

The Representation of Social Discrimination in Kiera Cass' The Selection

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Abstract

Social discrimination is a never-ending issue that happens not only in reality but also in fiction novels. It is described as perpetual inequality of people based on their disability, illness, sexual orientation, religion, or any other. Hence, literature as a cultural product has a potential to deliver social discrimination discourse. This research aims to discuss how the social discrimination depicted in Kiera Cass' The Selection. The Selection is a story about an event to find a prince's bride in Illéa. The caste system and absolute monarchy exist in Illéa's kingdom. Depending on their jobs, people are divided into eight castes. In this research, the representation theory by Stuart Hall is applied. The study's analysis is qualitative with the novel as primary data and other supporting sources as secondary data. The collected data are used to indicate how social discrimination between castes constructed in the novel, how it is related to the condition in the United States of America in 1900s, and where the author took a side with. The result of the research shows that social discrimination occurs as the absolute position of the caste and it is difficult to change this situation. The novel's social discrimination is also related to the real condition of the United States of America in the early 1900s, which includes job, partner, and lifestyle aspects. The author appeared to position herself more on the side of the lower caste at first, but no solution is offered as a result of the lower caste's work.

Keywords : Social discrimination; social class; caste; representation; the selection

PENDAHULUAN

Social discrimination is a never-ending issue that happens not only in reality but also in fiction novels. It is described as perpetual inequality of people based on their disability, illness, sexual orientation, religion, or any other¹. Most countries generally have three kinds of social classes based on the people's socioeconomic condition and their bloodlines; the highest are wealthy aristocrats, the lowest are poor and often get oppressed, and the middle stands in between as just well and neither wealthy nor poor and oppressed². Social classes usually are not express clearly and only exist as implication and have significant influence to the person or group's status.

The Selection is created by Kiera Cass and published in 2012. She was born and grew up in South California and finished her studies at Radford University³. The story of The Selection takes place in an imaginary country named Illéa. It is an absolute monarchy country and has social castes. They named the caste from the highest caste, royalty, as One. Then it continues until Eight, the lowest caste. Each caste has the jobs they are assigned to. Illéa then holds the event that can change their people's lives by changing their caste through

¹ Dinesh Bugra, "Social Discrimination and Social Justice", *International Review of Psychiatry*, Volume 28, Number 4 (July 2016), 336-341.

² Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User Friendly Guide second edition*, New York and London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006, 55.

³ Kiera Cass, *The Selection*, United States of America: HarperCollin Publishers, 2012, 330.

the event which is the main story of this novel; the selection. It is held specifically to find a bride for the crown prince of Illéa, Maxon. The candidates are referred to as the Chosen. They came as representations, coming from thirty-five provinces in Illéa. They have to live in a castle and strive for the prince's heart. If one of them manages to marry him, she and her family would be raised to the higher caste, as class one, one of The Royalty.

In reality, act of discrimination based on social class or caste still exists as people with higher status and richer get better treatment than those with lower status ones. Based on the explanation before, an early assumption is drawn that the clear social class system makes discrimination becomes harsher than a social class which is portrayed implicitly in real society.

This research aims to show the condition of social discrimination which is molded by the caste system and how it is affecting the character's life in the novel. The results found in this thesis are to be expected to contribute to further reference to another thesis with a similar issue being discussed. The representation theory by Stuart Hall is chosen as the tool to analyze how social discrimination is portrayed here by finding signs and what they represent through the narrations and dialogues in the novel. In this research, there will be a discussion about the representation of social discrimination using intrinsic elements in the novel. Then it will be related to the contextual condition in the real world. The author's background will be used as material to find the author's critical position. This thesis will use the condition of the United States of America. The problems of this research will be discussed by answering two questions; 1. How is social discrimination represented in Kiera Cass's *The Selection*? 2. What is the critical position of the author?

The main theory that is used to analyze this research is the representation theory by Stuart Hall and Michel Foucault's discursive model as the supporting idea.

THEORY

A. Representation Theory by Stuart Hall

According to Stuart Hall, representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our mind through language. It is the link between concepts in our minds through language which enable us to refer to either the 'real' world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people, and events⁴.

