

## THE CENTRAL CHARACTER'S SOCIAL BACKGROUND AND ITS RELATION TO DOMESTIC CONFLICT IN KEVIN KWAN'S *RICH PEOPLE PROBLEM*

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### ABSTRAK

The thesis entitled "The Central Character's Social Background and Its Relation to Domestic Conflict in Kevin Kwan's *Rich People Problem*" is the main topic of this research. The novel itself was published in 2017. The method used in this research is descriptive analysis method by analyzing and describing the central character's social background and how it is related to the cause of domestic conflicts through the use of intrinsic and extrinsic elements. The results showed that a person's social background affects their life and character which gave rise to domestic conflict, meaning that domestic conflicts can be caused by different social backgrounds even though they come from the same family lineage. In this particular case, the domestic conflict that occurred because of such condition, was in the form of a fight over the family's main inheritance, namely Tyersall Park.

*Keywords:* social background, central characters, habitus, wealth background

### I. BACKGROUND

Humans can be classified into two aspects, namely biologically and sociologically. These two aspects make humans have a prominent trait that distinguishes them from other living things. From the biological side, humans are classified as species with high brain abilities. As social creatures, humans are part of the social system of society that cannot live alone because they need others to interact and socialize to meet the needs of their lives in society (Suranto, 2011).

One of the results of interaction within the community environment is social status. Social status is a social background that has been

acquired by a person since they were born, this is passed down from the parents. The social setting and its role are elements in the social structure that have an important role for the social system. Social background is also related to the social status of the character in question, for example, low, middle, or upper social status.

Ralph Linton (Ritzer, George. 2004: 13) saying that social status is a set of rights and obligations that a person has in their society. Made Pidarta (1997: 233) says, people say a person's life is improving or

declining is always associated with their economy. Pidarta's statement hints that a person's social status is always associated with their economic level and their role in society.

The novel *Rich People Problem* by Kevin Kwan, published in 2017, is the final series of a satirical trilogy that raises high-class social backgrounds. Each character has a different social background. Kevin Kwan is a writer born in Singapore and grew up in the United States.

Kevin stated that *Rich People Problem* as the last book of the *crazy rich trilogy* is the script with the longest to finish. Because of the conflict based on the differences in social background with his immediate environment, namely the Young family circle, which he thinks is very difficult for him to describe because the conflict that Kevin presents in this novel is a conflict between families who fight for each other's main inheritance in order to increase social status.

Nurdjana (1994) states that the conflict is a result of a situation in which a desire or will is different or opposite to each other, one or both of them are disturbed by each other. So there are differences of opinion caused by several factors such as jealousy and the economy. An example of a conflict that fits these conditions is the domestic conflict that occurred within the Young family in the fight for the main inheritance.

The novel *Rich People Problem* by Kevin Kwan was chosen as the object of this study because it discusses the influence of social settings on the behavior of a society that involves different social classes, namely the upper class or commonly referred to as the 'wealthy people' and the middle social class. Meanwhile, the reason for the chosen topic is because the central characters in this novel have different social backgrounds involving high and middle social status which is interesting to examine. Therefore, the formulation of the problems are:

1. How does social background affect the life of the central characters.

2. How does the social background influence the central characters in the novel *Rich People Problem* by Kevin Kwan,

3. What are the correlation between the central characters social background and the emergence of domestic conflict in the novel *Rich People Problem* by Kevin Kwan.

## II. RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a qualitative research because the data collected are in the form of narrative literary works and theories, also understandings that are used to support the analysis. Analyzing and describing matters relating to the social background and its influence on the central characters in order to see how it correlates with the emergence of domestic conflicts are the focus of this study.

The research method used in this study is descriptive analysis, that is by analyzing and describing all aspects related to the social background and its influence on the central characters that causes domestic conflicts to occur. The analysis is supported by applying intrinsic theories such as characters, settings, plots, conflicts, symbols, themes and ironies and the extrinsic theory which is the theory of habitus by Pierre Bourdieu.

## III. RESULTS

The central characters in the novel *Rich People Problem* are Eddie and Nick. The two central characters play equally important roles throughout the storyline and both are instrumental in their involvement with the most conflicts from the beginning to the end of the story in the entire story of the novel.

Eddie and Nick as the central characters are presented indirectly (*Indirect Presentation*) because they are spoken implicitly. They are also the central characters in the novel because the characters are both dynamic, meaning that these

two characters change or develop due to the situation involving them.

The analysis begins with a description of Eddie's character. The character and identity of the character can be seen through the physiological dimension, the sociological dimension and the psychological dimension. Based on the physiological dimensions, Eddie's character is shown to be full and short, his hair is always arranged climactically presenting a formal vibe and neat impression, as well as clothes that always look eccentric. Another central character, Nick, is shown as a tall, pleasant, and handsome-looking man who is sweet when smiling because of his hospitality.

