

## SOCIAL ISSUES IN JOHN BOYNE'S *THE BOY IN THE STRIPPED PYJAMAS*

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### Abstract

Literature reflects life and shares insights about human life. Holocaust literature focuses on sharing the dark experience of the German Nazis' occupation of Poland in the Second World War. This study aims to identify the representation of social issues in John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006), one of the Holocaust novels that focuses on children's experience of the Holocaust. The study employs the interactive qualitative data analysis from Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), where the data analysis consists of three simultaneous processes of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. It reveals five major social issues included in the novel: the ethnocentric Nazi's beliefs about German's superiority, slavery, child labor, class difference, and marginalization toward women. The results imply that children's literature can also present social issues that may raise awareness about the cruelty of the Holocaust.

**Keywords:** social issues, Holocaust, discrimination, children's literature.

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### INTRODUCTION

John Boyne is an Irish writer who was born in Dublin, Ireland, on April 30th, 1971. He wrote several novels and short stories. The examples of his work are *The Boy at the Top of Mountain* (2015) and *The Heart's Invisible Furies* (2017). One of Boyne's famous works is entitled *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. The novel was published in 2006 and got much attention from international readers, and it has been translated into 46 languages (Gray, 2014). In 2008 the novel was then adapted into a movie, where the point of view moves away from Bruno's innocence to a more observant spectator of the contrast between the German Nazis' campaign and the real Auschwitz. Although film adaptations are prone to infidelities like this (Kranz & Mellerski, 2008; Suwastini, 2014).

Rich and Percy (2018) are concerned that the change of point of view has shifted the moral of the story. As argued by Rico & Fernández (2011), the persistence of Bruno's ignorance of the genocide in what he called "the farm" even after watching the Nazi propaganda movies is a representation of Bruno's psychological denial. Bruno was in denial that his life had been drastically changed when his father was promoted to oversee the operation of the Auschwitz concentration camp. As much as the montage of Nazi's propaganda movies and the mise-en-scènes of Auschwitz highlights the contrast of the nation's vision of greatness and the grave crimes they commit, the film seems to put the blame on Bruno' disability to accept change than the Nazi's ideology itself that place Bruno into the gas chambers on that

fateful day. In its smallest locust, Bruno's father is to blame, for it is his ambition that drove the family away from Bruno's childhood home and friends. At the same time, the Anti-Semitic beliefs that contaminated much of the European minds would be the ideology behind Bruno's suffering and all the striped-pyjamaed prisoners (Hayati & Al-Hafizh, 2012).

The present study reverts back to the novel and chooses to view the social issues raised by the Nazi occupation of Poland and the cruelty of Auschwitz, preferring Bruno's naive point of view as the point of view. While such a standpoint can be argued as a more neutral way to picture the suffering experienced by the Jews, the point of view can also symbolize German people's ignorance of the actual situations in the concentration camp as they were blinded by the Nazi propaganda. As argued by Gary (2016), reading Holocaust literature can shed educating light on one of the grimmest crimes in the history of humanity (Bosmajian, 2002; McGlothlin & Kapczynski, 2016). The present study is aimed to reveal the social issues represented in Boyne's *Boy in Striped Pyjama* to highlight the multi-dimensionality of Nazi's crimes during the Holocaust.

As mentioned by Rubiyanto & Arini (2016) and Slaughter (1980), social issues are consequences of one-sided concentration of wealth, power, and authority that create hierarchical social status and classes, which created social classes that separated the members of the society. The results of the present study are expected to extend the historical insights of the novel. German Nazi's ethnocentric beliefs about the Aryan's superiority have cost the Jewish people their lives and half of the world's stability with it. Thus, analysis of social issues in Holocaust literature is critically needed to prevent and stop the growth of ethnocentric and racist attitudes. As literature reflects and affects life (Abrams, 1999), it inevitably becomes one of the most persistent means for building characters among children (Widasuari,

Suwastini, Wahyuni, & Visestayati, 2020; Wijaya, Suwastini, Adnyani, & Adnyani, 2021).

