



**THE BINARY OPPOSITION OF EMPATHY AND VIOLENCE IN MARK
HERMAN'S *THE BOY IN THE STRIPPED PAJAMAS* THE MOVIE**

Wulandari ✉

Jurusan Bahasa Inggris, Fakultas Bahasa dan Seni, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

Info Artikel

Sejarah Artikel:

Diterima Oktober 2013

Disetujui Oktober 2013

Dipublikasikan
November 2013

Keywords:

*binary opposition, empathy,
violence*

Abstract

This study is attempted to analyze binary oppositions of Germans during WWII as reflected in the Boy in the Stripped Pajamas the Movie. The objectives are: 1) identifying the binary opposition of empathy and violence of German in the Boy in the Stripped Pajamas and 2) to know the things connected the empathic and violent Germans in the Boy in the Stripped Pajamas with Germany's historical background.

I use qualitative descriptive research and structuralism approach in this research. Source of the data is the movie script and scenes of in the movie. The data collected in this research are consisting of words, phrases, sentences and implicit meaning found in scenes laid in the movie. In conducting this research, I used observation sheets as the instrument. The data are collected by reading the movie script, identifying supportive text, inventorying the data into table, and classifying the data. From the analysis I concluded that (1) the characters is divided into two opposite groups; empathic characters and violent characters (2) the fictional characters in the Boy in the Stripped Pajamas connected with its historical background through three matters; jealousy, misinterpreted belief and enthusiasm of aggressiveness.

© 2013 Universitas Negeri Semarang

✉ Alamat korespondensi:

Gedung B3 Lantai 1 FBS Unnes

Kampus Sekaran, Gunungpati, Semarang, 50229

E-mail: wulansuyattanto@gmail.com

ISSN 2252-6463

INTRODUCTION

The Boy in the Stripped Pajamas by Mark Herman released in 2010. It touched people's heart by its sincere story of two different boys during Hitler's reign. Bruno, the only one son of German's soldier name Ralf is a nice adventurous young man of 10. He is a type of young man who loves adventurous book and have a passion of being a great explorer. He used to live in a busy and noisy place called as Berlin, the capital city of Germany but then has to move in and isolated remote house near farm area settled by 'funny farmers'.

There he meets and befriends Schmuell, the son of Jewish watchmaker. Those two friendships are a strange fact regards to condition of German which stressing on how noble they are and how low other ethnics such as Jewish are. This portrait of friendship makes this movie looks promising as an object of research.

The Boy in the Stripped Pajamas tells about the environment under living in Germany during Hitler's reign. *The Boy in the Stripped Pajamas* is a humanity movie, besides stressing on Bruno and Schmuell's friendship. It is a show of the lightning hope. A lightning hope for people that even in the darkest hour of mercy of mankind at least there is always someone keep believing in the mercy.

When the first time the writer watched this movie a question raises about why people can act cruelly toward other people. Why members of a family can act differently on seeing other s? Why did the way we seeing others can lead us to do violent? To get explanation of those questions this research conducted.

There are two major reasons for uplifting *the Boy in the Stripped Pajamas* the movie for final project. The first one is humanity issue. I hope by presenting this research people could comprehend that humans are created equally. Therefore there is no a reason to discriminate or hate people

because of their race. Then, the second reason for the choosing topic comes from affording an explanation for man's behavior using scientific researches and theories. The phenomenon of man bearing opposite potencies such as violence and empathy under his grey wet organ popular as brain.

This research have some objectives as listed below:

1. To identify the representative of binary opposition of empathy and violence of German in *the Boy in the Stripped Pajamas*.
2. To know connection of empathic and violent German in *the Boy in the Stripped Pajamas* with Germany's historical background.

The result of this research hopefully able to bring advantages in theoretically and practically forms. First in theoretically matters this research helps to know how people could behave in empathic manner or in contrary in violence manner. Then in practical matter we might accept a fact the necessity of diversity in any matter. In other word difference found in our social life is a part of making harmony, thus there should be any reason for any living being to push someone else to have similar thought as him.

DISCUSSION

4.1 The Binary Opposition of Empathy and Violence

In this research good and evil represented by the binary opposition of empathy and violence Empathy is the ability to read and understand people and be in-tune with or resonate with others, voluntarily or involuntarily of one's empath capacity (http://healing.about.com/cs/empathic/a/uc_empathtraits.htm). Whereas violence defined as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against a person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation stands

in evil
(<http://www.who.int/violenceprevention/approach/definition/en/>).

