

THE LIFE OF GERVAISE MACQUART AS A LOWER WORKING CLASS WOMEN UNDER FRENCH SECOND EMPIRE IN THE NOVEL *L'ASSOMMOIR* BY ÉMILE ZOLA

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ABSTRAK

*Industrialisasi yang berkembang pada abad 19 di Prancis tanpa disadari telah membawa banyak dampak baik maupun buruk. Beberapa dampak buruk adalah pertambahan angka buruh, munculnya konflik antar kelas, permasalahan sosial seperti prostitusi, dan ketertindasan perempuan kelas bawah. Penelitian ini membahas kehidupan perempuan kelas bawah yang tergambar dalam novel *L'Assommoir* karya Émile Zola, sebagai gambaran dari realitas yang terjadi di masa Kekaisaran II di Prancis. Analisis ini menggunakan teknik deskripsi kualitatif dengan teori mengenai eksklusivitas sosial dari Foucault, kajian mengenai gender kedua dari Beauvoir dan teori gender lainnya. Dari analisis yang dilakukan terlihat bahwa Zola melakukan kritik terhadap ketidakadilan pada perempuan pekerja kelas bawah di masa Kekaisaran II. Pada analisis ini juga terlihat bahwa perempuan mengalami eksklusivitas dari wacana besar di masyarakat Prancis kala itu. Proses eksklusivitas ini dilakukan oleh masyarakat dan didukung oleh Negara pada masa itu bahkan dianggap sebagai satu hal normal dan biasa.*

Kata kunci: buruh, Kekaisaran II, *L'Assommoir*, pekerja, perempuan, Prancis

ABSTRACT

The industrialization which developed in the 19th century France had brought both positive and negative impacts. Some of the negative impacts are the rising number of labors, the emergence of inter class conflicts, social problems such as prostitution, and the oppression of lower class women. This research will discuss about the life of lower class women depicted in the novel *L'Assommoir* by Émile Zola, as the portrayal of the reality in the French Second Empire. The analysis uses qualitative descriptive technique and applies Foucault's theory on social exclusion, Beauvoir's theory of second sex, and also gender theory. The analysis shown that Zola criticize the inequalities in the life of lower class women under Second Empire. It also shows that lower class women excluded from the 'grand' discourse in French society. The exclusion process which is done by society and supported by the State at that time regarded as a normal thing and 'taken for granted'.

Key Words: France, labor, *L'Assommoir*, women, worker, The French Second Empire

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INTRODUCTION

The industrialization by the end of the 19th century France brought tremendous changes in the country's social structure. In addition to growing factories and industrial centers, it also instigated the rising numbers of labors in France. Some skeptical opinions state that industrialization only conveys negative impacts to the society, such as urbanization, inter class conflicts, and the birth of consumerism (Nelson, 2007:2). The oppression of the working class within the social structure can be traced back from the country's social history. Labors are included in the common social class or *tiers états*, a group positioned in the lowermost level after the nobles (*noblesse*) and the churchmen (*clergé*) (Carpentier & Lebrun, 1987). The changing of leadership and authority in France, in circumstance, could not make *tiers états* acquire a better life. It can be said that they still befitted the oppressed people in the social stratification of French society, one which can be perceived in the French Empire II period.

Louis Napoléon Bonaparte or Napoléon III is the second President of the French Second Empire. Through the January 1852 constitution he legalized, the president became the solitary authority who can propose constitution or law to the legislative department. He then used it to rule as the King, no longer as a President. He announced the return of French Second Empire in November 1852 with the full support of *plebisit* (regional vote).

This writing discusses about the life of lower working class women in *L'Assommoir*, a novel by Émile Zola. Zola, who is called as the father of French Naturalism, believed that human nature is influenced by the inherited disposition and the surrounding environment. His writing method is based on his observing the surrounding authentic elements and his experimenting on some situations and environments (Husen, 2001:138-141). *L'Assommoir* is his seventh novel in *Les Rougon Macquart* series which was published in 1877. *Les Rougon Macquart* itself is an anthology containing a total of twenty works by Émile Zola released

in the span of 20 years starting from 1870. The anthology tells the life of three family branches in the French Empire II era, they are Rougon, Macquart, and Mouret families (Nelson, 2007:2). The complexity of this work lies not only on the number of characters (more than 300 characters) who have family relation to one another, but also in the story which explicitly depicts the life of higher, middle and lower class family in France at that time. While the title of *L'Assommoir* comes from the slang language used in Paris in the end of the 19th century which means a shop selling cheap alcohol produced by homemade distillation. The title also represents the content of the novel which is the life of lower class workers in Paris who were trapped in alcohol addiction, poverty, and prostitution under the second Empire.

Many studies on the novel *L'Assommoir* have been conducted for the reason that this novel is one of the works included in *Les Rougon Macquart* anthology which has been translated into various languages. Gauthier in his writing on "*Zola's Literary Reputation in Russia prior to 'L'Assommoir'*" (1959), confirms Zola's position in Russian literary world. The novel gained positive reviews in Russia especially since Zola is considered as a reformer who can criticize French Empire II government. Whereas Chaitin in "*Listening Power: Flaubert, Zola, and the Politics of Style Indirect Libre*" (1999) presents an analysis on his narrative style in the novel *L'Assommoir* compared with *Madame Bovary*, a novel by Gustave Flaubert, in which both are using indirect narrative style (*style indirect libre*).