There are three ways to explain representation. They are reflective, intentional, and constructionist. This research uses constructionist method where the reflective and intentional methods are combined. While creating the meaning, the individual's mind still discerns the social nature of the language. This method requires us to make a distinction between symbolic practices and the material world where people and things exist **Error! Bookmark not defined..**

B. The Discursive Approach

The discursive approach examines how knowledge is produced by a particular discourse that connects through power, regulates behaviors, creates or constructs identity and subjectivity, and defines how it is represented, as practiced and studied. It is more concerned with the effect and consequences of representation; it looks at how meaning is produced by languages and representation as well. According to Foucault, discourse generated knowledge practices, objects, and subjects that drastically varied from one era to the next without any necessary continuity **Error! Bookmark not defined..** Discourse

⁴ Stuart Hall, *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices*, London: Sage in association with the Open University, 1997, 6-47.

constructs different knowledge in different periods because readers or viewers differ in each period. For example, *The Selection* is a fiction novel that does not tell the history of a specific society, but rather depicts a social phenomenon that provides readers with new information. The term discourse is used to emphasize the importance of social structure.

The relationship between knowledge, power, and the body in contemporary society was one of the main research topics for this approach. Because it was used to control social behavior, it saw knowledge as being inextricably linked to power. **Error! Bookmark not defined.** An important development in constructionist methodologies was represented by this focus on the interrelationships between discourse, knowledge, and power.

C. Social Discrimination

The Oxford Dictionary of Current English defines social as the relationships between individuals or groups of individuals⁵. It means that individuals with the same goals and understanding are called social. Discrimination involves those who may wish to deny the equality of individuals and groups of people⁶. People may be treated favorably or unfavorably depending on their membership in a particular group; however, research focuses more on the latter.

From the explanation before, it can be concluded that social discrimination overestimates differences between groups, between individuals within a group, and act hostile and discriminates against individuals or group who has a different view from theirs⁷. In Bhugra's article, he states that social discrimination can stop people to reach their full potential and label them to change their identities¹. Therefore, this act should be revoked even if it is hard.

There is no value placed on diversity in social discrimination, and all citizens are given equal opportunities regardless of their ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, or religion. Equal resource distribution is also guaranteed, and human rights are supported. Many different factors can lead to discriminatory behavior, including the ones mentioned above as well as education, social class, political affiliation, views, and other characteristics, especially when they are displayed by those who may be in positions of authority.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses qualitative research. Qualitative research is characterized by the use of non-numerical data and analysis and will be presented in narrative form⁸. The discourse of social discrimination in *The Selection* will be analyzed using Stuart Hall's theory of representation by correlating text in the novel and context in the real world. This research employs two types of data. The first is primary data taken from the novel *The Selection*. The information is derived from the narrations, statements, and dialogues that relate to social discrimination. The data which are picked by deep reading from the novel are quoted directly to make it the basis to relate it to the context. Secondary data are drawn from books, articles, essays, news, and other printed books discussing the social class system condition in the

⁵ *The Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 477-886.

⁶ Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, United States of America: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1954, 34.

⁷ Saied Reza Ameli, *Social Discrimination: Across the Muslim Divide*, Wembley: Islamic Human Rights Commission, 2004, 17.

⁸ John W. Creswell, *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014, 8-9.

United States in the 1990s, as well as the author's biography. These secondary data are used to support the explanation and analysis of the data. Close reading is used to comprehend both primary and secondary data.

This research is carried out in stages. The first step is to categorize data. To answer the first question, the data related to the act of social discrimination that the characters receive or give to the other characters in the novel will be categorized into three categories; job, partner, and lifestyle. Then the explanation of the data will be given and related to the context in reality. To answer the second question, the researcher collects the author's biography which usually is at the end of the book, and some interviews she had. Then from the data, the view of her life and the critical position of the author will be discovered.

DISCUSSION

Social Discrimination in The Selection

The Selection has a setting of place in Illéa, a dystopian monarchy country. It is described as a place where social status is stated by social caste systems which are divided into one to eight descending castes which exist for a lot of generations. These castes are accordingly divided based on the individual's particular profession. This feudal condition establishes social discrimination in each character of the story.

America Singer is the protagonist of the story and she is a part of caste Eight and has a job as a singer for the precise. She is in love with Aspen Ledger, the man whose caste is below her. Unfortunately, this relationship is not allowed in Illéa's norm so they need to keep it a secret. Even so, she still tries to maintain the relationship and works hard with a goal set for marriage between them.

There are several ways to escape such discrimination to obtain a higher social caste but also quite limited as well. For example, through marriage; buying social caste with money; or through 'The Selection'; an event held by the kingdom in order to find the bride for the crown prince. The participants are only restricted by age and not caste. All women in every caste have an equal chance to be chosen and if they are managed to last until the end, they will be the next queen and raises their caste to One.