## METHOD

### Research Design

The study is qualitative research aimed to gain an understanding of the social issues represented in a novel (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The research subject is a novel entitled *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* by John Boyne, published by David Fickling Books Publisher in 2006. The research object is the social issues represented in the novel.

The main instrument for the data collection and data analysis is the researcher, supported by field notes. The primary method of data collection was close reading, supported with the segmentation of the novel narrative into sequences and subsequences to help divide the novel into manageable units of analysis (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008). In this case, a major event in the plot is considered a sequence, while the detailed incidents of the event are called subsequences (Dewi et al., 2021). These subsequences are then analyzed to identify the social issues that they contain. A table of tabulation is employed to record the social issues identified from these subsequences.

The data analysis is conducted following the interactive qualitative data analysis from Miles et al. (2014), which includes the simultaneous processes of data categorization/data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. As qualitative research relies on prolonged engagement as one of the strategies to gain trustworthiness, the present study repeats these simultaneous processes while continuously reviews the data collection to ensure that all necessary data are collected and analyzed. During these four simultaneous processes, the Marxist approach to literature is employed, where social hierarchies are considered the primary source of social issues (Eaglestone, 2000). In Boyne's *The Boy in Striped*

*Pajamas*, racial differences have been considered the main source of hierarchy. However, the hierarchical dichotomies between German Nazis and the Jewish people entail different types of oppressions.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned above, the study is focused on finding some sociocultural issues, especially the ones related to class difference, discriminations towards workers, and inequality experienced by certain people in their society because of their race and nationality. As cited in Raza & Awan (2016), the scope of Marxist criticism covers capitalism, social values, the use of power, inequality, and class difference. The present study identifies five major social issues in John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006): racism, slavery, child labor, class difference, and discrimination towards women and children. These forms of social issues were found through the sequences of the novel. Those social issues will be discussed in the following sections.

### Racism in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*

The story's time setting was during World War II when Germany invaded Poland in 1939 and occupied it until the war was over in 1945. Poland had been home to a vibrant Jewish community; thus, the occupation of Poland by Nazi Germany with their anti-Semitic ideology directly affected the Jewish people in Poland (Pogonowski, 1993; Prazmowska, 2010). As the invader, The Nazi German assumed the higher position that made decisions to control the Jews.

In Boyne's *The Boy in Striped Pyjamas*, the assumption of the German Aryan as the greatest race is represented in Bruno's statement in subsequence 10m, as shown in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 1:

*"Well, because Germany is the greatest of all countries," Bruno replied, remembering something that he had overheard Father*

*discussing with Grandfather on any number of occasions"*

(Boyne, *The Boy*, 2006, pp. 69).

From excerpt 1 of the story above, the representation of German's ethnocentric assumption of its superiority compared to the other race in Europe can be seen. In the above excerpt, Bruno stated this belief about this superiority as his grandfather taught him. As a child, Bruno did not create this kind of prejudice by himself. He overheard it from the adults around him. He did not only hear it once to make him remember the statement. The Germans and the Nazi children had been taught about their superiority over the other races, especially the Jewish people. Such teachings can implant an ethnocentric belief among the younger generation, which may lead to the reproduction of ethnocentrism and social injustice toward the marginalized race or ethnicity. Rubiyanto (2016) found a similar issue in his analysis of Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. He revealed how a twelve-year-old child Amir showed a negative attitude toward one of his friends because he had been taught that his friend's ethnicity was lower than Amir's. Thus, through Bruno's naive comments, Boyne's *The Boy in Striped Pyjamas* effectively highlights the issue of German's ethnocentric beliefs while underlining its effect on children's education when such issue is repeatedly expressed in daily discourses. However, as a young child, Bruno's naivety still could not connect the concept of German's superiority over the Jews, so he did not show negative prejudices toward Shmuel, a son of Jewish prisoners in the concentration camp where Bruno's father was the commander. Bruno was unaware that the concentration camp was different from Nazi propaganda movies, which depicted the camps as productive working sites in the interests of the Jews.

