## FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS IN MANHATTAN AS DEPICTED IN COSMOPOLIS

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### ABSTRACT

Cosmopolis takes themes around economy, capitalism, Marxism and social class. This study aims to analyse the author's way to depict false consciousness in Cosmopolis' "fictionalised" Manhattan through the proletariat's actions toward the bourgeois main character in keeping on promoting of the latter's economic interests. The study uses descriptive analytical of qualitative method with Marxist class theory to analyse false consciousness in Manhattan as depicted by the selected proletarian characters who work for the bourgeois main character. The result shows that the proletariat in the book do what they and the society consider to be true by serving the capital owner in return of money which they can use to get better lives, when they should join efforts to tear down the system that keeps them stay in their unfavourable positions as workers.

Keywords: false consciousness, American dream, Cosmopolis

### **INTRODUCTION**

The United Nations Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs estimated the world population (the total number of humans currently living) at 7.9 billion as of October 2021. More people mean more needs and more needs mean more resource exploitations. How each individual exploits the resources is determined by the ownership and control of the means of production (all, most, some or little) (Ishiyama & Breuning, 2011); and it, in turn, defines what class an individual belongs to.

A class is those who share and are conscious of common economic interests and participate in collective action to gain those interests (Andrew, 1983). The level of how much a man possessing and managing the means of production will decide how much economic power a man has. Since economic power always include social and political power as well, it is common to refer economic class to socioeconomic class (Tyson, 2006).

The thought that class is determined by its relationship to the means of production was proposed by 19th century German philosopher, Karl Marx. He introduced a method to understand, according to him, the most important aspect of human life, economy. It is economy that makes the world go round; it is economy that gives birth to human culture and activities. If a theory or ideology does not try, even the slightest effort, to point up the important of economic roles in human culture, then it fails to understand human culture (Tyson, 2006).

In general, Marxist theory divides socioeconomic class into two main classes: the bourgeoisie, who owns the means of production and the proletariat, who must sell their own labour power. The Marxist theory itself, as well as other many theories, has developed into many schools of thought and none acts as definitive Marxist theory (Wolff and Resnick, 1987).

As propaganda or otherwise critics to capitalism, Marxist theory can be found and applied in almost any issues. Literary works are the best instances of this. Many literary works slip or even blatantly take up Marxist theory as their themes. One of the literary works that takes up a theme around economy, capitalism and Marxism is *Cosmopolis*.

*Cosmopolis* is the thirteenth novel written by American writer, Don DeLillo and first published in 2003. Don DeLillo himself is known for his works that cover wide range of genres and topics, from politics and economy to nuclear war. He is praised by the way he drives his readers and the complexity of his works. Upon its release, *Cosmopolis* gained mixed reviews, particularly compared to DeLillo's previews works. David Kipen (2003) of the *San Francisco Chronicle* wrote: "*DeLillo continues to think about the modern world in language and images as quizzically beautiful as any writer now going*".

Walter Kern (2003), otherwise, in *The New York Times* was not quite impressed by the works by writing: "Beware the novel of ideas, particularly when the ideas come first and all the novel stuff (like the story) comes second. Cosmopolis is an intellectual turkey shoot, sending up a succession of fat targets just in time for its author to aim and fire the rounds he loaded before he started writing".

*Cosmopolis* adapted to the big screen by Canadian director, David Cronenberg in 2011 and premiered in 2012, met with, yet again, mixed reviews.

There have been several studies conducted to analyse Delillo's *Cosmopolis* through Marxist viewpoint. Some of them are "*Icarus Falling – A Marxist Study of Don DeLillo's Cosmopolis*" by Anna Sundelius (2014), "*A Satire on Capitalism in Don DeLillo's Cosmopolis*" by Gabriel C. Sudibyo (2014) and "*The Currency of DeLillo's Cosmopolis*" by Mark Osteen (2014). The first study tries to show that *Cosmopolis* portrays the imperfectness of modern capitalism and the attempt to make the work as a starting point for an emergent counter, as well as discuss the psychology of the main character as a fictional creation and as a representative of the capitalist system and using Marx's theory of alienation. It also argues that *Cosmopolis* has a theme of cyber-capital.