Aside from the event of The Selection that happens in the novel explained, the novel also shows the condition of each caste and from examining the findings; it is found that there is some evidence of the data in which the social discrimination happened in it. As is described in chapter two, social discrimination exists to implicate unfair treatment between individuals in their social life, making them not receive the same results as the other as if they do the same portion to reach the results. Here is one of the examples found.

"I want to play ball." He kicked his foot into the aging carpet. "I know. And you can for fun, but you need to find a craft you're good at to make a living. You can do both." "But why?" he whined. "You know why. It's the law." "But that's not fair!" Gerad pushed the canvas to the floor, where it stirred up dust in the light from his window. "It's not our fault our great-grandfather or whoever was poor." "I know." It really seemed unreasonable to limit everyone's life choices based on your ancestors' ability to help the government, but that was how it all worked out. And I suppose I should just be grateful we were safe. "I guess it was the only way to make things work at the time." ... "I know it's hard, buddy, but that's the way it is, okay?" (Cass, 2012:32)

Those two dialogues come from America Singer and her little brother, Gerad. Gerad is a seven-year-old child who still wants to play ball. Unfortunately, due to the condition of their family class status, America needs to remind him to find passion and to learn more about something that he can make out as a career, although knowing his young age condition. Gerad thinks that is an unfair situation, as America thought that is unreasonable to have a destiny based on what their ancestors did in the past. Nevertheless, she cannot do anything other than accept that just the way it is.

This particular limited choice of life, especially in a job based only on their caste is an example of the act of discrimination that happens in the society of Illéa. As to follow up the evidence of those areas are portrayed will be explained as follows:

Job

Job defines as paid employment that needs to be done⁵ and will demonstrate the existence of humans. It is also a means of limiting the lower class in order to improve its capital status. It is critical to foster development in mentality; the job can serve as an effective mediator in the development of personal identity and self-satisfaction. Job is one of the elements in this novel that indicates much of how they classify people in the castes. The protagonist, America Singer, and her family are in the caste Five. As it is shown in the quotation, they work as artists and not the big and famous ones because there is a mention that their caste only has three levels of difference from the bottom. They only as merely performers who work as people who are meant to be heard only and not to be seen by the employer. They are mainly hired at three events in Illéa, they are Christmas, New Year, and Grateful Feast—the Independence Day of Illéa. Of course, these events are not something that happens all year long. Therefore, they seem to be in constant need of money as they try not to refuse any job if they think that they can do it. The whole family is so busy and they even still got one person who cannot do the work because he is too young. As the result, they are at the risk cannot fulfill their family needs.

If I glanced up from a task, she'd fix me with a fierce look as if she could shame me into wanting the same things she did. She tried that every so often. Like if I didn't want to take on a particular job because I knew the family hosting us was unnecessarily rude. (Cass, 2012:2)

The freedom to choose and accept or refuse the job they should take is unacceptable even if they have reasons. They have to withstand bad treatment from the employer in order to get more income. This quotation strengthens the fact that America's families, especially the lower classes, are in need of money and have no other choice over their own even if they are uncomfortable with the attitude of the employer. The whole family is so busy and they even still got one person who cannot do the work because he is too young. As the result, they are at the risk cannot fulfilling their family needs. This shows that working women commonly exist in here and not a role solely for men just as it is common in United States of America⁹.

Aspen was a Six. Sixes were servants and only a step up from Sevens in that they were better educated and trained for indoor work. ... Where meals were a worry at my house, they were a disaster at Aspen's. He had much steadier work than we

⁹ Yusqi Qolbi, "Women's Need of Men in Danielle Steel's First Sight", *Journal of Feminism and Gender Studies*, Volume 1, Number 2 (Juli 2021), 75-82.

did but got paid significantly less. There was never enough food for his family. He was the oldest of seven, and in the same way I'd stepped up to help as soon as I could, Aspen had stepped aside. He passed his share of the little food they had down to his siblings and to his mom, who was always tired from working. His dad had died three years ago, and Aspen's family depended on him for almost everything. (Cass, 2012:17)

This chapter shows the caste below America now ~~caste~~ Six. Aspen Kruger is one of them. He gets jobs that are not dependable to the season but actually, he gets paid lower than what America's family gets. Food is a constant problem for Aspen and the family, unlike America's family that have it as a problem when there are few jobs because it was the time of off-season or the time when there are fewer to no events at all. Also, the fact that Aspen has a bigger family only just makes it worse because there are more mouths to be fed but less money they can have.