On the other hand, a study conducted by Petrey in "*Goujet as God and Worker in L'Assommoir*" (1976) criticizes this novel for it was considered as incapable to contribute any account on the solution to the problems faced by the society, yet it shows how the society themselves make negative stigmas on labors, and force them to work as hard as animals. Ibsch in his study entitled "*Historical Changes of The Function of Spatial Description in Literary Texts*" (1982) shows the historical and time contexts in

Naturalism school which are clearly depicted in *L'Assommoir* novel.

Other studies about the domination of male to female in novel can be seen on the works of Endah Istiqomah Apriliani, Aquarini Priyatna Prabasmoro, Asep Yusup Hidayat in “*Penggambaran Sosok Bapak dalam Novel Il A Jamais Tué Personne, Mon Papa Karya Jean-Louis Fournier*” (2013) which aims to examine the representation of father domination and the role of autobiographical fiction in resisting the father domination. There is also an article written by Tri Marhaeni P. Astuti entitled “*The Ever Failing Counter Movement: The Case of Low Class Women Migration at Grobogan, Central Java*” (2008) which shows its reader about low class women migration at Grobogan and what caused the movement. From the literature review above, it is known that the research on the lower working class women in Zola’s novel “*L'Assommoir*” has never been conducted before. Therefore, it will be a noteworthy of pointing in this research.

The labors’ life, which is identical with poverty and oppression, as well as their strategy on how to survive in the society, are among the interesting topics in *L'Assommoir* novel. The novel tells about the labors in French Empire II in the beginning of the industry growth in Paris. Accordingly, this research formulates the research problems into: (a) How Zola describes the labors’ life under Second Empire; (b) how the life of Gervaise Macquart represents the life of lower working class women in *L'Assommoir* novel; (c) How Zola addresses criticisms to Louis Napoleon Bonaparte’s regime, related to the inequality of life between male and female workers. The social exclusion theory and gender theory are used to show how the truth is sometimes constructed by those who have the authority. Hence, the discourse produced by men tends to victimized women, as revealed in this writing. Sociology of literature approach from Lucien Goldman is used to show how environment influences someone’s character; by using this approach, the research also shows how novel serves as media to picture reality in

the society. It is an attempt to provide a relatively autonomous status in literature as a social institution. In addition to the sociological and historical method, Goldmann also develops the concept of world view, which can be interpreted as a meaningful global structure. World view is closely related to social conditions. Moreover, world view is always a view of social classes, although it is not clearly visible in the social group (Damono, 1979:33)

This writing is intended to give an account on how the labors’ life and the lower working class women’s life in *L'Assommoir* novel are the representation of the life of *tiers états* under Second Empire. To do so, the novel *L'Assommoir* was taken as an object material. It discusses a few matters related to the questions in relevance with the life of lower working class under Second Empire regime. The discussion will start with the picture of labors’ life in Paris under Second Empire and then go on to the struggle of the main character in *L'Assommoir*-Gervaise Macquart-to survive in her position as a lower worker under Second Empire. Finally, it will explain how Zola was tried to give an implicit criticisms to Louis Napoleon’s regime (Second Empire), especially on how the regime did not give lower working class women the same opportunity of life, which then made them the most ‘suffering’ ones at that time.

L'ASSOMMOIR AND THE LABORS' LIFE IN PARIS

L'Assommoir is set in labors’ and workers’ life in factories and industrial areas in Paris as well as their daily life in the slum area in the outskirts of Paris. The period depicted in the novel is around Napoléon III’s *coup d'état* incident in 1851. The story is divided into two parts. The first part tells about Gervaise Macquart who ran away to Paris with her lover, Auguste Lantier. There, she worked as a laundress in a sweltering laundry in the most slum area of Paris. After they had got two boys namely Claude Lantier dan Étienne Lantier, her husband left her. She

then had a relationship with Coupeau, a roofer. They got married and had a daughter named Anna Coupeau. In her blissful moment, Gervaise succeeded in establishing a new laundry. However, the happiness did not last long.

The second part tells about misfortunes in Gervaise's life. It started with Coupeau's accident while repairing a roof which made him hospitalized. During his excruciating treatment, Coupeau started to consume alcohol, which turned him into a drunkard and unwilling to work anymore. The condition worsened with the arrival of Auguste Lantier, who was received with open hand by Coupeau, to their house. Gervaise had to endure all of the economic burden and family debt on her own, although in fact she got some help from Goujet, her cousin who secretly loved her. At the end, Gervaise's business went bankrupt and she became depressed and followed her husband's path to be an alcoholic until she died.

In the preface to the novel, Zola admits that *L'Assommoir* is his most precious and most heart wrenching work. He also said that this is the first novel which tells the reality about people who have never previously been disclosed, without any made up story. He did not deny the criticisms addressed to him that in this novel he depicted the lives of workers and the lower classes in Paris, but applied language style. It was very different from other literary works which he considered as still using academic and the upper class's language. Equally important, he did not want that the characters in his novels were considered evil, because he thought the all characters are basically good except that they were the victims of ignorance and the rigors of life in the environment around them.