4.1.1 Characters Dominated by Empathy

There were two character in the Boy in the Stripped Pajamas who dominated by empathy. First was Bruno, main character of this movie. And second was Elsa, Bruno's and Gretel's mother.

4.1.1.1 Bruno

Bruno was 8 years old boy of Nazi soldier who adored his father much, loved to play battle fight and planed to be a great explorer. One day his father got promotion as Commandant yet consequence asked his to move at a house in a remote area of concentration camp and Ralf was in charge to run it well. Otherwise Bruno thought the concentration camp back at his new house was no more than a strange farm house who farmers wearing same uniform of pajamas in daily activities.

In one dinner accident happened. In dining time a Jewish servant unintentionally spilt wine into one soldier's uniform. He raised his temper and made the soldier beat the servant. Bruno scared to death to see such a violence act but he could not do anything to stop the violence. He finally able to protest what had just happened after dinner over and there were only he and his sister.

4.1.1.2 Elsa

Elsa was a mother of two kid; Gretel and Bruno. She had a husband she really proud of named Ralf who worked as Nazi soldier. However Elsa's stand point started to change when the soldier unintentionally told her that stinky smell came sourced from the combustion was in fact did not burning rubbish but cremation of body of Jewish. All of sudden she felt disgusting with Ralf and what he had been doing in the concentration camp.

Elsa was a woman who knew that her power did not backed by the mass of muscle but woman's affection. She then continued her protest by tried to open Ralf eyes to family value where war was not supposed separated a family because of different political value. At the end Elsa's allusion moved Ralf to reconsider the presence of their family at a house close to the concentration camp.

4.1.2 Characters Dominated by Violence

There are some characters which represents violence. It consists of Ralf (father), Gretel, Lieutenant Kotler and Her Liszt.

4.1.2.1 Ralf

Ralf was a father of two kids a husband of Elsa and a faithful soldier of Germany. He had just been promoted as new commandant. This promotion seemed to be a significant achievement of his childhood dream of being a soldier.

Ralf's childhood dream took a consequence for his personality which built by aggression, violence, and ignorance in the name of fatherland. He justified any violence act he done for the sake of making Germany back into its Glory. It seemed that in the eyes of Ralf there was not a limit for violence and cruelty so long as it matched with his job.

4.1.2.1 Gretel

Gretel was the only daughter of Ralf and Elsa and sister of Bruno. She at earlier scene was portrayed as normal little girl who keened on playing doll. She also portrayed as nice little devotee before her came to the concentration camp.

When the servant got beaten by the soldier at family dinner she seemed less bother it. She even gave understanding for Bruno who had not finishing his shock after watched the beating of Pavel.

4.1.2.3 Lieutenant Kotler

Lieutenant Kotler was an 18 year old soldier helped at Ralf's family to serve them in daily occasion. Besides his young ages Lieutenant Kotler also could manage himself in mood of violence. He could beat an old weak servant a young lad when he accused him of talking and stealing pastries at Ralf's house. There was not an excuse of having a mercy toward people considered by Germany as evil cause of its miserable condition post First World War.

4.1.2.4 Herr Liszt

Herr Liszt was a private tutor for Gretel and Bruno. His main lesson was history of Germany within its falling and revival. He continuously inducted Bruno and Gretel the idea of Glorious Germany in past and how it was destructed by Jewish. In Herr Liszt perspective for miserable thing happened upon Germany and Germans there were Jewish behind its cause. There was not a chance he stressed, for any Jewish of being good.

4.2 The Things Connected the Empathic & Violent Germans in *the Boy in the Stripped Pajamas* with Germany's Historical Background

This sub-chapter discuss about aspects which supports German in *the Boy in the Stripped Pajamas* set on Hitler's reign to classify himself either on block of empathy or block of violence. Below is the discussion.

Environment in *the Boy in the Stripped Pajamas* is Germany post First World War which led by ruthless Hitler. Hitler succeed to invert poor condition occurred in Germany because of lose war and Treaty of Versailles thus he became the idol of Germans. Besides made good again the condition he also inserted the idea of gluing together Germans by proposing public enemy as the tool. The public enemy materialized in Jewish.