Nazi German used their position to create social classes based on racial identity, where the German was higher than

the Jews. It was apparent in the novel that the hierarchy was not that of the German over the Polish people because there were also many Jews from other countries who were sent to the Auschwitz concentration camp. It is stated in the novel from Shmuel's explanation to Bruno in subsequence 10j, as shown in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 2:

*"Most of us here are from Poland," said Shmuel. 'Although there are some from other places too, like Czechoslovakia and—"*

(Boyne, *The Boy*, 2006, pp. 69)

In Excerpt 2 above, Shmuel stated that people detained in the fenced camp were mainly from Poland, and some were from "other places "like Czechoslovakia." Later, Shmuel also explained to Bruno that there were more than hundreds of people in his place (that is, a barrack inside the concentration camp), which consisted of children, teenagers, and older men. Pogonowski (2010) states that the Germans used the Auschwitz concentration camp to imprison Jews from Poland, Russia, and other parts of Eastern Europe. The Nazis put the Jews in concentration camps to control them, their assets, and their activities. It is in line with Lee's & Mani's (2014) argument that the ruling class will use many strategies to control every aspect of the lower-class society to maintain their superior status. Hence, in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006), the Nazis used their military power to arrest the population of the Jews in the concentration camps made by them. Thus, by arresting the Jews, they were able to control every movement of the population.

### **Slavery in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas***

The story was started in Bruno's house, which was located in Berlin. Bruno's father was a commanding officer in the Nazi party. When Bruno's father got promoted to take charge of the Auschwitz operation, the whole family moved from Berlin to southern Poland and lived in a house next

to the Auschwitz concentration camp. The camp was named Auschwitz, but Bruno called it Out-With instead, which was effective to mark Bruno as a very innocent and naive boy who was completely unaware of the anti-Semitic sentiments of the Auschwitz operation. Despite Shmuel's simple explanation of what the Jews did in the camp, Bruno was unaware that the camp was a prison and that his father's office enslaved the Jews.

In Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, thousands of Jews were detained and forced to work for the Nazis. Most of the Jews had to work without payment, and they had to live in extreme poverty. The exploitation of Jews in the Auschwitz concentration camp can be considered slavery because they were not paid for the work they did for the Nazis. According to Mwetulundila (2016), exploitation refers to the social injustice where workers do not get compatible fees based on their work. In addition, Sanka et al. (2019) stated that exploitation usually had done by people who held power to the workers from the lower class. However, the cruelty of the Nazis' party to the slaves can be seen in several parts of the novel.

In subsequence 7f, Bruno witnessed Lieutenant Kotler maltreated Pavel that Bruno was described to "look away" because he felt "ashamed to be part of it." Here is an excerpt from subsequence 7f.

Excerpt 3

*"Hey, you!" he shouted, then adding a word that Bruno did not understand. 'Come over here, you—' He said the word again, and something about the harsh sound of it made Bruno look away and feel ashamed to be part of this at all.*

.....

*"And afterwards, when you return to the kitchen, make sure you wash your hands before touching any of the food, you filthy—' Lieutenant Kotler repeated the word he had used."*

(Boyne, *The Boy*, 2006, pp. 47-48)

Pavel was a Jew from the camp who was assigned to be a kitchen hand in the commanding officer's residence. Pavel was a doctor before the Nazi's occupation of Poland. However, as a prisoner, he was maltreated by the Nazis. He had to stop practicing medicine, and he had to peel potatoes instead. He was not paid for the work he did in residence. That was not enough. He was also called a very bad word repeatedly, which Bruno felt ashamed to hear. From Excerpt 3 above, it can be seen that Pavel was considered "filthy" by Koestler, who was a young soldier. It was described that Koestler called him filthy and that he was a "\_\_\_," a term unstated in the novel.

Understandably, a children's novel like *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* eliminates inappropriate name-calling. Readers may be left wondering what Pavel called that made Bruno so ashamed to be part of the event where he was one of the Nazis that treated Koestler so severely. However, the complete title of the book gave way to the secret term. In the inner cover of the novel, it was mentioned that the novel *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* was "a Fable by John Boyne." In a fable, the characters in the narrative are animals. This subtitle implies that the characters in the novels are animals. Thus assumption can apply to both sides of the war, where the Nazis behaved inhumanely, hence like animals, and the Nazis treated the Jewish people like animals. It seems that the second possibility could be the explanation of the term, where Pavel was called some sort of animal.