The second study investigates the intrinsic and extrinsic elements, which focuses on false consciousness, alienation and class struggle. It finds that the book itself is none other than a critic to capitalism through a satire and a good irony to real life situation.

Lastly, the third study mentioned above examines how the book employs postmodern, derealised money to represent the psychic and social conditions of the early twenty-first century, as embodied by the main character. It also concludes that human body is the most significant undeniable power of countercurrencies.

The first and second studies analyse the portrayal of capitalism as well as theme in the book and the form of the book a satire of capitalism, respectively. Both studies discuss one or more intrinsic and extrinsic elements in the book and talk about Marx's theory of alienation. The third study doesn't even mention false consciousness. Even though the second study also attempts to discuss the false consciousness aspect, it only discusses it in a brief discussion, let alone mentioning Manhattan as the setting. Therefore, this study is conducted to deepen and widen the understanding of false consciousness based on *Cosmopolis*' Manhattan as a literary work. This study, in particular, examines how socioeconomic classes create false consciousness in Manhattan as depicted in Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* by using Marxist class theory for it will clearly show the relations between the two main classes in creating false consciousness of proletariat class to bourgeois one.

#### **RESEARCH METHOD**

In this study, the writer uses descriptive analytical of qualitative method with Marxist class theory to analyse false consciousness in Manhattan as depicted by the selected proletarian characters who work for the bourgeois main character.

#### **1. Data Source**

The data source for this study is the 2012 edition of Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* (first published in 2003), published by Scribner.

## 2. Data of the Study

The data for this study are the texts from the data source, in form of dialogues and narratives from the bourgeois main character with the selected proletarian characters that show the indications of false consciousness.

- **3. Data Collecting Procedure**
- Acquire the 2012 edition of Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*, published by Scribner.
- Read the book thoroughly.
- Identify the main and supporting characters.
- Identify and distinguish the bourgeois and proletarian characters.
- Identify and differentiate which proletarian characters (workers) that employ by and work for the bourgeois main character and do not.
- Identify and mark the dialogues and narratives from the selected proletarian characters which indicate false consciousness.

## 4. Data Analysing Procedure

In conducting the study, the writer did as follow:

- Analyse the socioeconomic background of Manhattan in the book.
- Analyse and determine the relations between the bourgeois main character with each of the proletarian character.
- Analyse the identified dialogues and narratives from the selected proletarian characters that indicate false consciousness.
- Interpret the data.
- Draw the conclusion based on the analysis.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The findings show that *Cosmopolis* is one of the best examples of literary works that embraces Marxism as its theme. The findings, which are in the form of dialogues and narratives, are used to answer the research questions in the first chapter.

The first question concerns about how false consciousness is depicted in the book; and from there, also try to find out how the proletariat keep promoting the interests of the bourgeoisie instead of fighting for the real cause of an equal condition in the societies, which forms the second question.

The writer found twenty-two passages in form of dialogues and narratives in *Cosmopolis* that indicate false consciousness. The dialogues and narratives analysed are sorted out according to the order of the found narratives and dialogues' appearance of the selected proletarian characters in the book. There are seven proletarians analysed according to each of their interaction to the bourgeois main character, Eric Packer; they are, according to their interaction's order of appearance:

# 1. Torval

Torval is Eric's chief of security and his first worker to have dialogue with him which shows the indication of false consciousness through the dialogue. He is also Eric's worker to have the most interactions with him.

Where?" he said./ "I want a haircut."/ "The president's in town."/ "We don't care. We need a haircut. We need to go crosstown."/ "You will hit traffic that speaks in quarter inches."/ "Just so I know. Which president are we talking about?"/ "United States. Barriers will be set up," he said. "Entire streets deleted from the map."/ "Show me my car," he told the man. (p. 11)

Eric decides that he wants a haircut. He goes to his car for which Torval is already waiting for him by the car. Torval asks him where he wants to go and explains the possible situations along the road. In the dialogue, Torval serves Eric as his employer by giving him the information of the traffic they will possibly encounter; he even let the bourgeoisie to dismiss his professional analysis about security situations, instead of realising the real struggle of a classless society where he does not have to give security report to a superior.