In terms of the psychological dimension, the two central characters are both people who are easy to get along with and socialize, the difference is that Eddie is easy to get along with in order to have many connections to improve his social status, especially through business and his heart is not as sincere when interacting with someone. Meanwhile, Nick is easy to get along with because of his friendly and simple nature, and is sincere in heart when interacting with someone. In Eddie's case, he always wanted to look superior to the rest.

A portrait of a social background shown with adequate economic status will support a person's appearance. The better the economic status, the better the position and place in the community.

Eddie is a perfectionist, he does not want to look like he has weaknesses in the eyes of others. Therefore, he tried hard to improve his family's lifestyle to be considered from a circle of high social background. The social background becomes a benchmark for how a person is viewed and enforced in society (Ni Wayan, I Nengah, I Nyoman. 2020). Eddie's ambitious actions are often considered excessive

by those around him, especially by his sisters from the Young family. Eddie is considered crazy because his obsession with always wanting to look superior to his brothers looks exaggerated.

Because of the lack of direct explanation of Nick's character, his description of character can be concluded from Nick's conversations with people who were described as simple characters in the novel. Compared to Eddie, who lives a luxurious life, Nick is the opposite of Eddie. Although Nick comes from a family with a higher social background than Eddie because Nick is the first real descendant of the Young family, his life is not as luxurious as Eddie. After marriage, Nick chose to live in New York and abandoned all the luxuries of his family and lived a simpler life with Rachel Chu, his wife.

From a sociological point of view, Nick comes from a family of high social background. Meanwhile, Eddie comes from a family with a lower social background than Nick. According to the family tree of Young family, who is of native Chinese descent, Reported from HG.org who has the right to inherit the main inheritance is the descendant of the first son. Therefore, the one who has the right to inherit Tyersall Park is the first male descendant, because Philip Young chose to give up his name from the main heir, then Nick automatically became the main heir. Therefore. This caused Nick to feel a lot of pressure, especially from the Young family and decided to live freely after he moved to New York.

Nick's current life after the events of a few years ago that caused bad relationship with his extended family. The anxiety that Nick felt because he did not gain the trust of Su Yi as his favorite grandson made Nick choose to rebel. In this case, it is Su Yi as the older generation who still sees a person from their social background. Therefore, Su Yi wants Nick to marry a woman who has the same social background as him.

In Eddie's case, he is half of Young's descendants because his mother is the one from the Young family. Which makes Eddie born as a Cheng clan that has a middle social background. However, most of his life was with the Young family, this is what made Eddie try very hard to be equal to the Young family.

Based on the role of the character according to Aminudin (2012), Eddie can be said to be an antagonist because it causes conflicts. In addition, Eddie has evil traits that are not liked by readers. His excessive ambition also caused a lot of bad things to happen, especially to Nick. Eddie told his whole family that Su Yi did not want to see Nick at his critical moments. However, it was just Eddie's manipulation so that Nick could not meet Su Yi and decide on Nick's opportunity to be able to make up with Su Yi, so that Eddie's chances of becoming the main heir were not threatened.

Nick's character can be said to be the protagonist who gained the sympathy of readers because his relationship with Su Yi was not good, making Nick excluded from the main heir list. In addition, Nick falls victim to Eddie's manipulation in Eddie's ambition to get Tyersall Park.

The setting of the place that occurs in this novel takes place in several countries that are the setting of places such as New York, and Singapore. However, most of the incidents occurred in Su Yi's mansion, which is in Tyersall Park, Singapore.

The plot connects the entirety of the events experienced by the two central characters. One event caused the other event to occur, its the occurrence of a domestic conflict between Nick and his grandmother which caused a change in the main heir because Nick cut off communication with his extended family which then made Eddie experience confidence that he

would replace Nick as the main heir to Tyersall Park. Eddie thus making Nick unable to see his grandmother and Eddie's chances of becoming Tyersall Park's heir are getting bigger.

According to the theory of *habitus*, Eddie wants to show that he comes from a family with a high social background by showing his abilities. The intended *habitus* is as a mental structure that Eddie uses to deal with his social life (Harpindo Syah, 2019: 34).

Eddie lied that Su Yi did not want to meet Nick, thus making Nick unable to make up with his grandmother, this event was the beginning of the domestic conflict between Eddie and Nick. However, out of regret for having fought a cold war with his beloved grandmother, Nick tried various ways to get into Tyersall Park. At first Nick struggled because Tyersall Park was in very tight guard and his guards had only been working for about two years and did not know Nick. With the help of his best friend and cousin, Colin and Astrid. Nick managed to meet the butler who already knew Nick well. Afterwards, Nick manages to sneak in without being noticed by Eddie.

Eddie learns Nick who managed to meet Su Yi becomes panicked and when no one listens to him to stop Nick who is talking to Su Yi, Eddie becomes angry. Fiona, who saw Eddie about to get out of control, immediately resuscitated Eddie not to get out of control. This event also illustrates the irony in the character of Eddie who has to control himself from his mental instability.