Jewish was seemed as successful minority who control many aspects of Germany such as education, art, economy

and politic whereas the indigenous German lived poorly. Imbalance between the newcomer and indigenous sprouted dissatisfaction for the indigenous and been used by Hitler and his reign cleverly. He popularized Jewish as the public enemy and as the scape goat of misery. This agreement of the public enemy then accepted by most of people. Most of these people built environment which claiming source of their misery belonged to Jewish. However it gave a negative impact for German by putting them in stress condition caused in jealousy for the minority success.

Jealousy drive by part of brain named *amygdala* (<http://m.detik.com/health/read/2013/02/06/185720/2163162/763/cemburu-adalah-penyakit>). *Amygdala* giving response to schizophrenia, a mental disorder which symptoms include paranoid (Hirsch, 2003: 21). Jealousy felt by them then was no more than a materialization of their paranoia. They seemed to be insecure of losing his existence because of Jewish. Besides that, giving stimulation on *amygdala* also causing a strong emotion materialized in aggression or violence (<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/04/100409093405.htm>). Thus jealousy happened on Germans during Hitler's reign creeping to other problems included 1) paranoia and 2) aggression.

Unfortunately this jealousy nursed by the leader (Hitler) continuously and implicated in mental destruction of German which later led them to be paranoia seeing newcomer like Jewish and helped them to be aggressive and end in violence. It was an unfortunate event for their brain since the continuous jealousy interfere them to be empathic mankind. *Amygdala* correlates with *ventromedial prefrontal cortex* which responsible for empathy and guilty feeling was going to be more difficult to be shown. By living the jealousy made German to be less emphatic thus slaughter another mankind for example Jewish ruthlessly.

Deep inside the wet grey brain of the antagonists such as Ralf, Gretel, Lieutenant Kotler and Herr Liszt were in state of jealousy, paranoia, and hatred to Jewish it influenced them in these matters:

1. Suppressing the empathy
2. Uniting them with other Germans

The way the antagonist perceived problem of their fatherland depended on which one was dominated emotion they had, whether it was empathy or violence. More jealousy, paranoia, and hatred they preserved would be more negative excess materialized in violence they could do. This conclusion rises while comparing with Luis Moya Albiol Research in Chapter II which shown mankind will tend to be less empathic if they act ruthlessly. It was a vicious circle for anyone who had done one act of violence and did not try to payback it by being empathic mankind like shown by Lieutenant Kotler.

Lieutenant Kotler in *the Boy n the Stripped Pajamas* depicted as a young ruthless soldier of Germany who had beaten a Jewish (Pavel) easily without sorry. Later he did not regret it nor has a mental problem because of it. He continued to beat another Jewish even though it was just a little boy of eight like Schmuel. Violence he did difficult to stop since mind was set to be consistence in whatever man's doing.

Then we get first aspect which made German in *the Boy in the Stripped Pajamas* classified either empathy block or violence block. It was jealousy as the root. If a German such as Herr Liszt or Ralf disabled to manage his worry of Jewish and threw away the jealousy he then did not have to be involved in aggressive thought and violence acts. In contrary if the worry succeed been kicked out such as done by Bruno, he was the one in empathy block.

Post First World War was an awful time for Germany. As has been mentioned in Chapter II the signing of Treaty of Versailles brought Germany deep down bankruptcy. The bankruptcy caused by the obligation of

paying billion Deutschmark (currency of Germany before Euro) reparation payments and lost its overseas colony. In short German had lost their comfort zone and ought to face a bitter condition and been blamed for the war.

By the time of Third Reich era of Hitler the pride of being a great and strong nation given back. Rearmament and military service introduced to people whereas based on Treaty of Versailles Germany rearmament must not been done in any way. Secretly Germany had been planned to it even in small scale dated back to the Treaty (Seward, 1988: 118). This Army or Wehrmacht and any other organizations under Nazi party and Hitler like Schutzstaffel (SS), Strumabteilung (SA), Labor Corps, and Hitler Youth wore their uniform with pride (Seward, 1988: 109). Once again statement in previous chapter saying that uniform stands for not only as ordinary clothes but as a showcase of deeper emotional feeling called as pride proved in this matter.

