survive.

CONCEPT OF THE CREATIVE WORK

Premise
A working-class student who struggles under the school system built by and for the dominant class is faced with a future-deciding test that determines her whole life ahead. Valued by her resources, she is far from having enough to pass to the next stage – making her on the edge of being sent to a faraway, unknown place. While trying to save herself and her twin sister, she uncovers the true state of the corrupt system, leading to the powerful ones intending to eliminate her by using her twin sister. When cornered and betrayed by those close to her while she tries to expose the corrupt system, she must choose to save her family or continue to fight for her entire community.

Creative Principle
Through this screenplay, I wish to portray the difficulties of Indonesian working class students in a system which often favors the dominant class students to have better lives. Set in a dystopian world of Indonesia in the year 2082, there will be two spaces: one where the students live (their school) and a faraway place where students are sent to if they fail to meet the standards. The main character will struggle as an agent under the overruling structure built for the rich. These struggles will lead to how the oppressed face them and what actions will be taken as the result of constant oppression that makes the students' lives difficult.

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Pitch

A. Thalia, an obedient 18-year-old working class student, struggles to protect her twin sister Odette and herself from being sent to an unknown, faraway place named The Outland.

B. On the verge of being sent to The Outland, Thalia searches for Odette who escapes while discovering the school leader The Archruling's evil plan to eliminate all working class students – leading her to choose between the safety of Odette or her entire class.

C. After rebelling to survive against The Archruling and causing riots, Thalia is betrayed by Odette and Thalia is sent off to The Outland – while managing to survive.

Synopsis

In the year 2082 in Indonesia, after the country fails to achieve its goal of being one of the biggest economic powers, a group of rich members of the society takes over the government and helps put the country back on its feet. Having narrowed everything down to one per necessity, e.g. one school, one hospital etc. for the sake of the economy, the people become more segregated. A 18-year-old working class (Nether) senior student named Thalia is among many senior students in the only school left (The Wallside) who must take one final examination called the Forte to determine their paths, which depends on their levels of resources labeled as Phuria and their intelligence. Thalia, who has low Phuria, must work extra hard to survive. Under the same condition, her twin sister Odette would rather eat sand than comply with the system. The consequence of failing the test is they get sent to an unknown, faraway place named The Outland. Their classroom teacher, Mr. Prayoga has a big plan of giving better lives to students in the Outland. Under the covers, Odette and her friend Bora and other students have a plan to escape the Outland. While trying to protect Odette from said place, Thalia always instructs Odette how to do things. However, Odette is tired of being treated like a child, and cuts ties between them.

The founder, or The Archruling poses a new rule that allows the students' parents Phuria to be added to the students', decreasing their chances of failing. However, the Forte comes, and despite their hard work, many students including Thalia and Odette are going to be sent to The Outland. Moved to a facility for The Outland, Thalia receives information from her dominant class (Utmost) friend, Felix, who apparently takes Thalia's chance of succeeding during the Forte. He lets her know that all Utmost students pay their leader, The Archruling to get to their desired Path, no effort needed. At the same time, other students bound for the Outland, including Odette, go with their plan and escape. Little do they know that them escaping is The Archruling's plan all along, justifying his intention of completely separating Nether from Utmost by sending as many Nether to The Outland as possible – basically leaving all Nether for dead. Unfortunately, Thalia and Odette are caught and almost killed. Odette, however, has a plan with her group of rebels and escapes, while managing to steal The Archruling's gold compass. Not actually knowing what it is for, it angers Thalia that Odette puts them at extra risk for a thing they do not know about. Then, Thalia meets Felix who helps her use the gold compass to expose The Archruling's evil plan.

With his plan found out by everyone, inside and outside the school, The Archruling hunts Thalia down with Bora's help. However, instead of leading him to Thalia, Bora leads him to Odette – making her must choose between living or giving up his twin sister. Little does Thalia know, Odette has taken The Archruling's side, in return for her becoming an Utmost student. Before Odette manages to kill Thalia as ordered by The Archruling, Bora kills Odette, to save her own life. Then, The Archruling is summoned to the Jakarta headquarters, where he

will face the consequences of his negligence in dealing with the situation. The story ends with Thalia being sent to The Outland forever, which angers other Nether students, causing riots within The Wallside. Meanwhile, Mr. Prayoga has found his own way to The Outland, giving uncertain hope for the students sent to The Outland.

Characters
Main characters:
- Thalia Kusuma, 18 years old
  A Nether level student, working class. She has become a natural hustler, working to accumulate Phuria. She is naturally curious and a quick-learner. She often moves away from confrontation. Despite that, she likes to question and try to fix things if she deems it wrong. She loves working since it gives her a sense of purpose. Sometimes she gets emotional, and she tends to do things impulsively. She takes everything seriously. She complies with the system, because she thinks that rebelling will get her to worse places than where she is now. She has short and straight dark hair and dresses neatly.