It indicates that the lower caste you are, the lesser you get paid even though you are in the same group of lower caste people. This condition could be depicted as the condition of income in the United States during the 1980s and early 1990s substantially unequal. Wodtke explains that the income of the lower part of the social class is in a stagnant position and can even decrease while the upper can increase it. This happens because the managerial part of the company does not give the workers what they deserve. After all, the managers think of themselves as a higher part or position than the workers¹⁰. It means that Aspen as one of those lower class people (as in literal and metaphorical), hardly can rise his income as long as he is still part of the lower class or workers.

"Just you," I said, smiling. "It's cute to see that your job bugs you. What's so bad about the meetings, anyway?" "Oh, America!" he said, facing me again. "They go round and round in circles. Father does a good job at calming the advisers, but it's so hard to push the committees in any given direction. Mom is always on Father to give more to the school systems—she thinks is always on Father to give more to the school systems—she thinks the more educated you are, the less likely you are to be a criminal, and I agree—but Father is never forceful enough to get them to take away from other areas that could manage perfectly with lower funds. It's infuriating! And it's not like I'm in command, so my opinion is easily overlooked." So now I could see a bit of Maxon's world, but it was just as unimaginable as ever. How could you deny the voice of your future sovereign? (Cass, 2012:226)

From Maxon's dialogue, we can see that even the royalty is in the highest caste, they cannot overlook advisers' opinions. It is hard for Maxon to give his opinion and get accepted even though his position is only under the King and the Queen. His opinion is also considered a good thing for their people. Unfortunately, that idea may affect the other projects even though they can do just fine with lower funds than they are now. Maxon states that the cause of this disagreement is that he is not the one in command, his father is. America thinks that this situation is unthinkable because no matter what, Maxon is royalty and the future leader of the kingdom.

The act of advisers can be determined as disrespect and give inequality a chance to him. The advisers, that seem older than Maxon, represent the act of age discrimination. Age

¹⁰ Geoffrey T. Wodtke, *Social Class and Income Inequality in the United State and Personal Income Distribution from 1980 to 2010*, American Journal of Sociology, 2016, 1.

is a significant and crucial attribute of status in our society. Every segment of the population indicator suggests that it has political, cultural, and interactional significance¹¹. Therefore, it is not a rare occurrence to get unfair treatment based on this indicator despite the ability of the individuals who get discriminated against, just like the treatment Maxon received from the advisers.

“...around the new year, there will be public assistance for food in every Province Services Office. Any Five, Six, Seven, or Eight may go there any evening for a free, nutritious meal. Please know that these women before you have all sacrificed some or all of their compensation to help fund this important program. And while this assistance may not be able to last forever, we will keep it running as long as we can. ... “I feel that no good leader can let the masses go unfed. Most of Illéa is comprised of these lower castes, and I feel we have overlooked these people far too long. And that is why I am moving forward and why I am asking others to join me. Twos, Threes, Fours . . . the roads you drive on don’t pave themselves. Your houses aren’t cleaned by magic. Here is your opportunity to acknowledge that truth by donating at your local Province Services Office.” He paused. “By birth you have been blessed, and it is time to acknowledge that blessing. I will have further updates as this project progresses, and I thank you all for your attention. ... There was a smattering of applause from everyone in the room, though it was obvious not everyone was as enthusiastic about Maxon’s announcement. The king, for instance, was clapping but without excitement, though the queen was radiant with pride. The advisers also seemed torn about whether or not this was a good idea. (Cass, 2012: 241-243)

In the end, Maxon works hard so his aspirations can be realized. The idea he suggests is related to free food supply to lower castes which as expected, made the king and advisers reluctantly accept the idea. The act is shown in how the king’s unexcited cheering for the idea and the advisers are still uncertain whether it is a good idea or not even though Maxon already announced it to the public.

Implicitly, this condition is very different from what America and Aspen experienced in their life. The condition where they can hardly ~~and~~ seldom ~~change~~ the condition even if they already work hard to make it happen because they lack power and wealth. Maxon, as a crown prince, has those things they lack. So when he works hard he can make his ideas finally work out even though it was rejected before. From Maxon, we know that being royalty is better, especially in job aspects.

Partner

Partner for marriage is one of the social discrimination problems in Cass’ *The Selection*. According to Anderson’s (2013) definition, marriage exists to unite men and women as husband and wife and as the parents of the children their union bears¹². Thus, the fundamental of marriage is the existence of a father and mother is important. However, In

¹¹ V. J. Roscigno et al, “Age Discrimination, Social Closure, and Employment”, *Social Forces-SOC Forces*, Volume 86, Number 1 (September 2007), 313-334.