Je ne me défends pas d'ailleurs. Mon oeuvre me défendra. C'est une oeuvre de vérité, le premier roman sur le peuple, qui ne mente pas et qui ait l'odeur du peuple. Et il ne faut point conclure que le peuple tout entier est mauvais, car mes person-nages ne sont pas mauvais, ils ne sont qu'ignorants et gâtés par le milieu de rude besogne et de misère où ils vivent. Seulement, il faudrait lire mes romans,

les comprendre, voir nettement leur ensemble, avant de porter les jugements tout faits, grotesques et odieux, qui circulent sur ma personne et sur mes oeuvres (Zola, 1877:3-4).

I do not defend myself elsewhere. My work will defend me. It is a work of truth, the first novel about the people who do not lie, and it has the smell of real people. And we must not conclude that the whole people is bad, because my person-households are not bad, they are only ignorant and spoiled by the middle of rough work and misery in which they live. Only he would read my novels, understand clearly seen together, before wearing ready-made judgments, grotesque and hateful circulating about me and my work

This novel explicitly portrays the life and realities of labors in the end of the 19th century Paris with all of the difficulties in it. One of the positive sides of Second Empire is the growth of economy marked by the escalation of credits, emergence of new factories, trade to foreign countries, construction of streets and railways to support the trade, and the development of modes of communication. Above all, Napoléon III showed more interest than his predecessors to develop Paris. As a part of his political dealings, he embraced the labors and working class people with the promise of improvement in their life, as well as the vision to make Paris to become the Centre of the world both in industry and entertainment.

The rapidly growing industry in the French Second Empire era also changed the *façade* of Paris and brought urban life atmosphere there. It did not take a long time to establish the suburban area in the outskirts of Paris. The area is jam-packed with labors and workers who came from villages and other areas to pursue their dreams of a better life in Paris (Lorwin, 1954:10). They chose to live there because the housing lease price was much cheaper than in Paris, even though it was a slum area and far from the 'clean' circumstance .

Several kinds of professions in Paris industries in the 1850s are portrayed in this

story. Some of them are builders, plumbers, roof men, carpenters, butchers, laundress, factory labors, tailors, watch makers, nail factory labors, street sweepers, ironers, florists, lace makers, embroiders, etc. They left home early in the morning and headed to the outskirts of Paris, jostling on dirty and muddy streets to the factories or workshops in Paris. They only came back home after the sun set.

The life in the industrial and suburban area of Paris is an upsetting one. As portrayed in *L'Assommoir*, the labors and lower class workers lived in dirty, vile, and inappropriate apartments. People living in this area are described to hate each other due to hardships in their life, which made them regard their neighbors as enemies. They preferred to listen to gossips and wicked news than good ones. There was hardly any privacy in the apartments and rented houses. The shared walls and the doors set face to face let everyone to discover each other's activities in the house. The extreme weather condition—extremely hot in the summer or extremely cold in the winter—put them in a worst health condition. It was worsened by the landlords' harsh treatments. They collected higher rent but provided minimum facilities. They would cruelly send the tenants out to the street for overdue payment (Zola, 1877:367).

The health condition of the labors at that time was miserable. The lack of garbage disposal made litter and waste from the factories piled onto the streets. One block of apartment had only one toilet and bathroom to be used by several families at a time. Consequently, they hardly enjoyed individual sanitization (Foley, 2004:58). In addition, the cleaning service attendants simply threw the garbage to Seine River, turning the river into a flow of trash while running through the city of Paris. Only those who earned more money and rented in the lower floors could consume water freely. As the result, people were suffering from cholera, dysentery and other epidemic diseases causing a high mortality rate to both children and adults (Price, 1987:216).

Another interesting thing revealed by Zola in this novel is that, in the middle of the worsening condition and hard life of the labors and workers under Napoléon III, there was a good character that was not addicted to alcohol. Goujet, who represents 'honnête ouvrier' or honest workers in *L'Assommoir* is portrayed as a clean, neat and smart character living in a habitable house with a harmonious family.

Goujet était un colosse de vingt-trois ans, superbe, le visage rose, les yeux bleus, d'une force herculéenne. À l'atelier, les camarades l'appelaient la Gueule-d'Or, à cause de sa belle barbe jaune. Les Goujet gagnaient encore à être fréquentés. Ils faisaient de grosses journées et plaçaient plus du quart de leur quinzaine à la Caisse d'épargne. Dans le quartier, on les saluait, on parlait de leurs économies. Goujet n'avait jamais un trou, sortait avec des bourgerons propres, sans une tache. Il était très poli, même un peu timide, malgré ses larges épaules. Les blanchisseuses du bout de la rue s'égayaient à le voir baisser le nez, quand il pas-sait. Il n'aimait pas leurs gros mots, trouvait ça dégoûtant que des femmes eussent sans cesse des saletés à la bouche. Un jour pourtant, il était rentré gris. Alors, madame Goujet, pour tout reproche, l'avait mis en face d'un portrait de son père, une mau-vaïse peinture cachée pieusement au fond de la commode. Et, depuis cette leçon, Goujet ne buvait plus qu'à sa suffisance, sans haine pourtant contre le vin, car le vin est nécessaire à l'ouvrier. (Zola, 1877:121)

