

HIPPIES' SOCIAL THREATS AND SOLUTIONS POTRAYED IN THE FILM BAD TIMES AT EL ROYALE

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Abstract

As an art, literature and film offer ways of seeing and feeling new things without having to experience them ourselves. They can also function in society as a means of both criticizing and affirming cultural values, as well as describing historical events throughout the years. Thus, this study aims to explore representations of social threats posed by the hippies toward American society in the late 1960s as depicted in the film 'Bad Times at the El Royale'. Besides, this study also aims to investigate the solutions performed by the rest of the American population in overcoming the threats as demonstrated in the film. The data of this study are the utterances and scenes reflecting the social threats and solutions portrayed in this film. The method of this study was qualitative methods. Results show that the social threats posed by the hippies are determined through the contrast between the American values and the hippie values as depicted in the film, while the solutions are interpreted based on what actually happened according to history.

Keywords: *American values, hippies, social threats, solutions*

INTRODUCTION

The terms literature and literary studies have a significant difference between them. However, understanding both terms are equally necessary before this research is discussed any further. Since as far as 1942, the two terms have been defined and explained by Warren and Wellek. In short, literature is an activity that produces works of art, while the study of literature—also known as literary research—is a branch of science that discusses literature (Warren & Wellek, 1977). This definition referred to how in the past, literature roughly indicated writings that were good. Therefore, philosophy and history writings weres once considered as literary works. As science develops, the meaning of literature shifts to all kinds of literary works that have aesthetic and educational value, and

can be fictitious as well (Rexroth, 2019). According to Jonathan Hart (2011), literature needs to be studied and compared no matter how important context and culture are. This is why literature and literature studies are strongly linked to each other.

When discussing literature, it is also important to learn about the several forms of literature works and the elements that form them. It is general knowledge that there are several forms of literature, and they are poetry, prose and drama (Rexroth, 2019). Each type has intrinsic elements that form the literary work. Films have the same basic intrinsic elements as other literary products, especially with prose and drama (Ramrao, 2016). This intrinsic elements are characters, characterization, plot, setting, point of view, theme and style (Gill, 1995). These elements

then form the narrative aspect that is one of the two intrinsic elements that make a film—the other one being technical aspect that deals with the technical issues of a film such as cinematography, sound and editing (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). Thus, it can be concluded that because there is an obvious link between film and literature, film can be considered as a branch of literature.

Literature is not only formed only on intrinsic elements, but it also has extrinsic elements that affect the literature work. Therefore, it is also necessary to know in advance the extrinsic elements of a literature when working on a literary study, or a literature research, that is based on a literature work. Extrinsic elements concern more on the background, history, social conditions and biography of the writer that affect how a literary work is written (Gill, 1995). Complete understanding of the extrinsic elements can help readers to understand the reason behind the production of a literary work, as well as to have a glimpse on the condition that becomes the background of said work.

Through the years, film has been the object of many literary studies. With Hollywood as the biggest film industry in the world, most films made are American films. Therefore, many literary studies discuss America in their research because the films used as the research objects are American film. In this literary research, the literary product that is discussed is the film *Bad Times at the El Royale* that was released in 2018, which

was directed by Drew Goddard. This film is American neo-noir thriller that is set in 1969. The plot follows seven mysterious characters, each one of them hiding dark secrets when they come together in a shady hotel on the California-Nevada border. Each character in this film represents and illustrates the diversity of American society and how they dealt with the social threats posed by the hippies.

Inspired by Lake Tahoe's famous Cal Neva Resort & Casino, the fictional El Royale Hotel was set as the meeting point where the characters of the film interacted by staying at the hotel. There was Laramie Seymour Sullivan, a salesman who is actually an undercover CIA agent; Emily Summerspring, a hippie chick on the run from a hippie leader who's brainwashed her sister Rose; Father Daniel Flynn, a former bank-rober posing as an Irish priest; and Darlene Sweet, a struggling African-American singer.

The awkward but likeable hotel manager, Miles Miller, who turns out to be a Vietnam war veteran, is often nowhere to be found. Secrets are slowly revealed between the occupants of the hotel, and things soon escalate for the worst, especially when the leader of a hippie-cult Emily and Rose run away from, Billy Lee, comes to the hotel with his obedient but violent followers. At first, Billy Lee and his followers managed to terrorize the remaining occupants of the hotel. But everything comes to an end when Darlene, Father Flynn and Miles work together to defeat Billy Lee and his posse.