"Report from the complex. There's a credible threat. Not to be dismissed. This means a ride crosstown."/ "We've had numerous threats. All credible. I'm still standing here."/ "Not a threat to your safety. To his."/ "Who the fuck is his?"/ "The president's. This means a ride crosstown does not happen unless we make a day of it, with cookies and milk." (p. 19)

At another chance, Torval gives Eric the current situation of the street, and yet again he just lets Eric to dismiss his professional calculation, even now with a cursing word. Surprisingly, Torval, who is supposed to feel disturbed with Eric's respond, seems to feel the other way around, he even throws a little joke at the end of the dialogue. Torval fails to perceive the real issue where he must not give report to the one who owns the money.

"In the next block there are two haircutting salons. One, two," Torval said. "No need to go crosstown. The situation isn't stable." (p. 20)

Torval informs Eric about other safer barbers to go to, rather than going to an unsafe desired one. Torval concerns about Eric safety, where he should be concerning about his very own safety in pursue of equal economic condition.

**Torval said, "A word."**/ "Yes."/ **"The complex recommends extra security."**/ "You're not happy about this."/ **"First a threat to the president."**/ "You're confident you can handle whatever comes up."/ **"Now this attack on the managing director."**/ "Accept their recommendation." (p. 35)

Yet another proof of Torval being blinded by the rooted system of capitalism; he gives another report to his employer, though this time, Eric listens and accepts his advice.

**Torval leaned into the man. He said, "Who the fuck are you?"**/ "Excuse me."/ "**There's a time limit.**"/ Dr.Ingram."/ **Torval had the man's arm yanked up behind him now. He pressed the man into the side of the automobile.** (p. 42)

This passage perhaps show the most erroneous action a proletarian makes in the book. Here, Torval lays physical assault to his fellow comrade. They fail to become aware of the real enemy, the system that make them have conflict in the first place.

"Imperative that we reroute."/ "The situation is what."/ "This. We have flood conditions in the streets ahead. State of chaos. This. The question of the president and his whereabouts. He is fluid. He is moving. And wherever he goes, our satellite receiver reports a ripple effect in the traffic that causes mass paralysis. This also. There is a funeral proceeding slowly downtown and now deflecting westward. Many vehicles, numerous mourners on foot. And finally this. We have a report of imminent activity in the area."/ "Activity."/ "Imminent. Nature as yet unknown. The complex says, Use caution." (p. 65)

Another report given by Torval to Eric concerning the traffic ahead. This passage gives us information about one of Eric's possessions, a satellite. Torval uses this capitalist-ownedmeans to do his "job" of guaranteeing the safety of the owner of the aforementioned means; whereas that means could be used to achieve the real goal of equal lives condition.

His eyes were coated with the stuff but he heard Torval nearby, their rustles and grunts as the two men skirmished./ .../ He was able to see that Torval had the man bnt over the trunk of the limo, forearm locked behind his head./ "Subject reduced," Torval said into his lapel. (p. 141)

Another very-wrong act done by Torval; as he attacks another proletarian who, ironically, tries to attack the upper class and the "aristocrats" symbolically by throwing pies onto their faces. As a proletarian himself, Torval is supposed to join efforts with the "pastry assassin" to destroy the capitalist system. The protection failure from the pastry assassin's

act, which much to Eric's dismay, will lead to Torval's death by Eric, the very man he tries to protect and serve all the time. An irony indeed.

"You play?"/ "Some. Not really my game," Torval said. "Rugby. That was my game. You play?"/Some. I liked the action in the paint. I pump iron now."/ "Of course you understand. There's still someone tracking you."/ "There's still someone out there."/ "This was a petty incursion. The whipped cream. Technically irrelevant."/ "I understand. I realize. Of course."/ .../ "Next time no pies and cakes."/ "Dessert is over."/ "He's out there and he's armed."/ "This is true."/ "You will have to draw your weapon."/ "This is true," Torval said./ "Let me see the thing."/ "Let you see the thing. Okay. Why not? You paid for it." (p. 144 – 145)

Here Torval still provides Eric with report threat that someone is after him. He also mentions about the previous incident regarding the "pastry assassin" and says that such incident will not happen again for a more serious thing is on the way. This passage also reveals another form of capital Eric owns, the weapon, as equipment for his worker to guarantee his safety. Eric demands to see Torval's weapon and Torval give sit, an act that will ultimately lead to his murder by Eric. If only Torval realises the real thing he should do (fighting for an equal condition), instead of serving the capital owner's personal needs, he will have avoided his futile death.