Goujet is twenty three years old, handsome, endowed with reddish face and blue eyes, and strong resembling Hercules. In his workplace, his friends call him *Gueule-d'Or* for his alluring blonde goatee. Goujet's family enjoys a happy life, with some saving in a Bank. His family are well respected owing to his economic condition. Goujet always wears clean, spotless and flawless clothes. He is polite and shy, even though he has very broad shoulders. Whenever he passes, the laundry workers at the end of the big street will cheer without him notice. He dislikes them because he cannot understand why women can speak

dirty and nasty words. One day, he went home from work drunk. Madam Goujet then took her husband's painting, an ugly painting kept in the lowest drawer of her vanity. From that moment, Goujet never drinks anymore. However, he cannot hate wine, since it is needed by the workers. (Zola, 1877:121).

The polite, shy and handsome Goujet was an idol of female workers, including those who worked in the laundry where Gervaise worked. He did not like to drink alcohol even more after her mother reminded him about the incident happening to his father after he was drunk. Unlike his friends, Goujet's hatred to drinking alcohol enables him to save some money which he deposited in the Bank. He was also very generous and willing to donate some money for Gervaise.

Goujet's presence within the 'sick' society is like the two sides of a coin. On one side, he gives the hope that there is still a hero who is not influenced by the negative things and the hardship of the lower class society's life in France. On the other side, the presence of a hero implies how the society tactlessly 'punished' the workers from the lower class to stay in the class forever (Petrey, 1976:241). Despite their good deeds, they had no hope for moving up to the higher class and to get a better living. Goujet who was hard working, faithful to the family, polite, smart, and did not drink alcohol remained to have the same fate as the jobless, lazy, and alcohol addict like Coupeau and Auguste Lantier. In other words, Goujet is used by Zola to portray that a good character whose behavior is in accordance with the norms is only an ideal, but unappreciated by the society at that time.

Zola gave Goujet a portion for the protagonist character in this novel, but unfortunately Goujet was not female character. The female character, Gervaise Macquart, was shown as a very unfortunate female on earth through the novel. She had run away with Auguste Lantier from her family who used to support and love her, only to land into Lantier's domination. When Auguste ran away, Gervaise meet Coupeau. For a while,

she thought that she'd found her happiness in him, but it did not take long to realize that happiness was not at her side. She was forced to work hard to support her family, while Coupeau fell into alcohol addiction. Once again, she was subordinate under male's domination. The next part will discuss about Gervaise life, as a representation of lower working class women under Second Empire.

GERVAISE MACQUART'S MISERABLE LIFE AS A LOWER WORKING CLASS WOMAN IN L'ASSOMMOIR

The dream of getting a better life in an industrial city was the cause of the increasing number of people. They used to work as farmers on cultivation and farms in the village and came to Paris to be workers and labors in industries. What happened to Gervaise and Auguste was typical in that they both ran away from the village with the hope of having a better life in Paris. However, Gervaise had to spend her days as a laundress in one of the most sweltering corners in the city of Paris to earn money just enough to fulfill her daily needs.

-Qu'est-ce que tu fais ?... Où vas-tu ?

Elle ne répondit pas d'abord. Puis, lorsqu'il répéta sa ques-tion, furieusement, elle se décida

-Tu le vois bien, peut-être... Je vais laver tout ça... Les enfants ne peuvent pas vivre dans la crotte.

Il lui laissa ramasser deux ou trois mouchoirs. Et, au bout d'un nouveau silence, il reprit :

-Est-ce que tu as de l'argent?

Du coup, elle se releva, le regarda en face, sans lâcher les chemises sales des petits qu'elle tenait à la main.

-De l'argent! où veux-tu donc que je l'aie volé ?... Tu sais bien que j'ai eu trois francs avant-hier sur ma jupe noire. Nous avons déjeuné deux fois là-dessus, et l'on va vite, avec la charcuterie... Non, sans doute, je n'ai pas

*d'argent. J'ai quatre sous pour le lavoir...
Je n'en gagne pas comme certaines femmes
(Zola, 1877: 15)*

-What are you doing... Where are you going?

She did not reply at first. Then, when he repeated his calling furiously, she decided to answer.

-You see, maybe ...I'll wash it all ...The children cannot live in the mud. He let her pick up two or three handkerchiefs. And, after another pause, he continued:

-Do you have money?

In sudden moves, she got up, looked into his face without letting go of the dirty small shirts she held in her hand.

-Money! Where do you want so that I can steal it? ...You know I got three francs before yesterday on my blackskirt. We had lunch twice about it, and it goes fast, with the deli... No, of course I have no money. I get four francs for the works...I do not get as much as some women (Zola, 1877:15).

Gervaise was stressed because her husband (Auguste) did not work. The above excerpt shows that he was just asking where she went without any intention to help her. It is also clear that working choice as a laundress was not her choice that had imagined before. She took it rather than working in the factories competing with men. Above all, she could not stand seeing her children starving.