- Thalia's twin sister, Odette Kusuma, 18 years old
  She is independent and braver than Thalia if she sets her mind to it. She is curious too, like her twin sister. She would rather eat sand than do something she hates, such as working and studying. She deeply hates the system since it has been making her life difficult. Identical to her twin, she also has short and straight dark hair. She never wears her uniform properly, often ties her tie loosely. She wants nothing more than to have a good life, whatever it takes. In contrast to Thalia, Odette does not follow the rules, but often, she gives in to Thalia when she starts nagging her.

- Mr. Handoyo (The Archruling), 58 years old
  The most powerful person in The Wallside. He controls everything and does so to fulfill his desire of having more Phuria, hence more power, to be unbeatable. He thinks deeply and elaborately. He makes decisions that benefit himself. He is firm, some consider him an admirable leader for his intelligence and assertiveness. He has gray hair and is dressed in all white down to his shoes. However, with such power, he tends to do what he pleases, regardless of the consequences or the greater power above him.

Supporting characters:
- Felix Sutiono, 17 years old
  An Utmost student who is good friends with Thalia. They got to know each other when Thalia started doing her chore, since they meet often. He takes everything seriously and he is a hard worker for his own good. He is naïve and sometimes impulsive, making him do things without thinking of the long term consequences. He is tall, with tanned skin and has a lot of hair. His parents sent him to the Wallside from Jakarta, because they put a lot of money into the school.

- Thalia's friend, Gil, 16 years old
  Thalia's best friend in Nether. He is a hard worker, since his older sister got sent to the Outland several years before. This drive makes him sometimes greedy, not thinking of the consequences of his actions to others. But he is intelligent and strong-willed, and he cares for his closest people. He talks a lot. His thick glasses he worked two years to pay for sits nicely on his chubby cheeks. He is very proud of his genius brain, often taking every chance available to display his intelligence.

- Melvin, 18 years old
  A worker at the send-off station to the Outland. One batch older than Thalia, works alone until Felix comes. He follows orders well and risks anything to keep his job. He is a big fan of the Archruling, he sees him as his savior, therefore he is very loyal to the Archruling. He is sloppy and thinks highly of himself. He dresses neatly, accompanied by his round glasses under his thick eyebrows. He is a little shorter than Felix.

- Bora, 21 years old
  Odette's rebellious friend in Nether. A rebel who hates The Archruling and the system because she lost her closest friends to The Outland. She does whatever she wants because she sees no point in trying, she has nothing to lose. She only wants to get away from the school. Her arms are filled with scars she got from the guards because she often taunts them. She is brave, thorough, and she holds her ground firmly, which at times, makes her stubborn. She is extremely skinny, with thin hair framing her defined face.

- Thalia's class teacher, Mr. Prayoga, 42 years old
  He does not fully agree with the system, but he has found a way to keep himself in abundance despite being a Nether level teacher. He channels his abundance towards the students he cares for, especially those thrown away by the system. A black cane is his best friend, after he got involved in an accident when he tried to break off a fight between an angry guard and a clueless Nether student. His arms are full of scars as constant reminders of his youth when he used to fight with guards all the time. Many of his students fear and hate him, because they see him as being involved a lot with the powerful.

Conflicts

There will be two types of conflicts in this screenplay, which are man vs society and man vs self. The former, man vs society, is where a character fights against "...a man-made institution or practices" (Morell, 2009 as cited in Folarin, 2015, p. 5). This will be the larger conflict experienced by the screenplay's protagonist, emphasizing on the character's desire to stand up against the oppression she experiences under the system. The next conflict, man vs man, happens between people, although it is not always physical. Disagreement or cold behaviors are examples of this conflict (Folarin, 2015). Most of this conflict will show the tension between the protagonist and the more powerful people of the system, such as the founder and students in higher paths. This conflict will also happen between the protagonist and her twin sister, when the situation forces them to go against each other.

CONCLUSION

The screenplay is created to see that discrimination causes the working class students to be unable to improve their lives through the education system and to show that the discriminated students can expose the system's discriminatory actions which calls for a change in the system. With the aim to bring more light to the often overlooked issue in Indonesia, the screenplay uses the young adult dystopian genre to highlight the consequences of economic inequality in Indonesia's education system if left untreated. The main character, Thalia from the working class (Nether), experiences discrimination in many forms such as her worn-out uniform, her poor quality food and the high hostility by the dominant class (Utmost) due to her lack of capitals. Starting from trying to save herself and her twin sister Odette from being sent away to The Outland due to their lack in capitals, she decides to use her agency for the safety of

her peers. The school, The Wallside's leader (The Archruling) sees Nether students as threats which leads him to eliminate them all. However, Thalia stumbles upon the plan and she utilizes her agency to stop him, by exposing his plan to the whole country – hoping for someone to help the helpless students.

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