According to Smith (2011), the Nazis called the Jewish people "rats" and considered them filthy. The Nazis, as represented by Kotler in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, considered themselves to be the owners of the animals, where the animals are pets to these owners. It justifies the slavery theme presented in the novel because, in the rule of slavery, the workers will be treated as a pet or the owner's

property (Schaefer, 2019). According to Schaefer (2019) this logic helps the oppressors justify the slavery that they conducted by avoiding the feeling that they are harassing and torturing human beings. Instead, they assume that the slaves are pets, so they do not feel like they are violating human rights.

The other representation of human exploitation or slavery conducted by the Nazis during the Holocaust can be seen through how Pavel's physical condition worsened after he arrived in the Auschwitz camp. It is mentioned in subsequence 13l of the novel, as can be seen from the following excerpt.

Excerpt 4:

*"He seemed to grow smaller and smaller each week, if such a thing were possible, and the colour that should have been in his cheeks had drained almost entirely away. His eyes appeared heavy with tears and Bruno thought that one good blink might bring on a torrent."*

(Boyne, *The Boy*, 2006, pp. 81)

From Excerpt 4 above, it can be observed that Bruno noticed that Pavel was getting smaller and look even more unhealthy than before. However, despite the conditions of his physical health, Pavel was forced to work for Bruno's family. Therefore, this event shows how the Jews who had to work for the Nazis did not get a proper payment and suffered from the injustice because they were classified as lower-class people compared to the Nazis who stood on the highest chain of the community. Raza & Awan (2016) mention that the ruling class often forces the working class to work without getting proper benefits such as money, food, house, health care, or education. Hence, Excerpt 4 above shows that the Jews also had to work without receiving proper treatments from the Nazis. The decrease in Pavel's health that Bruno noticed is a sign that Pavel did not get proper health care and food after moving to the concentration

camp. Besides, the work he did for the Nazis made his health worse because, as mentioned in the previous excerpt, Pavel also received physical and verbal abuse from the Nazis.

### **The Representation of Child Labor in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006)**

Similar to slavery, child labor is also part of human exploitation (White, 2009). However, the target of mistreatment in child labor is the child workers (White, 1996). During the Holocaust, child labor also happened in concentration camps (Marriage, 2009). In Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, child labor also occurs as one of the main social issues represented through the presence of Shmuel from the eyes of an innocent nine-year-old boy, Bruno. Unknown to Bruno, Shmuel's presence in his father's residence was child slavery. Shmuel was a nine-year-old boy who lived in Auschwitz with his grandfather, father, and brother. Shmuel was assigned as a helper in the residence of the commanding officer. That was how Bruno met Shmuel and befriended him, as they happened to be of the same age and to have the same birthday. This meeting was depicted in sequence 15h of the novel, as can be observed in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 5:

*"'He brought me,' said Shmuel. 'He?' asked Bruno. 'You don't mean Lieutenant Kotler?' 'Yes. He said there was a job for me to do here.' And when Bruno looked down, he saw sixty-four small glasses."*

(Boyne, *The Boy*, 2006, pp. 95)

In Excerpt 5 above, Shmuel stated that Kotler assigned him to work as a servant in Bruno's house. The work assigned to Shmuel was wiping the glasses in Bruno's, which would be used to celebrate Ralf's birthday, Bruno's father. He was assigned to wipe sixty-four glasses. Later on, it was described that Bruno noticed that Shmuel looked skinny and unhealthy. Bruno also mentioned the significant differences between Shmuel's fingers and his. Both

were the same age, yet Shmuel's appearance did not look as healthy as Bruno's. Bruno described his hands as "full of life," while in contrast, Shmuel's hands were worse than "dying twigs."