There have been other studies that discuss America as a country as well as the people and culture prior to this research. Jessica L. Papajcik in her paper *The Rhetoric of 'American Beauty': A Value Analysis* (2006), discusses American society and the values the people uphold, and how the reality of the ideal American culture that is considered to be beautiful and perfect isn't as it seems. This revelation is portrayed literally, by showing the many flaws the characters have—each one of them representing the many types of Americans. On the other hand, this current study about the film *Bad Times at the El Royale* discusses symbolic scenes that show the termination of the threats to the American society.

Rahmatiah's research, entitled *Identity Status in Barry Jenkins' Film 'Moonlight'* (2017), is vastly different compared to the study based on the film *Bad Times at the El Royale*. The most obvious difference is how Rahmatiah's study discusses a more specific community in America, which is the Afro-American homosexuals, while this current research discusses American society as a whole. Secondly, Rahmatiah's study observes more specifically about one character, which is unlike the current research. Rahmatiah's study is also generally neutral in pointing out her results, while this current research describes a certain flaw in a specific American society and its solutions that value positivity.

Brooke Dianne-Mae Hughes' research, entitled *Our Sunken Place: Post-Racial America in Jordan Peele's 'Get Out'* (2018), discusses the explanation of the film's genre, then moves to the messages conveyed in it. It discusses how the film talks about black representation and how 'Black Lives Matter' movement that has begun post-Obama reign has led to Blaxploitation which is an exploitation in the media of the black community.

America was a nation of immigrants (Stevenson, 2020), which led to the country's law on gun-ownership allowance (Spitzer, 2015), and also a cluster values to meet all the needs of the ethnically diverse people in America (Stevenson, 2020). However, with the rise of the hippie movement as a response to the Conscription law and the American government's agenda against the threats of communism, these American laws and values were violated by the hippies' own hypocrisy that betrayed their supposedly peaceful values (Issitt, 2009).

The hippies' actions toward the American nation made them a social threat to the country. There forms of social threats that the hippies posed to the American nation in the 1960's are unstructured lifestyle, glorification of violence, excessive use of guns, and brainwashing (Issitt, 2009). In response to these threats, the American nation came up with a major solution and a complementary solution to deal with them

(Issitt, 2009), and both solutions are strongly related with the historical events that occurred after the second World War (Foner, 2017).

As the most important country in the world, with the biggest economic power as well as strongest military force, the whole world rallies to understand the Americans and their culture, in order to be friend and maintain a good relationship with this prosperous nation. American in the late 1960s was an important era in the American history and its society. Therefore, the film's depiction of that era becomes the reason for this research's discussion about the social threats that were posed by the hippie toward the American society, as well as the solutions carried out by the rest of the American nation in dealing with these threats. This research was conducted with the intention to assist in the effort to enrich cultural works, and also as an improvement for the community through the message conveyed. In addition, this research is also expected to be able to give positive effects that will inspire other literary works that will come.

METHODS

For this research, the approach that is used to analyse the data is descriptive qualitative approach because it describes the American social system in the late 1960's as well as to relay the story of the film. A descriptive qualitative approach aims to

describe the condition and situation of something specifically (Nazir, 2014).

The primary source of data for this research is the 2018 film *Bad Times at the El Royale*, directed by Drew Goddard. The secondary source of data are the books that are used as references to support this research. The type of data taken for this research is soft data. The data are the utterances, clauses and scenes that represent the social threats posed by the hippies as well as the solutions to those threats.

Technique of collecting data is a systematic procedure in collecting data of the study (Elmusharaf, 2012). There are several steps in that procedure, they are: 1). Watching the entire film; 2). Identifying the forms social threats posed by the hippies and the solutions to the threats; 3). Listing out the forms of social problems and the solutions; 4). Classifying the forms of social threats posed by the hippies into categories; 5). Classifying the forms of solutions to the threats

In analysing the data, the questions of the research are answered, and it also gives direction for future data collection. The technique for analysing data has several steps, and they are domain analysis, taxonomy analysis, component analysis, and cultural theme analysis (Spradley, 2016).

Domain analysis, a technique that is intended to obtain an overview of study's object in order to discover the focus of the

study. In this step, the scenes and the utterances from the film are selected to be used for the analysis.

Taxonomy analysis, a step that explains how selected data are explained further. In this process, the data are classified into two classifications according to the research problem of this study. These classifications are the social threats posed by the hippies, and the solutions carried out by the rest of the American population in dealing with the threats.