#### 2. Ibrahim Hamadou

In the book, as Eric's personal driver, Hamadou and Eric's interactions are more often in the form of actions than dialogues. So, there are only narratives of Hamadou's actions that show the indications of false consciousness.

The driver held the door open, ready to jog around the rear of the car and down to his own door, thirty-five feet away. (p. 11)

# The driver held open the door. (p. 32)

The driver stood at the rear, holding open the door. (p. 157)

The writer found three direct actions of Ibrahim Hamadou to Eric Packer that indicate false consciousness in the book. All of which are Hamadou holds open the door for his employer; he even has to run for a considerable length after doing that. He fails to realise that he could have had the very same car of his own instead of serving Eric as his driver through a real class struggle for an equal living condition.

#### 3. Shiner

There is only one dialogue found in the book by the writer that indicates false consciousness regarding Shiner's activity towards Eric Packer.

"What have we learned then?"/ "Our system's secure. We're impenetrable. There's no rogue program," Shiner said./ "It would seem, however."/ "Eric, no. We ran every test. Nobody's overloading the system or manipulating our sites."/ "When did we do all this?"/ "Yesterday. At the complex. Our rapid-response team. There's no vulnerable point of entry. Our insurer did a threat analysis. We're buffered from attack."/ "Everywhere."/ "Yes."/ "Including the car."/ "Including, absolutely, yes."/ "My car. This car."/ "Eric, yes, please."/ We've been together, you and I, since the little bitty start-up. I want you to tell me that you still have the stamina to do this job. The single-mindedness."/ "This car. Your car."/ ... (p. 12)

As Eric's head of technology and cyber security, Shiner is definitely a competent man in his area of speciality. He can use that advantage to, at least, himself; instead of to the benefits of the capital owner. He fails to realise the system that keep him in his position as a "sidekick" to a more superior person, in terms of capital ownership. He even assures Eric to keep his performance on the business, a thing he is not supposed to do in achieving a classless society. Eric, the capital owner, even emphasises his ownership of a capital with "my car", but Shiner still fails to realise the false ideal.

# 4. Michael Chin

Eric Packer's currency analyst; he is young, bright and with an advanced degree in mathematics and economics, for which it makes him similar to Shiner, an exceptional expert in his field.

"I know that smile, Michael."/ "I think the yen. I mean there's reason to believe we may be leveraging too rashly."/ "It's going to turn our way."/ "Yes. I know. It always has."/ "The rashness you think you see."/ "What is happening doesn't chart."/ "It charts. You have to search a little harder. Don't trust standards model. Think outside the limits. The yen is making a statement. Read it. Then leap."/ "We are betting big-time here."/ "I know that smile. I want to respect it. But the yen can't go any higher."/ "We are borrowing enormous, enormous sums."/ "Any assault on the borders of perception is going to seem rash at first."/ "Eric, come on. We are speculating into the void."/ ... (p. 21)

With his speciality in analysing currencies, Shiner gives Eric his worry over Eric's actions regarding his yen strategy to be a flop, but it turns out to happen otherwise:

"While you were away," Chin said./ "Yes. Tell me."/ "There was a report that consumer spending is weakening in Japan." He spoke in a newscaster's voice. "Raising doubts about the country's economic strength."/ "See. What. I said as much."/ "The yen is expected to fade. The yen will sink a bit."/ There we are. See. Has to happen. The situation has to change. The yen can't go any higher." (p. 35)

Again, Chin gives Eric his currency statements that Eric's action of buying yen in substantial amount is showing progress by the weakening of the country's consumption ability, in consequence, its economic strength, which much to Eric's delight. Chin should have done better with utilising his superiority in mathematics and economics to the advantage of, at least, himself, in accordance with the realisation of equal economic status in classless society.