¹² Ryan Anderson. “Marriage: What It Is, Why It Matters, and the Consequences of Redefining It”, The Heritage Foundation, March 11, 2013, <https://www.heritage.org/marriage-and-family/report/marriage-what-it-why-it-matters-and-the-consequences-redefining-it>

The Selection. Marriage is a matter because people have to choose their marriage partner differently. There is an implicit rule created between women and men.

“If I’m so lovely, how come no one ever comes by to ask me out?” “Oh, they come by, but I shoo them away. My girls are too pretty to marry Fives. Kenna got a Four, and I’m sure you can do even better.” Mom took a sip of her tea. “His name is James. Stop calling him a number...” (Cass, 2012:9)

This quotation shows that even America and her family are a Five, her mother does not want her to marry the same caste as her. She thinks her daughters deserve to marry people with a caste higher than Five. America’s mother is a person who thinks highly about caste and she even calls her son-in-law by number instead of his name.

Choosing a partner for marriage in Illea is a representation of United States marriage life in the 1900s. People tended to marry people with higher incomes to create a better life¹³. Based on the story, there is a special belief in marriage between men and women, that men should have a higher caste. Regarding this marriage, their marriage would bring happiness in life. In having a job, people in Illea already trust that a better caste is a better job, and a better job is a better income.

The dependence of women on a higher caste in marriage is a symbol of marriage in the United States in the 1990s. The reason for this is men in the past married women who were unpaid for taking care of their children and doing housework. Moreover, the men would focus to work only. On the women’s side, they also have reasons to choose these men. The women prefer men of higher status and better wealth than them, and it will be much better if they also have a good physical condition. Women tend to attract more men that invest in themselves and live stable life. It is because the women can assure they can provide for the women’s lives and their children, it is about their way of surviving life¹⁴¹⁵.

...it was atypical for a woman to marry down. A man from a lower caste could ask for your hand, but it was rare to get a yes. And when anyone married into a different caste, they had to fill out paperwork and wait for something like ninety days before any of the other legal things you needed could be done. I’d heard more than one person say it was to give people a chance to change their minds. So us being this personal and out well past Illéa curfew . . . we could both get in serious trouble. Not to mention the hell I’d get from my mother. (Cass, 2012:15)

Marriage between castes and women to be in a higher caste than men is possible but they must overcome bureaucratic hurdles. The process is so frustrating because you have to take a lot of time and fill out a lot of paperwork. After that, you still need to do other things until you finish the process and it can make people rather just give up because of the long process.

¹³ Dan Kopf, “High-Income People in The US Keep Marrying Each Other , and It’s Exacerbating Inequality”, Quartz, March 11, 2020, <https://qz.com/work/1812980/high-income-people-in-the-us-keep-marrying-each-other/>

¹⁴ Elizabeth Cashdan, “Women’s Mating Strategies”, *Evolutionary Anthropology Issues News and Reviews*, Volume 5, Issue 4 (1996), 134-143.

¹⁵ Elaine Hatfield and Susan Sprecher, “Men’s and Women’s Preferences in Marital Partners in the United States, Russia, and Japan”, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Volume 26, Issue 6 (November 1995), 728-750.

It is mentioned before that America's sister, Kenna, married the higher caste. This implicitly shows that marriage between castes is more favorable towards men especially when they marry down. The proof of this idea has also come from America's mother who preferably finds higher caste spouse for their daughters because as we know before, the better caste you are, the better income you will get. This topic also demonstrates how men dominate in this social system. As previously stated, it is more convenient for men to marry lower-class women. If it is like this, they will have a higher position in the relationship and will strengthen their position. The condition mentioned before is a representation of hypergamy, a condition where marriage likely occurs between higher-income men and lower-income women. Hypergamy is considered ideal because they believe that the higher income women have a high-cost lifestyle and they also demand to get a high-cost livelihood from their spouse¹⁶.