Component analysis, a step that discusses the relation between classified data in taxonomy analysis. The relation between the first classification, social threats, and the second classification, solutions, is cause and effect. Therefore, they are intertwined because there are effects to social threats that lead to the solutions, and the solutions exist since they caused by the social threats.

Cultural theme analysis, a technique based on the assumption that every culture and cultural scene consists of a system of meaning that is integrated into some kind of larger pattern. In the film, the cultural theme is shown through the actions of the hippies that are deemed to be harmful toward the American values.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results present the data of the major extrinsic aspects of the film *Bad Times at the El Royale* that was gathered after watching it. The data gathered were first classified into

two categories, social threats posed by the hippies and the solution to the social threats, as they are the problems of the research. Each categories were then separated into a few more categories.

The category for the social threats has sub-categories, and they are unstructured lifestyle, glorification of violence, excessive use of guns, and brainwashing (Issitt, 2009). These form of social threats are directly against the values that American people believe in. Known as a nation of immigrants, America has a cluster set of values that determine their way of life (Stevenson, 2000).

For the second category of the data, which is solution to the social threats, the sub-categories are the major solution and the complementary solution. These data represent the actions the rest of the America took in dealing with social threats posed by the hippie, which have strong relation with historical events that occurred after the second World War.

American Values

America was a nation of immigrants (Stevenson, 2020). It led to a couple things. Firstly, it was the gun-ownership allowance that came from the animosity between the Settlers and the Native Americans, which became a law in the Second Amendment that stated: “right to bear arms” (Spitzer, 2015). The law states that it is well within an American’s right to use a gun to protect their

property by all means against everyone, especially Native Americans. Secondly, with its ethnically diverse people, it makes America a plural society with many values that complete each other and are tied into clusters of values (Stevenson, 2020).

These clusters of values are consisted of several ideals: (1) the very first one is independence, which is sometimes referred to individualism as well as self-reliant, (2) American's independence leads to another ideal, and that is privacy. They like to have alone time and space, and may be private about their personal life, (3) Americans are also known as a nation of very direct people, which means that they will often tell people their most honest thoughts, and they will be resolute about what they want and needs, (4) the next ideal is equality. Americans believe in the idea that all people should be treated equally, and have equal opportunities. This leads to the famous jargon called the 'American Dream', (5) their belief on equality leads to their belief on informality. Mainly, it can be seen through the way they dress casually. Regarding their interactions, there is no particular rules between older and younger people, as well as between people of higher class and common people. This is applied starting from between family members and their neighbourhood, (6) then, American Dream encourages people to be competitive. They value hard work and goals and achievements. All of this leads to their appreciation toward time and efficiency. In

business, this is largely due to the capitalist economy, which leads to their consumerism, (7) all of those points lead to the work ethics of the Americans. They work hard to keep improving at what they do so they are 'workaholics', (8) from an early age, American children are taught that the rights of the individual should balance out their responsibilities. Then, they give clear definition about family members, separating them into nuclear and extended family because family is valued greatly in American culture. The importance of family is originally a culture that is lived by the American Southerners, who are the conservative community of America. Although America is generally considered as a liberal nation, especially nowadays, they still live by the conservative ideals of the South, which is truly the original ideals of America, (9) after the second World War, the world economy grew dramatically. Thus, as the biggest country, with its advanced and leading technology, America as a nation developed rapidly. This created a lot of field, it went as far as giving opportunities for women to apply for it, (10) acts of women's emancipation in the Western world developed greatly. Thus, women fought to be treated equally like men and they succeeded: women's emancipation is implemented almost to perfection in America.

Hippies in America

The hippie culture was a phenomenon brought about by a small number of cultural

leaders who were intelligent and charismatic people, and their followers who were mostly young people that were inspired by them (Issitt, 200). Their main cause was to respond to the 1950s Cold War hysteria that swept across America. This was a time of a lot of rage for the American people: the animosity between America and Uni Soviet, the Anti-communist Crusade on suspected communist sympathisers that destroyed lives and broke families, and the Conscription that forced families to send their young men thousands of miles away to Vietnam in a war that didn't really concern them (Foner, 2017). Campaigning under the banner of peace and love, the hippies rallied against what they believed to be a violent America and their Cold War agenda (Issitt, 2009).

Coming as the successor of the Beat Generation, the hippies had relatively the same beliefs as their predecessor. They set themselves apart from the mainstream by their lifestyle choices, including the types of clothing they wore, and how they approached relationships, employment, and politics (Issitt, 2009). They were fascinated with many ideologies such as pacifism, ecological consciousness, homosexual rights, and hedonistic lifestyles.