This physical appearance of Shmuel reveals how unhealthy he was. Besides, it indicates that Shmuel did not get nutritious food, payment, or health care in return for the work he did for the Nazis. A similar case of child labor was also mentioned by Hadi (2015) in his study of Charles Dicken's *Oliver Twist*. He mentioned that the character of Oliver had to work to pick oakum since early in the morning. However, despite the effort he put into his work, the employee made him sleep in a rough, hard bed every night. Thus, Shmuel, who worked as a servant in Bruno's house, was also treated unequally in this sequence. Shmuel was not even given sufficient food as payment which caused him to feel starving. Moreover, Kotler assaulted Shmuel verbally and physically after he got caught eating a piece of chicken given by Bruno.

The other representation of child labor in Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006) is shown in sequence 12l. In this sequence, Bruno also mentioned how small and skinny Shmuel was despite being the same age as Bruno. However, Bruno decided not to talk about Shmuel's appearance to avoid being unkind to him. Bruno noticed how small and skinny Shmuel was described in subsequence 12l, which can be seen in Excerpt 6 below.

Excerpt 6:

*"He turned and walked away and Bruno noticed again just how small and skinny his new friend was."*

(Boyne, *The Boy*, 2006, pp. 76)

Similar to the example of child labor mentioned before, the injustice received by Shmuel is also revealed through his unhealthy looks noticed by Bruno. Bruno also uttered that he never saw any boy who was as skinny as Shmuel before. It is a sign that his life as a worker and a prisoner of the

Nazis had a significant impact on his life, especially his health. White (1996) states that the peril of child labor starts when the child workers are kidnapped or forcefully removed, bonded or strictly limited in their movement, and forced to work while being unfairly treated, stripping the children of their rights. After being imprisoned by the Nazis, Shmuel's needs as a child and human being were mostly denied. The Nazis did not give him sufficient food, health care, or access to education. Shmuel seemed perpetually hungry, and he always asked for food each time he met Bruno. Meanwhile, Shmuel's unequal access to health care can be seen in how he always looked pale and had dirt all over his body. The depiction of injustice received by Shmuel as a worker and a prisoner of the Nazis represents how terrible child labor during the Holocaust era was.

#### **Class Difference in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas***

Class difference is one of the main issues discussed in Marxist analysis (Eaglestone, 2000; Mirunalini, Devi, Mirunalini, & Devi, 2017; Slaughter, 1980). In Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006), the class difference was starkly divided between Nazis and the Jews. It is a light departure from Marx's opinion, which is based mainly on the economy and accumulation of capital (Eaglestone, 2000; Slaughter, 1980). The classes in Marxist society are divided into two, namely the bourgeois and the proletariat. In Boyne's novel, the Nazis classified the Jews as the lowest class in society, lower even than the Germans proletariat workers. The Nazis classified the Jews as the lowest people described in subsequence 5i, as shown in Excerpt 7 below.

Excerpt 7:

*"Ah, those people," said Father, nodding his head and smiling slightly. "Those people ... well, they're not people at all, Bruno."* (Boyne, *The Boy*, 2006, pp. 35)

From Excerpt 7 above, it can be seen that Bruno's father, Ralf, uttered that the Jews that Bruno saw through his bedroom window could not be classified as people or human beings. The act done by Ralf in this sequence can be taken as a way for him to downgrade and ignore the existence of Jews population by pretending that they did not exist. Roozbeh (2018) mentions that the relationship between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is influenced by hatred. Roozbeh (2018) explains that the bourgeoisie as the superior party always disparaged the proletariat and placed the population of the proletariat to the lowest chain of the community. In the excerpt mentioned above, it can be seen how Ralf, as part of the bourgeoisie, tried to downgrade the Jews by not classifying them as part of people. Besides, the hatred of the Nazis for the Jews made them came up with the idea of extermination of the entire Jews community. Avoiding mentioning the name of Jews in front of Bruno was a denial of the existence of the Jewish population.

The juxtaposition between Bruno and Shmuel can be used to represent the differences between these two social classes. At the beginning of the story, the writer described Bruno's house as luxurious: it had five floors and a big kitchen. Even after he moved to Poland, his house was quite big because it had three floors. Meanwhile, the camps where the Jews were detained were described as shabby, with no greenery, and surrounded by high fences. The food consumed by the two children presented even starker contradictions. Where Shmuel was always starving, Bruno was supplied with abundant decadent food. This issue is presented in subsequence 10o, as can be seen in Excerpt 8, as follows.