Aspen was a Six. Sixes were servants and only a step up from Sevens in that they were better educated and trained for indoor work. Aspen was smarter than anyone knew and devastatingly handsome, but it was atypical for a woman to marry down. A man from a lower caste could ask for your hand, but it was rare to get a yes. And when anyone married into a different caste, they had to fill out paperwork and wait for something like ninety days before any of the other legal things you needed could be done. I'd heard more than one person say it was to give people a chance to change their minds. So us being this personal and out well past Illéa's curfew ... we could both get in serious trouble. Not to mention the hell I'd get from my mother. (Cass, 2012:15)

The quotation above shows that there should be different levels between a man and a woman to be married. For women, it was a forbidden thing to marry men who have a lower caste than women. America who was from caste five was in a relationship with Aspen who was from caste six. In Illea, women often marry upper-class men. However, as a caste six, America is a representation of the denial of women for the rule of marriage in Illea. She does not care about the marriage rule. In contrast, people in Illea think that marrying lower caste only would make them harder in everything. It is pictured by the statement that a higher caste woman marrying a lower caste man will not easy to register their married. They would have to fill out the registration in ninety days which is included as a long time to finish. It means, at the beginning of dealing with marriage lower caste men, people will only make it difficult themselves. They have to think about after-life marriage which will be more difficult than marriage registration.

I rolled my eyes as she went on. This was the way they did it with sons. Princesses born into the royal family were sold off into marriage in an attempt to solidify our young relations with other countries. I understood why it was done—we needed allies. But I didn't like it. I hadn't had to see such a thing, and I hoped I never would. The royal family hadn't produced a princess in three generations. Princes, however, married women of the people to keep up the morale of our sometimes volatile nation. I think the Selection was meant to draw us together and remind everyone that Illéa itself was born out of next to nothing. (Cass, 2012:7)

¹⁶ Gilles Saint-Paul, "Genes, Legitimacy and Hypergamy: Another Look at The Economics of Marriage", *Journal of Demographic Economics*, Volume 81, Number 4 (December 2015), 331-377.

This paragraph gives us info on this selection only happens for the crown prince. For the princesses, the kingdom immediately sends them to be married to the other kingdom. This shows that unfair treatment also happens in the highest caste between the genders. Both princes and princesses cannot choose their partners freely, but being a prince is better.

The selection for the prince is a grand annual event and joining it will give you benefit. The fact that the participants can come from all castes, the people get the message that it is a reminder that Illéa was created from nothing, with no castes between them before. This meaning gives far more glorification vibes in finding princes' brides than the princesses'. For a princess, there is no effort made to conduct a selection to find her bride. They just send her to be married to anyone as long as it benefits the kingdom.

Now, I know this is personal, but I've had to discuss it with every contestant, so please don't be shy." He paused. "I need confirmation that you are, in fact, a virgin." Mom's eyes nearly popped out. So this was why May had to leave. "Are you serious?" I couldn't believe they'd send someone out to do this. At least send a woman . . . "I'm afraid so. If you're not, we need to know that immediately." Eww. And with my mother in the room. "I know the law, sir. I'm not stupid. Of course I am." "Consider, please. If you are found to be lying . . ." "For goodness' sake, America's never even had a boyfriend!" Mom said. "That's right." I grabbed that rope, hoping it would end this discussion. "Very good. I'll just need you to sign this form to confirm your statement." I rolled my eyes but obeyed. I was glad Illéa existed, considering that this very land had nearly been turned to rubble, but these regulations were starting to make me feel like I was suffocating, like there were invisible chains keeping me down. Laws about who you could love, forms about your virginity being intact; it was infuriating. (Cass, 2012: 59)

The idea that the candidate of the crown prince's bride needs to be a virgin shows from the official's question. The law in Illéa controls sexual disease by not allowing you to do the sexual activity before marriage. If government catches you doing one and even gets pregnant, your child will be thrown to Eight immediately. This act shows discrimination towards America as a lower caste and as a woman. In middle to the late nineteenth century, virginity is suggested as a symbol of purity and innocence in sexual activity. It is considered natural for unmarried women. Recently, though, a virgin is deemed as an individual who has not experienced a penis penetrating the vagina yet¹⁷. The meaning of virginity is very tied to women as the fact that it never mattered to men and it does not control how they fit to be married and survived¹⁸.

Lifestyle

A pattern of an individual's choice in spending time and money is called lifestyle, but this behavioral pattern is also related closely to an individual's attitude and values. Therefore, it also means that there are a lot of factors related to lifestyle, for example, an individual's self-concept, reference groups, and social classes¹⁹. So, the lifestyle that each people have can be different even if they live next to each other because people's income and

¹⁷ Laura M. Carpenter, "The Ambiguity of "Having Sex": The Subjective Experience of Virginity Loss in the United States". *Journal of Sex Research*. Volume 38, Issue 2 (Januari 2010), 127-139.