Their main characteristics were, (1) they lived in communal, which led them to move around like nomads once their number was too big for the area they lived in. This was against the American values: independence and privacy, (2) the hippies also rejected traditional models of morality and legality in

exchange for the belief that they could create a society free from consumerism, where food and other goods were given free or in return for other services. What they couldn't obtain legally, they stole from area merchants. Not only this was an act of crime, it was also against the American value: competitiveness and work ethics, (3) their psychedelic movement was believed to be the cause of all the misdemeanors that the hippies did, which ended up to the serious crimes that the hippies later pulled. This was strongly against the America value: work ethics and discipline, (4) acts of brainwashing which was against the American value: independence and equality, (5) unstructured lifestyle that was a contrast to the well-planned lifestyle of conservative Americans, (6) their tendencies to do crimes that often involved violence and even guns, which was a blatant act of hypocrisy to their peaceful agenda as well as an abuse against American laws. One of their most famous acts of crime was the murder of actress Sharon Tate and her friends, under the behest of a hippie cult leader Charles Manson. This frightened the Americans and made them believe that the hippies were no different than criminals; they were the enemy of Americans.

In the end, Americans finally realized that the hippie lifestyle and beliefs were social threats to the American values (Issitt, 2009). The actions taken to fight the hippie movement were: (1) informing their family members how wrong the hippie lifestyle was

with all their crime-doings and destructive intoxication tendencies and glorification of sexual exploration, (2) campaigning in schools and churches, working together with parents and teachers pastors to warn the children to stay away from the hippies, (3) working with the authorities such as the police to apprehend any hippies they saw that they deemed to be potential criminals.

The final reason for the end of the hippies was when the Vietnam War came to an end. When Richard Nixon issued to put a stop to the Conscription as part of his law during his presidency in 1968, the hippie movement began to lose its heat (Foner, 2017). By 1970s, the war was gradually winding down, and finally by 1975 when the War ended, the hippie movement lost their popularity because their two main causes were no longer valid. Protesting the Conscription and the War was a mutual goal that held the hippie movement together, but when both ended, the members started to dissipate (Issitt, 2009).

Hippies as Social Threats

According to Issitt (2009), the hippies in 1960's America really was the height of the hippies' development. The portrayals of the hippies in 1960's America in this film can be classified into several social problems, and they will be explained in accordance to the theory mentioned.

Social threats posed by the hippies are divided into four categories. The unstructured

lifestyle is shown through three data. The hippies in the film, portrayed by Billy Lee and his followers, lived together in large groups with the intention to party all the time, fulfilling their needs by doing crimes such as stealing and robbing, dressing themselves in a filthy and unkempt way—many of them were even unclothed. Thus, theoretically, the hippies' lifestyle posed a threat to the American values as surmised by Stevenson (2000).

“Go to room seven, get the dead guy.

And put all of his stuff and the body in the trunk of the car. Then go room to room, see if you can find anybody else. If you can, you bring 'em here.”

Billy Lee, ordering his followers to take the hotel occupants' belongings. (1:44:06-1:44:15)

Glorification of violence that is conducted by the hippies is shown through four data in this movie. The scene of Rose Summerspring's tussle with another girl – instructed by Billy Lee – who was the 'trophy' for the winner is the beginning of it. Then, there were Billy Lee's followers cheering up on the blatant show of violence. Next was the way Billy Lee and his followers terrorising the hotel occupants by beating them up, before it reaches for the worst when Billy Lee murders Emily Summerspring and attempts to murder the rest of his hostages. Thus, the depiction of violence in the movie is a direct contrast to the hippies' peaceful belief (Issitt, 2009), which strongly indicates their hypocrisy.

"Boots, why don't you come up here and help me out for a sec? And, what about...Millie, why don't you come join us, too? Come on. We're gonna have ourselves a tussle tonight. It's been a while since we've had a tussle, right? Oh, but wait a second. Rosie don't wanna tussle. She's smart enough to know not to play the game, right? But this is how I get her. I dangle something she really wants. You two are gonna have a proper tussle tonight...and the winner... Well, the winner gets to sleep with me in the big house tonight. How'd that be? See? Now we got skin in the game, as they say."