There was full employment and genuine job by security by 1938 (Seward, 1988: 108). A complete different condition under Hitler while comparing it with 1933 which by the eyes seeing a lot of unemployed fulfilling the street by 6 million amount of people. National income doubled in just four year and the national debt disappeared. The future seemed stroke back nicely for German, they had been able to enjoy went on holidays which disable they reached during past few years after war.

This success of Germany helped Hitler on massively building people's trust. Beside financial and sovereignty matters there was another factor putting people under his command: charisma. Historian Laurence Rees commented in BBC was nothing but a quasi-religious leader who offered almost spiritual goals of redemption and salvation (<http://m.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-20237437>). Germans suffered through massive unemployment as the impact of

Wall Street Crash of 1929 were starving for 'salvation'. And Hitler fulfilled that hoped of hopeless people. Then this fulfilling tended as a milestone of national agreement on whatever Hitler's saying and doing.

Beside fixed the economy aspect Hitler also used the condition post First World War by proposed them an exit door to be blamed. He proposed Jewish as the public enemy they could be blamed on for the misery. Psychologically it was a nice move of Hitler. It helped Germans on focusing their strength to face the outsider (Jewish) and concentrating themselves as one nation bearing same bad luck. Hitler built a massive cohesiveness among German.

This scape goat addressed to Jewish supported by paranoia symptoms of German as has been mentioned in Chapter II. It included aggressiveness, delusions of persecution and megalomania which has been reflected in *the Boy in the Striped Pajamas'* story. In conclusion all the aggressiveness had done by the antagonists German signs for social psychology's trick of cohesiveness and an output of their inner mental problem.

Ralf, Gretel, Lieutenant Kotler and Herr Liszt were succeeding to see what Hitler wanted them to see. To see Jewish as national threaten and support war helped them connecting each other. They were in the same boat facing miserable things happened to their fatherland and in agreement to do anything included war then strike back the condition.

Thus in any chance in the figuration of WWII (1939-1945) was expected to cohesive people in one identity and destiny. However this war played another aims: to defeat enemies and take advantages from their shellacking. Jeffrey Record professed about Second World War benefit for Germany:

Racial survival depended on racial expansion and racial expansion depended on spacial expansion. But spacial expansion also meant inevitable war, since those inferior races occupying the vital living space

could not be expected to voluntarily submit to the new racial order (Record, 2005: 13).

Spacial expansion needed by Nazi to provide a space area of *lebensraum* (living space) for German planned stretched across Vistula to Ural. And this large space resided by millions of people, millions of non Aryans, millions of lower species of mankind for Nazi believers. As mentioned in *Mein Kampf* that races which are culturally superior but less ruthless would be forced to restrict their increase, because of insufficient territory to support the population, while less civilized races could increase indefinitely, owing to the vast territories at their disposal. Having another World War was a challenge for Hitler. To make his dream of *Lebensraum* succeed through people willing full participation he needed to get people's trust of his maneuver. For most of German who had been defeated severely and infected badly their pride as a nation on financial, emotional and sovereignty matter there must a comeback way. The way made up by improvement on financial matter. And he succeeded it.

The misinterpreted belief in having of public enemy to help cohesiveness and to reject distraction of completing national goal of revival was the second aspect to determine Germans either included in s emphatic people or violent people. Bruno failed to comprehend the idea of nodding Jewish as the public enemy since he by his own eyes witnessed a kind help provided by his Jewish servant, Pavel, and also nice friendship provided by his Jewish friend, Schmuel. It seemed hard for Bruno to balance the idea of the public enemy and his own experienced with Jewish thus at last he has to choose which one of side he would accept as a fact. Bruno chose to believe his experience and object any idea of doing violence.

However the antagonists' behavior could not be separated by historical background. At those times people of German was living in an enthusiasm mood of war. A "holy flame of anger" was a term

substitution for Germans on describing their first contribution on World War (WWI) experience dated back on 1 August 1914 (Berliner Morgenpost, 1914: 3). National Socialist Party or famously in its short name: Nazi claiming its accession to [political] power as a recreation of the days of 1914 (Verhey, 2000: 4. Spickernagel, a propaganda officer in 1917 described the spirit of 1914 as a spirit which is still alive in the army, this spirit of manliness and the happy and willing incorporation of the individual in the whole, this faithful and unshakeable trust in the leadership and in one's own strength (Standford, Hoover Colection Archives, p. 6). However what those quotations of the spirit of 1914 connected to?

