

**SOCIAL MOBILITY REFLECTED IN THE KNIVES OUT FILM (2019): A  
MARXISM APPROACH**



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Surakarta, 28 October 2021



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## **SOCIAL MOBILITY REFLECTED IN THE KNIVES OUT FILM (2019): A MARXISM APPROACH**

### **Abstract**

The aim of this research is to show how social mobility is depicted in Rian Johnson's Knives Out movie. This study belongs to qualitative research. The writer will use descriptive qualitative method. The data is from non-human sources. The primary data source is Knives Out movie published in 2019 also with the script. Written and Directed by Rian Johnson. The secondary data source is material related to the research, such as articles, books, and other sources. Both online and offline sources. In collecting data, researcher used observation method. The researcher uses Marxist Theory by Karl Marx to discuss social mobility in Knives Out movie. This research produces several conclusions. First, there are indicators of social mobility, namely the existence of occupational, authority, and property structure. Second, social mobility is illustrated by means of a plot that affects characters. Third, social mobility is an issue in this film because it is a form of response to social conditions that exist in society.

Keywords: Knives Out, Social Mobility, Marxist

### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menunjukkan bagaimana mobilitas sosial digambarkan dalam film Knives Out karya Rian Johnson. Penelitian ini termasuk penelitian kualitatif. Penulis akan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif. Data berasal dari sumber non-manusia. Sumber data primer adalah film Knives Out yang diterbitkan pada tahun 2019 juga dengan naskahnya. Ditulis dan disutradarai oleh Rian Johnson. Sumber data sekunder adalah bahan-bahan yang berhubungan dengan penelitian, seperti artikel, buku, dan sumber lainnya. Baik sumber online maupun offline. Dalam pengumpulan data, peneliti menggunakan metode observasi. Peneliti menggunakan Teori Marxis oleh Karl Marx untuk membahas mobilitas sosial dalam film Knives Out. Penelitian ini menghasilkan beberapa kesimpulan. Pertama, terdapat indikator mobilitas sosial, yaitu adanya struktur pekerjaan, wewenang, dan kepemilikan. Kedua, mobilitas sosial digambarkan melalui plot yang mempengaruhi karakter. Ketiga, mobilitas sosial menjadi isu dalam film ini karena merupakan bentuk respon terhadap kondisi sosial yang ada di masyarakat.

Kata Kunci: *Knives Out, Mobilitas Sosial, Marxis*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In this life, there is a community, and in that society, there are various classes. Generally, the community is divided into lower classes, middle classes, and upper classes. Class divisions in society can be based on education, family, and economic status. The most striking and most often applied in society is the division of social classes based on economics. In certain social classes, they will get particular rights. In general, the higher social class of a person, the more privilege they get.

The social construction of social class on society is controversial (Fussel, 1992; Storck, 2002). Social classes are challenging to define. Several experts define social class. For Marx, the secret to understanding capitalism and other socioeconomic arrangements or development processes is to examine economic dynamics, social roles and even shifts in such frameworks. In the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels argue that the past of every life that remains to now is the past of class struggles. (Bottomore, p. 75). Marx argued that there were two social classes - the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

In life, it is very possible for social change to occur. One of them is social mobility. Many people think that the higher the social position, the happier their life is, that's why people are competing to make social change. Social mobility can be defined as the act of moving from one social class to another. (Horton & Hunt, 1984: 369). According to Soekanto (2001: 68) defines social mobility as movement in social structures. According to Kimball Young, the social structure contains the relationships between individuals and their groups.

One film that contains elements of social mobility is a film written and also directed by American filmmaker Rian Johnson. His film, *Knives Out*, indirectly displays social class in society. This film tells the story of a young woman named Marta Cabrera, played by Ana de Armas. Marta comes from a family of illegal immigrants. Marta is a nurse and close friend of Harlan Thrombey, a wealthy novelist. Harlan Thrombey, on his 85th birthday, was found dead in his chair with an incision in his neck. After the discovery, a character, played by Daniel Craig, named Benoit Blanc, a private detective, appeared. Blanc asked all family members at home when Harlan was killed. From all the interviews of family members, Blanc knew that everything was lying. Blanc walks the house and meets with Marta, and makes Marta become his assistant after learning that Marta cannot

lie. After searching, a character named Ransom, played by Chris Evans, appears. Starting here, the climax of this film begins.