¹⁸ Hanne Blank, *Virgin: The Untouched History*, New York: Bloomsburg USA, 2007, 10.

¹⁹ Michael R. Solomon, *Consumer Behavior: A European Perspective Third Edition*, London: Prentice Hall, 2006, 558.

needs are different. The lifestyle can be around in a lot of aspects like food, clothes, and entertainment. The difference in lifestyle can also come from job discrimination as they cannot afford to experience the lifestyle they want or to upgrade their experience now because the. They cannot afford to do another job and get another income.

Where meals were a worry at my house, they were a disaster at Aspen's. ... There was never enough food for his family. He was the oldest of seven, and in the same way I'd stepped up to help as soon as I could, Aspen had stepped aside. He passed his share of the little food they had down to his siblings and to his mom, who was always tired from working. His dad had died three years ago, and Aspen's family depended on him for almost everything. I watched with satisfaction as he licked the spices from the chicken off his fingers and tore them into the bread. I couldn't imagine when he'd eaten last. (Cass, 2012:17)

Food is a substance taken in to maintain life and growth⁵, so we can say it is a necessary thing to maintain us to be alive. Some people, cannot feed themselves properly, and hardly can provide food every day. Aspen and the family are one of those people who face difficulties in having enough food for themselves. Aspen is the head of the family after his father has died, he often has to give in his food for his family. As a result, Aspen is always so hungry that he even licks the seasoning of the food that sticks to his finger.

Aside from food, fashion in Illea also include as one of lifestyle aspects. As a form of nonverbal communication, fashion can be seen as a medium for the wearer to express self-identity, behavioral traits, and social status. As civilization advanced, so did language and its capacity for variety depending on the subject matter and goal of fostering communication between people who are wearing clothing or accessories. According to Rosello, different authors have studied and understood the meaning of fashion in different ways²⁰.

Ronald Barthes quoted Saussure (1916) in the mid-twentieth century for defining the foundation of human language by two concepts: *langue* and *parole*. Aside from individuals, *langue* is the essential system of language, containing a large number of elements through which meaning is created. *Parole* is defined as a single act, an outward manifestation of language. Such a theory, according to Roland Barthes, is related to the dialectical exchange of dress and dressing. As a sociological and historical construct, dress attributes the *langue*. An individual and a personal mode, similar to dressing (*parole*), construct a morphological, circumstantial, and physiological meaning. Both ideas shaped Saussure's initial concepts of clothing and language. When a group wears a piece of clothing in a distinctive way, it becomes a part of the outfit; however, if it's just one person, it just becomes the simple act of getting dressed. Both ideas align the dresser and the group in terms of semantic meaning.

... I noticed in the dim light that there were tiny bags under his eyes; no doubt he'd been working late all week. His black T-shirt was worn to threads in several places, just like the shabby pair of jeans he wore almost every day. ... Sixes and Sevens were almost always in denim or something sturdy. (Cass, 2012:14-28)

The first fashion theme explains in the novel is from caste Six. They wear denim or jeans or something similar which is sturdy. Denim was chosen as the preferred work wear

²⁰ Nuria Pons Rosello, "The Democratisation of Streetwear: Understanding Consumer Behaviour and the New Luxury Fashion Scope", *Issuu*, June 23, 2019, https://issuu.com/nuriapons77/docs/nuriapons_6famk001c_cwk2.

fabric choice for westerners in the United States in the early twentieth century. The reason is not only because the fabric has long durability to wear, but it is also quite dense than the popular alternative fabric made of cotton, linen, and wool. Moreover, denim is also cheap²¹.

It is expected that Aspen as caste Six wears them and even though it is already shabby he still wears them because as implied that he is a lower class and working until late, he cannot afford to change his shabby clothes. There are a lot of more important necessities to fulfill besides them.

The upper castes would wear khaki and denim from time to time to change up their looks, but it was always in a way that took the material to a whole new level. As if it wasn't enough that they could have pretty much whatever they wanted, they turned our necessities into luxuries. (Cass, 2012:28)

However, the upper castes who can afford to wear better clothes wear denim too but of course with different materials than the lower castes have. They use the new level or far more luxurious material of denim. For America, that shows the act of mockery to the lower castes because they turn their necessity into luxuries. This condition is similar to the condition of America in the early 1930s when denim was associated with clothing reserved for the lower class and genuinely the necessity for manual workers. Tim Gunn of the Parson's School of Design asserted that Levi's, denim, and jeans were relatively straightforward products that were about as glamorous as they could be and that people wore them with a great deal of humility. However, with the rise of "the cowboy," things started to change. Western films started to feature the image of American cowboys wearing Levi's jeans, which came to be associated with the independent lifestyle and tough individualism. As a result, denim gained a more positive reputation as an authentically American fabric and lost its general association with labourers. Thomas states that to replicate the denim's display without the usual roughness density of the cloth, with that aim, brands even produce those kinds of clothes. For example an entire collection made from Trofeo wool was crafted by Ermenegildo Zegna, which has been changed to show the traditional denim and features the opulently plush handle that one would expect from pure Trofeo wool²².