Excerpt 8:

*"Chocolate," said Shmuel very slowly, his tongue moving out from behind his teeth. "I've only ever had chocolate once." "Only once? I love chocolate. I*

*can't get enough of it although Mother says it'll rot my teeth."*

(Boyne, *The Boy*, 2006, pp. 81)

The excerpt above shows the conversation between Shmuel and Bruno, which reveals how different the loves of the two boys were. It was mentioned that Shmuel only tasted chocolate once, while Bruno "*can't get enough of it.*" It is unfortunate that one child is deprived of the most delectable treat, while the other had to be stopped from eating too much else he would have rotten teeth. However, when this conversation is connected with the description of how skinny Shmuel was (see, for example, Excerpt 6), the difference becomes horrifyingly contrasting. When Bruno had delicacies like chocolate at his whims, Shmuel did not have enough plain bread to eat that he was so skinny his fingers were like "*dying twigs.*"

The other representation of class difference seen in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* is the relation between the Nazis' proletariat and bourgeoisie. Mwetulundila (2016) states that the bourgeoisie consists of people who employ the workers, and these people usually have their sources of capital, such as land or factories. Meanwhile, the proletariat refers to the people who work for the bourgeoisie. In Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, the hierarchy among Nazi classes is also presented. In the novel, it was depicted that the commander household included a German house-maid named Maria. The family had hired Maria since Bruno was a baby. According to Bruno's father, Ralf, Maria had been an "*overpaid*" maid, as revealed in subsequence 2j:

Excerpt 9:

*"What do you think of all this, Maria?" he asked after a long silence because he had always liked Maria and felt as if she was one of the family, even though Father said she was just a maid and overpaid at that."*

(Boyne, *The Boy*, 2006, pp. 10)

From Excerpt 9 above, the father as a bourgeoisie viewed Maria as the proletariat. As mentioned, Ralf always thought that Maria was being overpaid for the work she did for Bruno's family. Despite how long Maria worked for the family, Ralf still thought that he paid Maria more than he should have because the bourgeoisie has the liberty to determine the value of their employee's work. Lee and Mani (2014) found a similar representation of class differences in Thu Huong's *Without a Name*. He discovered that Hoa was treated based on the capitalist ideology where the exchange value determined her life she could give. Ralf, like the bourgeoisie, determined the value of Maria based on the number of works that she did for the family, without considering her loyalty in working for the family for a long time.

Furthermore, the status of Maria as the proletariat or lower class can be seen from the way she behaved towards Bruno's family. Maria was not allowed to talk back or stare at the family members for too long in the story. The rules made by the family restricted her attitudes. Maria was not allowed to state her opinion even when it was related or directly affected her life. For example, when Bruno's family moved to Auschwitz, Maria had no choice but to follow them even though she knew how dangerous Auschwitz was. This injustice was one of the consequences for Maria's status as part of the working class or proletariat.

#### **Discrimination towards Women and Children in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas***

The other representation of social issues seen in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006) is discrimination towards women and children. According to Suwastini (2013), women are constantly marginalized by patriarchal values. For Marxist feminists, marginalization of the working-class women is even more apparent as they are marginalized by men of the working class and men and women of the bourgeoisie



(Tong, 2009). According to Marger (1985) discrimination refers to the act of denying the equal level rights of people as part of the human being. Marger (1985) mentions that age, gender, and race are some of the fundamental reasons behind the discrimination received by a person.

In Boyne's novel, subsequences 2e and 2g included the depiction of discrimination toward women and children, as shown in Excerpts 10 and 11 below.