Slowly but sure, Gervaise started to realize the fault in her previous decision to run away with Auguste. But she didn't have much choice at the time. After living with him under the same roof, Gervaise felt a huge distance now between her and Auguste. He used to treat her kindly, but then changed into a stranger who treated her badly. She was subordinate in the family relationship.

There are a lot of aspects contributing to the subordination of women. Those are the feeling of powerlessness, injustice, discrimination, limited self esteem, and lack of self-confidence. Thus, women's subordination is a situation where a power relationship exists and men dominate

women. Simone de Beauvoir argues, women are reduced to the status of the second sex and hence subordinate because men view women as fundamentally different from themselves (Beauvoir, 1974).

Apart from the domination of her husband, Gervaise as female worker had also experience inequality in the society. Female workers had minimum working options in the city, in which they receive less wage than male workers. Thus, women would always have job to do which required skill. The inequality was one of Industrial Revolution's effect. Machines were brought from inside and outside of the country in order to speed up the production, optimize the work, and reduce the number of workers so the factory owners could gain maximum profit since they did not need to pay much for the workers' wage. Male workers were considered to be the only one with the abilities to operate machines in factory.

In *L'Assommoir*, the workers thought that those machines were blessing. It would help them a lot and make them finish their work faster. They even considered that being in close proximity with the machines was a privilege any other workers could not gain. Furthermore, those who could operate bigger machines would get praises from their colleagues who could not do it. Goujet received one when he showed off the machine in his factory to Gervaise.

*Venez donc. Ce n'est rien, ces machines...
C'est au pre-mier qu'il faut voir.. La vaste
salle, secouée par les machines, tremblait ; et
de grandes ombres flottaient, ta-chées de feux
rouges. Mais lui la rassura en souriant, jura
qu'il n'y avait rien à craindre ; elle devait
seulement avoir bien soin de ne pas laisser
traîner ses jupes trop près des engrenages.
Il marcha le premier, elle le suivit, dans ce
vacarme assourdissant où toutes sortes de
bruits sifflaient et ronflaient, au milieu de ces
fumées peuplées d'êtres vagues, des hommes
noirs affairés, des machines agitant leurs
bras, qu'elle ne distinguait pas les uns des
autres. (Zola, 1877:86, 191)*

Come here..They're nothing, those machines.

In fact, that is the first thing you need to see... The big room was shaking by the quivers of the machines, with the long red shadows of its smoke. He convinced Gervaise while smiling, that there was nothing to be afraid of; she just needed to lift her skirt up high so it won't be too close to the machine's wheels. Goujet walked in the front, followed by Gervaise amid the thundering grunts of the machines within the billowing thickening smoke, pitch black men were working on the machines with their hands without bothering each other. (Zola, 1877:86, 191).

The arrival of the machines was welcome. Yet, as the time went by, when the workers' roles began to shift and be replaced by the machines, they started to curse the machines in their factories. Gervaise had a similar thought. In the end, she felt that all of the misfortunes befall on her and her family because of the machines in the factory.

Plantée devant l'Assommoir, Gervaise songeait.. Peut-être qu'une goutte lui aurait coupé la faim. Ah ! elle en avait bu des gouttes ! Ça lui semblait bien bon tout de même. Et, de loin, elle contemplait la machine à souler, en sentant que son malheur venait de là, et en faisant le rêve de s'achever avec de l'eau-de-vie, le jour où elle aurait de quoi. Mais un frisson lui passa dans les cheveux, elle vit que la nuit était noire.(Zola, 1877:462)

Standing in front of the *l'Assommoir*, Gervaise was thinking. Perhaps a drop would cut off his hunger. Ah! She had drunk drops! It seemed very good nonetheless. And, by far, she contemplated the machine, feeling the hurt coming from there, and making the dream ended with water-of-life, the day when she had not had anything left. But as a shudder passed her hair; she saw that the night was dark.(Zola, 1877:462)

In fact, Gervaise was not the only one who suffered the bad impacts of industrialization and the changing of human resources into machines. Thousands of workers and labors in France at that time also felt the same. That was understandable, considering that the only choice for lower class

people is working to earn money. Almost every worker and labor at that time started to work from early childhood. Unlike the higher class, the workers did not have a chance to get education. Consequently, they could not survive in the society which required education or knowledge as capitals. The only option left was working as manual labors in the factories or other industries that are available.

The long working hours, heavy workloads, minimum wage, and depraved living made the workers and labors depressed. The only amusements they could enjoy to 'release' the stress were alcohol and sex, which were commonly found in Paris at that time. They would take these enjoyments without caring about the risks and consequences. Many went into small shops along the streets to drink alcohol on their way back from the factories. Some time, they would spend all of their money in there.

One of the liquor shops described in this novel is *L'Assommoir*. Zola described in detail the milieu of a liquor shop in the outskirts of Paris namely *L'Assommoir*. Similar places could be found in the outskirts of the towns and the industrial centers.