Billy Lee pitching Rose Summerspring and another female follower of his into a brutal, tussle. (1:39:35-1:41:18)

The excessive use of guns is shown in three data. It began with the murder of Father Flynn's brother by an anonymous enemy. The next one was the moment when Emily Summerspring shot Laramie Sullivan because of her over constant vigilance. Then, this point was once again demonstrated when Billy Lee and his followers come to the hotel and start to terrorise the hotel occupants with guns, followed by the murder of Emily and it ended with shoot-out scene between the hippies versus the hotel guest as well the hotel staf. This is another proof to the hypocrisy of the hippie belief. While it is true

that Americans have the rights to have and use a gun for self-defense, as stated in the Second Amendment (Spitzer, 2015), however this film seems to remind Americans that as years passed, they have come to rely too much on their guns—as proven by the numerous recent shootings in America.

Billy : "Pick a color, Em. I ain't asking again. Pick a color. Pick a color."

Emily : "Red."

Billy : "I guess that makes you black, altar boy."

Miles : "What? No, no, no."

Billy Lee insinuating that he'll shoot his hostages in a game to entertain himself. (1:52:30-2:06:58)

The last category is brainwashing with four data. Rose Summerspring was shown to be the one who was brainwashed the most through her blind loyalty towards Billy Lee, by calling Billy Lee and letting him know where she and Emily were staying. There was also Millie, another one of Billy Lee's followers, who was willing to be objectified and then pitched into a tussle against Rose Summerspring in order to 'win' Billy Lee's favour. Then there were Billy Lee's five followers who had come with him to the Hotel, and obliged eagerly when Billy Lee told them to terror their hostages under gun-point. Lastly, it was shown through Rose Summerspring's lack of reaction upon seeing Billy Lee murdering her sister. All of these examples prove that the brainwashing that

happened to the hippies did not suit the American ideals that strongly encourage logic (Stevenson, 2000).

*Billy: "Did you think you could
just take what's mine, and I
ouldn't come huntin'?"*

Emily: "She ain't yours."

Billy: "Rosie, are you mine?"

Rose: "Of course."

Billy: "Of course."

Rose Summerspring's blind devotion to Billy Lee. (1:51:35-1:51:52)

Solution to the Social Threats

The results for solutions to the social threats are divided into two categories: the major solution and the complementary solution. The major solution is how the American mainstream, including the government as the regulator, react accordingly to deal with the threats the hippies posed. In the film it is represented by Miles Miller and his actions. He is the Hotel staff, which symbolizes as the government that regulates the society.



Miles Miller represents the major solution toward the social threats (2:06:55-2:07:52)

The complementary solution is how the rest of the American society, such as the civilians, took part in dealing with the threats. Both types of solutions are depicted one time

each. The complementary solution demonstrated in the film is represented by Father Flynn's and Darlene Sweet's actions, who symbolize the American society as a whole.



Father Flynn and Darlene Sweet represent the major solution towards the social threats. (2:02:58-2:09:10)

The major solution directly reflect how in the by the end of 1960's, the government's war agenda toward war met peak resistance, which led to all American soldiers to be sent back home due to the end of the Vietnam War. This is accurate to what is recorded in history that the hippies and their campaign gradually stopped as a way of life in America, with the end of the Conscription and the Vietnam War (Issitt, 2009). The complementary solution represents the rejection by the American public toward the hippie lifestyle; such as the anti-hippie campaigns in churches and schools and families, as well as the direct actions which was to report to the authorities in order to apprehend vagrant hippies (Issitt, 2009). Thus, this symbolizes how the American society left the old and dilapidated period in America of the 1960's and 1970's, into the bright and better future that they hoped the 1980's would be.

CONCLUSION

The results for this study all answer the research questions. The first result is the form of social threats, which are divided into four categories: unstructured lifestyle, glorification of violence, excessive use of guns and brainwashing. Each of these categories is based on the contradictory points between the hippies' belief and the American values. The second result is the solutions toward the social threats, and there are two of them: the major solution and the complementary solution. These solutions are based on what actually took place historically. According to the film, it is shown that the hippies, who had such a profound influence in the American history circa the Cold War era, turned out to be the reason for the serious decline of morals of American youths in the 1960's with their lifestyle and beliefs that contradicted the values of the American people.

As a work of literature, the film *Bad Times at the El Royale* is a prime example of what constitutes a good literary work. Not only does the film fulfill the requirements of a good film in terms of intrinsic aspects and technical issues, it also contains extrinsic aspects that educate the society. This film also shows that a nation as powerful and as well-organized as the Americans may face a threat from within their own society, which comes as a result of poor government policy and regulation—as is shown in the film through how the hippies became a social threat toward the American people despite

their original intention to oppose what they deemed to be horrible government regulation such as the Conscriptio and the Cold War.

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