On 28 June 1914 the Crown Prince of Austro-Hungarian murdered by Serbian making foreign relation between two neighbor countries temperature's got higher. A heedless ultimatum up to 25 July at 6.00 p.m. to Serbia announced by Austria carried Germany's involvement in conflagration. Germany to be underlined was an ally of Austria at that time. The rejected ultimatum at the end made Germans must be participated in this war for the sake of fulfilling alliance's obligation on war.

Surprisingly the Germans looked enthusiast checking for their participation on the war caused by the murder of Austro-Hungarian crown prince. They sang patriotic songs, gathered at public spaces, and yelling hurrah to show how huge enthusiasm of them on intercepting a war message (Verhey,2000: 2). This spirit of 1914 noted as check point of German's unity where political parties dissolved and synthesized in one German as Kaiser speech aired. Even more journalists, politicians, and theologians asserted not just courageous value above this war but also religious value on accepting the spirit of 1914 as mentioned on opening paragraph. Surely the German accepted the war as a joyous moment.

Then considering those quotations we may track back German's point of view on accepting war even the war itself did not connect directly with their social, economy and sovereignty of their own but Austro-Hungaria. Even Hitler himself recalled that moment of First World War as "Surely the time had come--so the Press declared--for us Germans to remember that this war was **not** our work" (1925: 136). Furthermore the spirit when German participated in pioneer of future First World War had peculiar accepted as one of Germany's greatest days (Lutz, 1932: 16). This was the day where awareness national identity rose (Verhey: 8). War sounded interesting. It unified fractions inside German to look at them as one unity.

This reaction toward war acting as external has been predicted by a psychologist named David Liebermann. Liebermann (2000: 178) mentioned that cohesiveness of any group worked through appearance of common enemy.

Thus war and all aggressiveness included in it were considered as part of spiritual experience. There was enthusiasm sparked among German on seeing the war. Thus to made any German either to be emphatic or violent depended on the way they perceived enthusiasm of aggressiveness.

In conclusion empathy and violence among the characters of *the Boy in the Stripped Pajamas* could be seen through these aspects: 1) jealousy 2) misinterpreted belief, and 3) enthusiasm of aggressiveness.

CONCLUSION

On this research I draw these conclusions from previous discussion. They are as below:

Firstly, *the Boy in the Stripped Pajamas* is a looking glass to watch things going on happened during Hitler's reign. Here we can see how Germans at that time seeing themselves and judging other races mostly Jew as no more than just a stinky garbage.

Secondly, to gather people under one empathy and ideology then the most effective is either by having or creating common enemy and combination of both having and creating public enemy. Post Second World War brings traumatic emotions among Germans. They must paid huge reparation as one of war initiator, loose his territories, and got into bankruptcy as war after effects. This humiliation as a nation needed a recovery back to his glory. Hitler with his dark charisma tended to bring new hope for people of German even though he was Austrian originated.

Next *the Boy in the Stripped Pajamas* is a movie of the light of hope at critical moment. Even at the darkest hour of mankind a least there is always someone who thinks differently against the mainstreamers. In every dark night there is always sunrise waiting.

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/04/100409093405.htm> [accessed 09/02/12].
<http://www.who.int/violenceprevention/approach/definition/en/> [accessed 07/22/2013]

REFERENCES

- Hirsch, S., and Weinberger, D. 2003. *Schizophrenia*. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Lieberman, D. J. 2000. *Get Anyone to Do Anything: Never Feel Powerless Again-with Psychological Secrets to Control and Influence Every Situation*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.
- Lutz, R. 1932. *Documents of the German Revolution, vol. I*. Stanford: The University.
- Record, J. 2005. *Investigating the Mythology of the 1930's*. Forbes Ave: Strategic Studies Institute.
- Seward. D. 1988. *Napoleon and Hitler: a Comparative Biography*. New York: Penguin Group.
- Verhey, J. 2000. *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth, and Mobilization in Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Website List

- <http://m.detik.com/health/read/2013/02/06/185720/2163162/763/cemburu-adalah-penyakit> [accessed at 04/10/2013]
(http://healing.about.com/cs/empathic/a/uc_empathtraits.htm)