L'Assommoir du père Colombe se trouvait au coin de la rue des Poissonniers et du boulevard de Rochechouart. L'enseigne portait, en longues lettres bleues, le seul mot : Distillation, d'un bout à l'autre. Il y avait à la porte, dans deux moitiés de futaille, des lauriers-roses poussiéreux. Le comptoir énorme, avec ses files de verres, sa fontaine et ses mesures d'étain, s'allongeait à gauche en entrant ; et la vaste salle, tout autour, était ornée de gros tonneaux peints en jaune clair, miroitants de vernis, dont les cercles et les cannelles de cuivre luisaient. Plus haut, sur des étagères, des bouteilles de liqueurs, des bocalux de fruits, toutes sortes de fioles en bon ordre, cachaient les murs, reflétaient dans la glace, derrière le comptoir, leurs taches vives, vert pomme, or pâle, laque tendre. Mais la curiosité de la maison était, au fond, de l'autre côté d'une barrière de chêne, dans une cour vitrée, l'appareil à distiller que les consommateurs voyaient fonctionner, des

alambics aux longs cols, des serpen-tins descendant sous terre, une cuisine du diable devant laquelle venaient rêver les ouvriers souïards.... Et, du comptoir, des tonneaux, de toute la salle, montait une odeur liqueureuse, une fumée d'alcool qui semblait épaissir et griser les poussières volantes du soleil.. (Zola, 1877:39-40)

L'Assommoir owned by Père Colombe is located in the corner of Poissonniers street and Rochechouart boulevard. Its huge sign overhead was plainly written in blue letters: DISTILLATION. There are two doors inside, covered in oleander dust. That place, a big bar with lines of glasses, fountain, as well as the remaining of tin piling up on the doorway, and the extensive room decorated with big insipid yellow painted barrels layered with sparkling varnish surrounding cinnamon-like tins. Above it, on the shelves, rows of liquor, juice bottles of all kinds in order covering the wall of which shadows reflected on the mirror behind the bar, glistening beautifully, green like apples, pale golden, and sparkling. However, the one which provokes curiosity on the house, actually, is the other side of the oak which becomes the barrier in the yard, a distillation space in which the consumers can see the device works. A long, curving all around device just like a snake, lies on the ground, and yes, the devil's kitchen where the drunkards' dreams are made. On the other hand, barrels filled with liquor are located along the room, emitting the smell of mixed syrup, alcohol, and smoke which thicken the liquor's aroma mixing with the dust of the sun. (Zola, 1877:39-40)

The need to relax, meeting up with colleagues in a cheap place which may well give great satisfaction were the reasons why liquor shops such as *L'Assommoir* were always filled with customers. The liquors served in those places were distilled in home industries with high alcohol content and of course unhygienic. The distillation process of the drinks was done in the backyard of the shop which could be seen by all of the customers. The workers usually dropped by after working until midnight. Every so often, they could not make it home because they were too drunk and would stay there until the break of the dawn.

L'Assommoir had turned into a vicious circle for the workers day by day. Even Gervaise who hated alcohol, finally became one of the regular visitors at the end of this novel. She thought that alcohol was her best friends, to whom she could share a minute of her miserable lives to forget her problems, her abusive husband and ex-husband.

Besides alcohol, sex became another source of fun. It might be with their spouses or prostitutes. In this novel, Zola shows it explicitly through Coupeau's unfaithful conduct against Gervaise. He could exercise the 'power' as a male during a sexual intercourse with women, without bothering to tie the knot with any of them.

.. Les femmes, ça me connaît, je ne leur ai jamais rien cassé. On pince une dame, n'est-ce pas? mais on ne va pas plus loin ; on honore simplement le sexe... (Zola, 1877:165)

.. Women who know me, they know that I won't tell unscrupulous stuffs. All of us want women, don't we? But we won't move too far; coz what we want is only sex... (Zola, 1877:165)

The fact that it was very easy to find brothel in the Napoléon III era relates to one of Napoléon III's visions, i.e., to make Paris into an industrial city and the center of amusement in the world to beat London. To reach that goal, he and Baron Haussmann carried out a giant project in Paris. It started from the rehabilitation of the city of Paris, the addition of water storage pipelines, disposal ducts, addition of railway tracks, and electricity rehabilitation. After that, the project focused on the building of opera houses, amusement centers, hotels, restaurants, shops, and factories. More than that, Napoléon III with Baron Haussmann also established the organizer for World Exposition in 1855 and 1867 which succeed in attracting customers from abroad to visit, stay, even invest their capitals in Paris. One of the project in the organization of the massive expo was the opening of prostitution places with commercial sex workers brought from various places (Ditmore, 2006:171). Commercial sex workers in Second French Empire era were grouped into several types

such as the ones who became the mistresses of noblemen or royal family members, the ones who worked under a great prostitution place in Paris, and the ones who worked in small prostitution houses in the outskirts of Paris. This last type was the biggest in number and always became the destination of workers and labors, including the characters in *L'Assommoir* novel.