"Time for you to do what."/ "Yes. All right," Chin said./ "You don't know this? We both know this."/ "There's work to do at the office. Yes. I need to retrace events over time and see what I can find that applies."/ "Nothing applies. But it's there. It charts. You'll see it."/ "I need to back-test currencies, I don't know, like into the misty dawn."/ "We can't wait for the misty dawn."/ "Then I'll do it here. To save time. That should make you happy. I do time cycles in my sleep. Years. Months, weeks. All the subtle patterns I've found. All the mathematics I've brought to time cycles and price histories. Then you start finding hourly cycles. Then stinking minutes. Then down to seconds."/... (p. 37)

This dialogue perhaps shows the most perfect example how a proletarian is blinded by the false ideal of American dream. In the dialogue, Chin offers himself to work for Eric as the capital owner, even propose himself to work overtime, in the car, just to make Eric happy, when he should be employing his mind, energy and time to his own benefits as a worker, a proletarian.

## 5. Jane Melman

She is Eric's chief of finance as well as his lover. Like other proletarians in the book, she is also blinded by the false ideal of American dream; for instance, in the book, she even still has to do her work in her day off!

.../ "I like face-to-face. And I don't need to look at all those screens," she said. "I know what's happening."/ "The yen will fall."/ "That's right."/ "Consumer spending's down," he said./ "That's right. Besides which the Bank of Japan left interest rates unchanged."/ "This happened today?"/ "This happened tonight. In

Tokyo. I called a source at the Nikkei."/ "While Running."/ "While my body down Madison Avenue to get here on time."/ "The yen can't go any higher."/ "That's true. That's right," she said. "Except it just did." (p. 40)

False consciousness of American dream takes another toll in this dialogue. Melman comes across Eric's vehicle while she is enjoying her day jogging. Even so, she already has something to report to him, information she gets the night before from a liaison at the Nikkei. Melman is a single mother and a busy woman, yet she still spends her day off to serve the capitalist's interest, instead of using the resources she has (i.e. time, connection) to create an economic utopia for everyone.

She said, "So look. We have two rumors working in our favor. First there's bankruptcies for six straight months. More each month. More on the way. Large Japanese corporations. This is good."/ "The yen has to drop."/ "This is loss of faith. It will force the yen to drop."/ "The dollar will settle up."/ "The yen will drop," she said. (p. 46)

Again, instead of maximising the information she has for a greater and wider good of classless society, she rather reassure Eric that his yen plan is working well, unfortunately to her, she fails to realise that it will only benefit the capital owner.

#### 6. Dr. Ingram

Originally, he does not work for Eric Packer, as he is only a substitute to Eric's regular physician, Dr. Nevius who all of a sudden cannot examine Eric at the time. There is only one passage in a form of dialogue regarding Dr. Ingram that indicates false consciousness and it is in an interaction with other proletarian character, yet still has the interaction with the bourgeois main character, indirectly. Besides, as a doctor, he perhaps has a better financial condition than Eric other workers.

## Torval leaned into the man. He said, "Who the fuck are you?"/ "Excuse me."/ "There's a time limit."/ Dr.Ingram."/ Torval had the man's arm yanked up behind him now. He pressed the man into the side of the automobile. (p. 42)

This passage shows clearly the negative impact of a deeply rooted system so that it constructs false ideal or false consciousness. Two workers or proletarians have conflict with each other over pleasing the capital owner, instead of join efforts to tear down the system that divert them from the real goal equal economic condition of classless society.

### 7. Vija Kinski

As Eric's chief of theory, she is paid for talking; for that reason, her dialogues with Eric are lengthy, therefore, for the sake of conciseness, not all part of the dialogues are included. Most of Kinski and Eric's dialogues are theoretical and about Kinski reassuring Eric to stick to his yen plan.