Excerpt 10:

*"I'm sorry, Bruno," said Mother, 'but your plans are just going to have to wait. We don't have a choice in this.'"*  
(Boyne, *The Boy*, 2006, pp. 8)

Excerpt 11:

*"We don't have the luxury of thinking," Mother, opening a box that contained the set of sixty-four glasses,"*  
(Boyne, *The Boy*, 2006, pp. 11)

From the two excerpts above, it can be observed that women during the Holocaust did not have the same right as men. As what happened to Elsa, Bruno's mother, she was aware that she did not have the luxury of thinking in the sequences above. It means that Elsa did not have the right to make a decision by herself. She had to follow the order from her husband without being able to state her opinion.

Marger (1985) and Suwastini (2013) explain that women had been restricted to participate in many fields, occupations, and positions in society. Women are frequently excluded from plenty of opportunities in social life. Hence, in the sequences mentioned above, it can be seen that Ralf was excluding Elsa during decision-making related to the family. As a wife, Elsa was denied the right to give her opinion about the family's sudden move to Auschwitz. Thus, as part of the family member, she had to follow the rule made by Ralf and live under the authority of his husband.

Besides discrimination towards women, other types of discrimination were represented in the novel, namely age

discrimination. The age discrimination in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006) represented how the children were denied the right to state their opinions and feelings. Marger (1985) explains that discrimination towards age happened when the age-based restrictions applied in society started to be irrational. Marger (2015) also adds that both the elderly and children can be the victim of age discrimination. The representation of age discrimination can be seen in subsequence 11h, as shown in excerpt 12 below.

Excerpt 12:

*"Then there are a number of ground rules which need to be set down before we begin.' Father was a big believer in ground rules. Whenever there was a special or important occasion in the house, more of them were created."*  
(Boyne, *The Boy*, 2006, pp. 68)

The excerpt above reveals that Ralf always created a ground-rule to be obeyed by his children during important occasions. One of the rules made by Ralf before the dinner with The Fuhrer was that Bruno and Gretel had to behave maturely and avoid creating problems. The authoritarian parenting adopted by Ralf can be taken as the reflection of oppression towards children (Palupy, 2016). Palupy (2016) argues that Ralf's rules that forced Bruno to behave maturely beyond his age were not good parenting because Ralf never educated Bruno to be mature. The ground rules made by Ralf were irrational because they made Bruno, who was just nine years old, had to change himself to be more mature whenever his family held an important occasion. Thus, it can be stated that Bruno did not show the mature side of him because of his own will but because the authoritarian father forced him.

Another representation of age discrimination experienced by Bruno because of his age is reflected in how he was forced to leave Berlin. The decision of Bruno's father to move to Poland was one-sided because he did not ask any permission

from the other members of the family. Rico & Fernández (2011) revealed that this sudden removal of Bruno from his familiar home has led to a psychological disruption. Rico & Fernández (2011) argues that Bruno's life in Poland's Auschwitz was wrapped in denial of his removal from his motherland. For Rico & Fernández (2011), this denial had become the source of Bruno's ignorance of the facts about the concentration camps as he failed to accept his presence there. However, Bruno's parents, especially his father, failed to acknowledge this condition. Instead of accommodating the adaptation so Bruno could accept his new home, Ralf demanded Bruno mature up. Bruno was denied the right to think or to state his opinion in the family because they have Ralf as the father figure, which held the authority to decide all the important things related to the family.

## CONCLUSION

This study aims to reveal the social issues represented in John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006). The novel used Holocaust as the setting. The novel focused on the life of Bruno, a Nazi child, as the main character. Through the eyes of Bruno as a nine-year-old boy traumatized by the sudden removal of his family from Berlin to Southern Poland, the novel highlights at least five social issues in the Auschwitz concentration camp: racism, slavery, child labor, class difference, and discrimination towards women and children. To include these issues in a children's novel like *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006) is a clever strategy to educate the children about the Holocaust. Although the novel is laden with critical social issues, it perceptively took the point of view of a nine-year-old Bruno to reveal the issues. Such a point of view may simplify the issues to the intelligence of a nine-year-old. Nevertheless, it is precisely the novel's strength, as it presents the issues for young teenagers as the intended readers of the novel. Nevertheless, further studies should be conducted on the pedagogical impact of

this strategy and the novel for children and education of social issues in the context of the Holocaust and history in general.

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