After meeting and resolving the conflict that occurred between Nick and Su Yi. Not long after, Su Yi exhaled her last breath. Su Yi's death caused the Man Against Man conflict between the central characters, Eddie who blamed Nick had killed Su Yi because it was Nick who met Su Yi before and caused her heart disease to be weak because of meeting Nick.

Eddie not getting a single penny from Tyersall Park angering him. This shows a surprise at the conflict that occurs. Eddie, who only learned that his wife was a witness when Su Yi signed the will, had an unstable mentality. Eddie had a big fight with his wife which caused him to lose self-control. This is what caused Eddie to lose to Nick in getting the inheritance.

After the distribution of the inheritance, the result of which confused the Young family, was finally decided. The result was to sell Tyersall Park and the proceeds will be distributed according to the percent obtained. However, Nick felt that his cousin was always greedy and is in a hurry to sell Tyersall Park while Su Yi had not died long ago. This triggers the domestic conflict between Nick and his cousin who wants to sell the high-value of Tyersall Park immediately.

The Man Against Himself conflict happened again, namely between Nick and himself, which can be seen from Nick's guilt of not visiting Su Yi early and being able to fix everything, Nick, who lived and grew up in Tyersall Park, could not just let it go. This refers to Habitus as Nick's son who is used to being called 'the Tyersall Park boy'. Finally Nick admits that he is not okay if Tyersall Park falls on someone else even though it is still his family but no one can take care of Tyersall Park as well as himself.

After learning that it was his wife who was a witness when Su Yi wrote the inheritance division letter, Eddie experienced a Man Against Man conflict, namely with his wife, Fiona. The altercation between Eddie and Fiona made the sound of broken things from the room where they were arguing which the servants could hear. Eddie blames Fiona for failing to make their family equal to the Young family who can make her children live well. Fiona manages to stop Eddie's crazy stunts by threatening to leave him which ends up Eddie crying on Fiona's lap. This

proves that the social background of Eddie's character is related to the domestic conflict between himself and Fiona.

Nick managed to keep Tyersall Park and make it even more high in terms of value. In addition, Nick also retained the entire assets of the Young family and became the head of the Young family. In addition, Nick and Rachel have already been fully accepted by the Young family. Meanwhile, Eddie became a better person and no longer had the ambition to improve his social background after losing to Nick because he did not get his main inheritance, his relationship with his family became better. His mental health got better after seeing a therapist and accepting the fact that Tyersall Park could not be owned.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion through the study of the central character in *Rich People Problem* by Kevin Kwan, a contrast condition between the two central characters are obtained in this study. Obviously, the contrast lies in the social background of the central characters. Eddie, who came from a family with a middle social background and Nick, who came from a family with a high social background. This can be seen in the lifestyles of the two different central characters.

Eddie, being a person who pays great attention to everything, felt that he must be perfect and luxurious, because for him, a person's appearance shows his social status. Therefore, this description of Eddie is his habitus that was formed from an early age. By doing this, he wants to be recognized by the surrounding environment, in the sense that everyone must see and acknowledge what he has. Meanwhile, Nick is simpler than Eddie. He prefers to keep a low profile, remain humble and not to stand out in his life by showing neither his wealth nor power.



The other result of this study shows that the social background has an effect on the character of the central characters. Eddie, who grew up from the shadow of the Young family, became very ambitious to become the successor of the Young family, he felt his life at that time was not enough because he was not equal to the Young family. Eddie grew up to be an arrogant person. Meanwhile, Nick has nothing he worries about from childhood so there is no ambition like Eddie that causes Nick to grow better than Eddie. That influence could have had good repercussions as it did to Nick when the domestic conflict over Tyersall Park's main legacy took place which realized his grandmother's treatment had been his good for Nick's happiness. Therefore, Nick became a sincere person and cared about his environment.

Eddie who was arrogant and ended up not getting the main inheritance at the end suffered from mental health. In addition, this occurred because of his way of thinking. He thinks that in a person's life, the influence of a social background is very important in living life in society because many see a person from his social background. The higher the status of the social community, the higher its place in society.

From some of the results obtained from a series of research processes above, it can be concluded that the influence of the social setting in the novel *Rich People Problem* shows that the life lived by the central characters is influenced by the social setting of the two different characters and the domestic conflict that occurs between Eddie and Nick completely occurs because the social backgrounds of the two different characters. Eddie, who ambitiously wants to match Nick in his social status and to replace Nick ends up in Nick being disturbed which eventually gives rise to the conflict that emerge between the two central characters.

Differences in social status can be a case that causes domestic conflict. Basically, humans want to be recognized by other human beings, whether they want to get validation from others or just for their own desires. In the end, however, all equally want the best for their families.

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