Gervaise's miserable life also resulted as an impact of her social class as *tiers états*. At that time, female domesticity was one of a large social issues, but nobody raised a hand to protest, as if it was a 'taken for granted' thing. However, this domesticity will be different if seen from different social class. In her *Ladies of the Leisure Class*, an account of the history of nineteenth century France, Bonnie Smith (1981) argues that bourgeois women created and actively promoted the culture of female domesticity. She argues that such women had real power over their households. Their cult of domesticity protected their position and expressed the world view that grew out of their household reign. Thus, the bourgeois women did not feel that domestication was actually a form of patriarchal domination to subordinate them, because they still have money and power to subordinate other class: the lower class/*tiers états* Gervaise belonged to.

BEING A LOWER WORKING CLASS WOMEN UNDER SECOND EMPIRE

Zola depicts the life of lower working class women under Second Empire as a kind of hell on earth. Lower working class women were subordinated by patriarchal order through their husband's act, while the State provided nothing to guarantee that they could live the same life as that of men or to live as an equal citizen. Through *L'Assommoir*, Zola addressed an implicit criticism to Napoléon III as the Emperor of the Second Empire. Moreover, he underlined the failure of Napoléon III to provide a better life for his citizens, especially for the lower class.

In 19th century, less than 10% of French citizens lived in big cities; the rest of the 90%

lived in the villages. With the 38% increase of French population in the beginning of the 19th century, the urbanization also increased to 300% especially in Paris (Price, 1987:87). Urbanization was rising along with the increasing numbers of villagers who went to the cities to get a better life. The city promised great opportunities for jobs with fixed salary which they could then keep or send to their family in the village. Unfortunately, only men were encouraged to migrate to the city and seeking for a job there. Women were supposed to stay in the village. They are often intentially made afraid of the danger of living in big cities (Struminger, 1983).

The main character in this novel, Gervaise, was brave enough to make a decision to go to Paris, but not because she wanted to get a better job. She was motivated by the dream to be able to live with her lover, Auguste Lantier, away from their family in Placans. Unfortunately, the happiness lasted only for a while, ended by Lantier's disappearance. Gervaise was left alone, and struggled to survive in Paris with her two children. She worked in a laundry as a laundress, working 8 hours a day with insufficient time to rest, to support her living. The laundry was damp, with pools of water everywhere, and very hot in summer. There was barely a space to breathe because the first floor was full with water tanks, washing tub, and drying machines.

Le lavoir était situé vers le milieu de la rue, à l'endroit où le pavé commençait à monter. Au-dessus d'un bâtiment plat, trois énormes réservoirs d'eau, des cylindres de zinc fortement boulonnés, montraient leurs rondeurs grises ; tandis que, derrière, s'élevait le séchoir, un deuxième étage très haut, clos de tous les côtés par des persiennes à lames minces, au travers desquelles passait le grand air. À droite des réservoirs, le tuyau étroit de la machine à vapeur soufflait, d'une haleine rude et régulière, des jets de fumée blanche (Zola, 1877:18)

It is located in the middle of the street, exactly where the sidewalks start to hike. There are three big water tanks filled with water,

cylinder roofing with pointy tip, showing the grey curve. Whereas behind the dryer is the second floor of which all of its sides are closed with thick windows from which we can see directly on to the outside of the building. On the right side of the water tank was a small pipe with constant billowing fume, with steady and regular hauls, fuming out white smoke (Zola, 1877:18).

The gender identity is one of the influencing factors in the employment especially in the industrial era in Europe. It was quite normal that men and women earned imbalanced amount of wages. Female workers always earned less than the male. The reason was, men were supposed to use their wage to support the family regardless of their marital status. Whereas the wage earned by women were considered supplementary of the men's wages, regardless of women's marital status (Scott, 1988:163). It brought both advantages and disadvantages. For male workers, the wage they earned would be enough to make their end meet. If their wives were also working, of course the monthly income would increase as well, which means, a better and appropriate living for the family. It is contrary to the situation women workers experience. Although they were still single, the wage they earned would not be sufficient to support even a modest life. If they already had a family, their wages would be to support the family. If they were single parents with children, the little wage would be insufficient to meet the daily needs. That is exactly what happened Gervaise. Her wages was used to support her family, while her husband's wage was spent on alcohol and prostitute.

The imbalanced wage triggers more problems female workers had to face: the life of their children and unplanned pregnancy. It was common in the lower class society in Europe, especially those who live in the industrial areas, to have more than 3 children with insufficient earning. During their pregnancy, female workers often had to work until dawn. After giving birth to a baby, the baby would sometimes be brought to dirty workplaces filled with pollution (Price,

1987:70). The baby was prone to illnesses. As the results, the infant and children mortality was high. From the education side, the children could not enjoy good education. When they grew up, they would end up at the same place, i.e, their parents' workplace, to become labors and lower class workers.

Female workers in the 19th century France was trapped in the dualism of production and reproduction roles. On one side, they were given opportunity to work in the industrial field which used to be reserved for men only. On the other side, women were also demanded to continue their reproductive functions, i.e., giving birth and raising children (Foley, 2004:56). In fact, many of them became single parents after their husband or spouses left them. The *cohabitation* phenomenon was common among labors and lower class workers at that time. Men did not want to be burdened with spouses and children, in order that their income would stay untouched. Unfortunately, women had to carry the burden of raising the children by themselves without moral and financial supports from their men. Zola describes this through Gervaise and Auguste Lantier characters.