The reading of the Harlan's will begins. The event was attended by the entire Thrombey family, including Marta. In the will, it is written that Harlan bestows all his assets for his nurse, Marta. The whole family was shocked to hear this and did not believe in it. The whole family urges Marta to release the treasure to family members who are blood-related to Harlan. Starting from pressing and making subtle threats. All family members do it except Ransom. At the end of the film, little by little, the mystery of Harlan's death unfolds. It is known that Ransom tried to accuse Marta by exchanging the drugs that Marta used to give to Harlan every day. This makes Marta guilty of Harlan's death. Harlan did not want Marta guilty, so Harlan made plans to run away for Marta and finally cut his neck with a knife. Ransom unconsciously admitted his evil deeds after Marta set him up. The film ends with Ransom's arrest by the police and Marta being the owner of Thrombey's property.

The major problem of the study is how social mobility reflected in the Knives Out Film. The problem of the study is dissected further into the following research questions. (1) What are the indicators of social mobility in Knives Out film? (2) How does the author illustrate social mobility in Knives Out film? (3) Why does the author address social mobility in Knives Out film?

## **2. METHOD**

This study is belonging to qualitative research. The data is from non-human sources. This study describes the social mobility reflected in Knives Out film. A qualitative method is the method which aims to find the answer of phenomena through systematic scientific procedures.

The steps of collecting data are conducted as follows: (1) Watching the movie repeatedly. (2) Finding the major character that will be analyzed. (3) Reading script, books and other related articles on internet. (4) Making notes of all found important data. (5) Developing the data. After collected the data, the writer will analyse them with several steps, namely (1) Watching the Knives Out movie. (2) Reading the Knives Out movie script. (3) Identifying the indicators of social mobility in Knives Out movie. (4) Identifying how and the reason why social mobility are reflected in the movie. (5) Identifying how social mobility affects society. (6) Interpreting the data. (7) Drawing conclusions.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are three basic criteria of social grouping; authority structure, occupational structure, and property structure.

People with high authority can influence society. According to Kerbo (2003), authority is the ability to control other people. The higher a person's social class, the higher the level of authority.

In this film, the researcher finds the character's authority based on the job rank they have. The rank is (1) Publishing House Owner, the publishing house is owned by Harlan Thrombey. He has the highest position in the company. With his position, with his position he can do anything to the company and its subordinates. (2) Detective Lieutenant. Another character of high authority is Detective Lieutenant Elliott.

Occupational structure is a grouping based on occupation in society. People with high occupations have high rewards or income. The researcher finds the characters occupations as follows: (1) Successful Writer, it is told that Harlan Thrombey is a successful and famous writer. This can be seen through interview from members of the Thrombey family who indicate this. (2) Corporate leaders, Harlan's children are said to own a company that is run by each of his children. There are real estate companies, publishing companies, and skincare companies. (3) Detective, the film called *Knives Out*, is all about mystery. To solve this mystery there is a detective. Apart from Lieutenant Elliott, there is a person named Benoit Blanc who is also a detective. (4) Caregiver, it could be said that the caregiver has the same duties as a babysitter or home nurse. Marta works as a caregiver in the family.

Property structure "is the person's ownership of property" (Kerbo 2003). People with high property can affect society. They get special treatment from the society because of their property ownership.





Figure 1. Harlan's Mansion

A huge mansion belongs to Harlan Thrombey which which is the person of the highest class.



Figure 2. Cabrera's Car

An ordinary car that is relatively cheap. This car is owned by Marta Cabrera who is arguably the lowest social class character in the film.

In social life, there is a thing called social mobility. Social mobility can be obtained from marriage, inheritance, changing jobs, and so on. Researchers have discovered the social mobility that Rian Johnson implicitly describes in his film, *Knives Out*. This can be seen from the scene and also the character's dialogue.

Researchers have categorized the class divisions of the characters in this film. The categories are as follows:

Table 1. Class divisions in the beginning of the film.

Divisions	Authority	Occupational	Property
Upper Class	Harlan Thrombey	Harlan Thrombey	Harlan Thrombey
Corporate Class		Walt, Linda and her husband, Joni, Lieutenant Elliott, Benoit Blanc	Walt, Linda and her husband, Joni
Middle Class	Lieutenant Elliott, Benoit Blanc		Ransom
Working Class		Marta, Fran	Marta
Lower Class			

At the beginning of the film, Rian Johnson describes Harlan as the upper class. he is highly influential with his authority because he is the supreme leader of the company, the highest occupation, and is also the owner of the mansion and large assets including the property of other companies.

Table 2. Class divisions in the end of the film.

Divisions	Authority	Occupational	Property
Upper Class	Marta	Marta	Marta
Corporate Class		Linda and her husband,	Walt, Linda and her husband, Joni

		Joni, Lieutenant Elliott, Benoit Blanc	
Middle Class	Lieutenant Elliott, Benoit Blanc		
Working Class		Marta, Fran	
Lower Class			Ransom

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Based on the table, there is a significant change experienced by Marta. His social status changed completely because of Harlan's will. After Harlan's death and his will is read, Marta becomes the owner of the mansion as well as all of Harlan's assets.