"The wise course would be to back down, stand off. You are being advised to do this," she said./ "Yes."/ "But there's something you know. You know the yen can't go any higher. And if you know something and don't act upon it, then you didn't know it in the first place. There is a piece of Chinese wisdom," she said. "To know and not to act is not to know."/ He loved Vija Kinski./ "To pull back now would not be authentic. It would be a quotation from other people's lives. A paraphrase of a sensible text that wants you to believe there are plausible realities, okay, that can be traced and analysed."/ "When in fact what."/ "That wants you to believe there are foreseeable trends and forces. When in fact it's all random phenomenon. You apply mathematics and other disciplines, yes. But in the end you're dealing with a system that's out of control. Hysteria at high speeds, day to day, minute to minute. People in free societies don't have to fear the pathology of the state. We create our own frenzy, our own mass convulsions, driven by thinking machines that we have no final authority over. The frenzy is barely noticeable most of the time. It's simply how we live." (p. 84 - 85)

Kinski convinces Eric to remain to his plan regarding the yen as to abandon it means being unauthentic to himself. With her ability to see things differently, Kinski can actually use it to her own benefit, instead of trying to persuade Eric about his plan, which if succeeded, it would only benefited him the most, not them.

"There's an order at some deep level," he said. "A pattern that wants to be seen."/ "Then see it."/ He heard voices in the distance. "I always have. But it's been elusive in this instance. My experts have struggled and just about given up. I've been working on it, sleeping on it, not sleeping on it. There's a common surface, an affinity between market movements and the natural world."/ "An aesthetics of interaction."/ "Yes. But in this case I'm beginning to doubt I'll ever find it."/ "Doubt. What is doubt? You don't believe in doubt. You've told me this. Computer power eliminates doubt. All doubt rises from past experience. But the past is disappearing. We used to know the past but not the future. This is changing." She said. "We need a new theory of time." (p. 86)

Again, Kinski persuades Eric to ignore his doubt about his yen plan. An act she is supposed to stop, yet still doing, of which to only benefit Eric in the end, if succeeded.

"You know what capitalism produces. According to Marx and Engels."/ "Its own grave-diggers," he said./ "But these are not the grave-diggers. This is the free market itself. These people are a fantasy generated by the market. They don't exist outside the market. There is nowhere they can go to be on the outside. There is no outside."/ .../ "The market culture is total. It breeds these men and women. They are necessary to the system they despise. They give it energy and definition. They are market-driven. They traded on the markets of the world. This why they exist, to invigorate and perpetuate the system." (p. 89 - 90)

This particular passage here is in fact interesting. Here Eric actually questions the capitalism itself, calling it only produces its own grave-diggers. Yet again, Kinski, reassures Eric that the free market itself is good and needed, the very thing she is supposed to tear down. Blinded indeed.

"You have to understand."/ He said, "What?"/ "The more visionary the idea, the more people t leaves behind. This is what the protest is all about. Visions of technology and wealth. The force of cyber-capital that will send people into the gutter to retch and die. What is the flaw of human rationality?"/ He said, "What?"/ It pretends not to see the horror and death at the end of the schemes it builds. This is a protest against the future. They want to hold off the future. They want to normalize it, keep it from overwhelming the present."/ .../ "The future is always a wholeness, a sameness. We're all tall and happy there," she said. "This is why the future fails. It always fails. It can never be the cruel happy place we want to make it." (p. 90 - 91)

Vija Kinski, like the other proletarians in the book, fails to realise what the real problem is. She turns blind eyes on protesters outside, whom, at least, trying to show opposition to the system, capitalist system, where she should be joining; instead she keeps convincing Eric to stick to what he is doing, even when Eric himself is not following what she says.

#### CONCLUSION

From the analysis, it can be said that *Cosmopolis* is a fine example of literary works that has themes around economy, capitalism, Marxism and social class. It has many aspects that support the indications of false ideal or false consciousness.

The main bourgeois main character, Eric Packer, represents the capitalist system itself, in which it masks its own failure with the proletariat's high hopes of prosperity through hard work, whereas, in fact, it only brings fortunes and advantages to the capital owner.

False consciousness in *Cosmopolis* is depicted through dialogues and narratives between the bourgeois main character with each of his worker, and in a certain case, between Eric's workers. According to the analysis, all of the workers fail to realise the main problem and issue they should fight for, instead, they keep promoting the interests of the capital owner as the result of the blinding potent rooted system that promise them a better economic condition through hard work of serving the one who owns money and other capital. The rooted system is so solidified in this "fictionalised" Manhattan in the book; it makes none of the proletariat aware of the economic injustice.

The proletariat in the book do what they and the society consider to be true by serving the capital owner in return of money which they can use to get better lives, when they should join efforts to tear down the system that keeps them stay in their unfavourable positions as workers.

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