The people disregard the female workers who were also single parents, especially because they questioned the ability to raise children well while also working in the factories. There were some who blamed the female workers as the main reason why many men were trapped in alcohol addiction. The reason was that female workers would likely ignore their family and spouses, so the husbands who felt not being well taken care would choose to go to liquor shops and consume alcohol (Foley, 2004:77).

Gervaise in this novel was portrayed as a victim of such assumption and stereotyping of the French society towards female workers. She had to raise her children on her own after being left by her lover. Although she then remarried, she still had to carry the heavy burdens on her shoulders, especially when her husband turned into a drunkard. The desperation on her horrible

fate made Gervaise into an alcohol addict, which in the end, made her child to be unable to hold on and then left her to be a sex worker.

Mais, lorsque l'hiver arriva, l'existence devient impossible chez les Coupeau. Chaque soir, Nana recevait sa raclée. Quand le père était las de la battre, la mère lui envoyait des torgnoles, pour lui apprendre à bien se conduire. Et c'étaient souvent des danses générales ; dès que l'un tapait, l'autre la défendait, si bien que tous les trois finissaient par se rouler sur le carreau, au milieu de la vaisselle cassée. ... Son père, depuis longtemps, ne comptait plus ; quand un père se soûle comme le sien se soûlait, ce n'est pas un père, c'est une sale bête dont on voudrait bien être débarrassé. Et, maintenant, sa mère dégringolait à son tour dans son amitié. Elle buvait, elle aussi. ... (Zola, 1877:413).

But when winter came, the existence becomes impossible for the family of Coupeau. Every night, Nana received his beating. When the father was tired of the fight, the mother will teach her how to behave. And they often make a ritual dances as soon as one was beating the other defended, so that all three ended up rolling around on the floor, amid the broken crockery... His father had long no longer counted; when a father gets drunk like his got drunk, it's not a father, that's a dirty beast of which we would like to be rid of. And now his mother in turn tumbled in his friendship. She drank, too. ... (Zola, 1877: 413)

The unscrupulous fate befallen on Gervaise in the novel *L'Assommoir* becomes another portrayal of the female workers' life reality in the Second French Empire era. At that time, women did not have any control on their own life. They were in the lowest level of the social structure. It was common that they were not considered as the part of French citizens although their number at that time almost reached 1/3 of the total numbers of the workers and labors in France. One of the official reports from the Empire which was published in 1867 shows explicitly that the women

had to take care of the family and sew the clothes (Hazareesingh, 2004:20). It was then considered as the absolute truth by the society, which triggered the exclusion of women by the society.

The discourse on exclusion and inclusion begins with a discussion by Foucault regarding the relationship between power and knowledge. A particular discourse will further result in certain knowledge and truth which will bring an effect of power from one party to the other. There are a lot of discourses in society, but only a particular discourse that the authorities chose and support, it will be the dominant and makes other discourses marginalized/excluded (Foucault, 1980). The dominant discourse in question here is Napoleon III and the French Second Empire while the excluded discourse in this case is women especially female workers.

CONCLUSION

Regardless of the pros and cons about the publication of the original *L'Assommoir* at that time, the novel has opened a new discourse on the life of the lower classes, especially for the female workers, which are rarely discussed by the great French writers. It was not separated from the fact that the literature until the late 19th century in France seemed to belong to the upper middle class only, so the topics shown by Zola will easily cause controversy. Many critics argue that the French people fear the themes of violence, poverty, and tragedy of the lower classes. They still have not been able to eliminate the trauma of the Revolution I and II which were driven by the lower middle class, which claimed many victims. As a result, few still have a belief that when workers and lower-class workers can perform in a work of literature, it is quite possible that they will perform well in politics and government as well.

Gervaise is described by Zola as the woman who suffered exclusion from the community at that time. The first exclusion she experienced was when she decided to get out of the house and

eloped with Auguste Lantier. At that moment, Macquart family then isolated her because they considered that her actions tarnished the family's reputation. It describes how the women did not have the right to determine their lives in the family. They should be according to what is said by the family, i.e., what is said by the father as the head of the family. In addition to the explicit exclusion, Zola also tells the exclusion which occurred implicitly against Gervaise, for example when Goujet bragged about his job environment in a factory with a variety of machineries and heavy equipments that contained only male workers without any women in it. Gervaise who was then just nodded in agreement and admiration towards Goujet actually was experiencing an exclusion, because Goujet's statement implied that women as Gervaise could not work in the middle of the big machines. One of the places that she deserved to be in was the sink without big machines.

Bourdieu refers to it as symbolic power. He asserts that power works through the mastery of symbolic capital or invisible power capital (Bourdieu, 2010:49). In this condition, women do not even see or feel that the domination they are experiencing as something wrong, rather as something natural and reasonable. Gervaise as the representation of women at that time is accurately described by Zola as someone weak, dominated, even lost in a fight against the bad luck that happened to her and her family. Gervaise initially was still determined to fight and survive without the slightest touch of alcohol. However, at the end of the story she became the most devastated victim of alcohol addiction. She regarded it the right way out to crush her problems, which were related to patriarchal domination she experienced.

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