Another change is the change experienced by Ransom. Ransom, who originally owned the treasure which was given by his grandfather, Harlan, became a person who had nothing. This happened after the plan to kill Ransom was revealed and he was named a suspect for his crime.

After classifying the class of characters at the beginning and end of the film, the researcher identifies social mobility that occurs in authority, occupational, and property structures.

Changes that occur in the structure of authority occur in this film. This change happened to Marta. This is a significant change. Marta, who is classified as lower class at the beginning of the film, changes to upper class. This happened after Harlan died and after his will was read. All property including the mansion and company assets, Harlan gave to Marta. This gave Marta the ultimate authority over Harlan's children.

In occupational changes also occur. This change happened to Marta and Walt. During Harlan's birthday, Harlan talks to Walt about work. In that conversation, Harlan had indirectly fired Walt. This made Walt the lower class. Walt, who was originally the leader of Harlan's publishing company, lost his job.

Other changes in occupational were also experienced by Marta. Marta initially worked as Harlan's caregiver. Her job is almost the same as that of a nurse. At the end of the film,

after Harlan's death and the reading of his will, Marta changes drastically to become the owner of the head of the company. Marta changed to become the upper class.

Changes also occur in the property structure. As we know Marta is an immigrant. Marta and her family own a house and an ordinary car, like most other working classes have. At the end of the film, Marta moves into the upper class. She had ownership of the Mansion, company, property, and everything that originally belonged to Harlan. That is a significant change.

The last change the researchers found was the movement that Ransom experienced. In the film, Ransom is Harlan's grandson. Son of Linda and her husband. Ransom does not work, but he has the property his family gave him. He owns a luxury car. Make him classified as middle class. Ransom tries to kill Harlan. His actions were exposed and made him a suspect and imprisoned. This made Ransom lose all the facilities his family had given him. Leaving him no ownership of anything.

Social mobility is depicted as a social issue in this film. Rian Johnson depicted social mobility through the plot and characters of the film.

A drastic social change happened to Marta. Marta is Harlan's nurse or caregiver. He is an immigrant. Rian Johnson illustrates Marta's social mobility through reading Harlan's will. Marta experiences social mobility. He experienced social climbing by inheriting the printing company, book copyrights and other properties from Harlan. This changes Marta's social status from working class to upper class due to ownership of all of Harlan's assets.

The film *Knives Out* is set in America. In America the class difference is a very striking thing. These differences can be based on occupation, property ownership, and even race. It is this class difference that will cause class struggle. The existence of class struggle allows for social mobility.

Rian Johnson sees film as a form of response to events in the real world. Hollywood films are made to give audiences a break from real life along with its endless events. The gap between rich and poor is getting bigger. So that many of the filmmakers raised this theme in their films.

This film is a satire on income inequality and class warfare. This film illustrates a world that is dealing with increased income disparity. This film also illustrates how differences in treatment between classes exist in society.

#### 4. CLOSING

Based on the results of the study, this film is a film that illustrates the social conditions in society today. This film talks about the existence of income inequality and class warfare that occurs in many societies in the world. Because of this class difference, there will be social mobility. Rian Johnson illustrates social mobility through the plot of this film.

This research focuses on the theory of social class initiated by Kerbo and the mobility. The researcher finds a link between the theory and social class which is reflected in this film. According to Kerbo (2003) social class is divided based on three things, namely, authority, occupation, and property. This film reflects that theory. There is a division according to authority, occupation, and property, in which Harlan has the highest position and Marta has the lowest position. Everything changed after Harlan's death.

The film also reflects social inequality, researcher finds that there is a different treatment between Marta and Harlan's family. This is related to theory by Kerbo. According to Kerbo (2003), social inequality is a condition where people do not have the same rights or access in society. Marta comes from a poor family. He also comes from outside America which makes him get treatment that tends to be racist.

This also supports the results of a previous study conducted by Supriyanti in 2007 which also showed that there were differences in treatment between social classes in the twentieth century.

The character who has the most striking social mobility is Marta. He experienced social climbing. From working class to Upper class. Marta got the movement because she inherited Harlan's assets and assets based on Harlan's will.

As experienced by Marta who got wealth from Harlan through Harlan's will. This shows that anyone can change their social status like Marta who is basically not Harlan's family. Rian Johnson made this film as a form of criticism of class differences and warfare that spread in society. How Americans perceive people who come from South America. Rian Johnson also illustrates that people who are looked down upon can become people with higher authority.

Marxism views social mobility as the effect of socio-cultural change. According to Marx and Engels (1848), materialism is the main factor of socio-cultural change. Social

mobility may occur unconsciously and unexpectedly. Social mobility can also occur if there is a desire to change social status.

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