He looked so uptight. His clean hair was too perfect, his tailored suit too crisp. He seemed more like a painting than a person. I almost felt bad for the girl who ended up with him. That would probably be the most boring life imaginable. (Cass, 2012:40)

In contrast with the lower classes, Prince Maxon appears almost perfect with his hair and clothes so neat and refers as almost like a painting. America feels bad for the girl who in the end will be with him because she thinks that would probably be boring.

The Critical Position of The Author

The novel establishes a world that the person would see as one of a character in it. To find out the connection between the author and the novel, first, we need to be informed

²¹ Hawthorn International, "History of Denim and the Origin of Jeans", Hawthorn, March 2015, <https://www.hawthornintl.com/history-of-denim>.

²² Charlie Thomas, "The Enduring Popularity of Denim", The Rake, January 2018, <https://therake.com/stories/style/the-enduring-popularity-of-denim/>.

about the background of the author. The author's life has taken a part in creating the world and characters inside the novel.

Kiera Cass is an American author in the young adult fiction genre. She is known for her book, *The Selection* series. The book which is the object of this thesis is the first part of the series. She was born on May 19th, 1981 in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Before transferring to Radford University, she attended Coastal Carolina University. She graduated with a degree in the field of history from Radford. She builds a whole new world with such a detailed history in it. She even includes the imaginary event Fourth World War and the details of how it made a new country were created. Her idea to build the world inside the novel is related much to her degree in History, she also states this is indeed helpful in an interview with Madison Rahner in Miscellany Web.

She got the inspiration for the story from Esther (from the Bible) and Cinderella as bases the story. She wonders how if before Esther was shipped off to the castle to be married off to the king, she may have loved another boy and just let her love die along with her going off to the castle. She also imagines how Cinderella never demanded a prince but rather a night free and an exquisite dress. Those ideas infused her thoughts and she wanted to tell a humble background's young woman's story and the prince would give attention yet would not give interest²³.

“... When we got the notice about the Selection, he insisted that I sign up.” Maxon's mouth dropped open. “I know. It was so stupid. But it would have hung over him forever if I didn't try. And I honestly, honestly thought that I would never get chosen. How could I?” I raised my hands in the air and let them fall. I was still baffled by it all. “I found out from his mom that he'd been saving up to marry some mystery girl. I was so excited. I made him a little surprise dinner, thinking I could coax the proposal out of him. I was so ready. “But when he saw all the money that I'd spent on him, it upset him. He's very proud. He wanted to spoil me, not the other way around, and I guess he saw then that he'd never be able to. So he broke up with me instead. . .” (Cass, 2012:194-195)

As a history major, it is not something new that she should have a lot of research and read and write a lot. She felt the fact that a lot of real-life stories she had studied before helped her to give a twist to her history²⁴. She then successfully made the story joining those two together and she even add the element that the boy who is loved by the main character is the one who encourages her to join the selection to be a candidate for the crown prince or else it will keep on his mind for a long time. America, who does not want that to happen, agrees. She is hopeful that will make Aspen happy despite their difference in caste, she still loves him. She also wishes that he will actually propose to her to get married, but instead, he breaks up with her.

This act of America to follow what their loved ones do also actually happened with Kiera Cass. For the boy she loved in college days, she moved to a different school and state from Coastal Carolina University to Radford University in Radford, Virginia. She even changes her major as a result of changing universities. This act shows she puts love above everything, just like America does. She puts love before anything she wants to do.

²³ Breia Brissey, “Kiera Cass Talks Her YA Debut ‘The Selection’”, April 27, 2012, <https://ew.com/article/2012/04/27/the-selection-kiera-cass/>.

²⁴ Edward Willet, *All About Author: Kiera Cass*, New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2015, 16-82

In the end, though, she did not end up with that boy, but she is still friends with that boy's wife now. She shows that unlike in television, movies, or books, girls can have some friendships with other girls who rival each other in love. That is also a point that she built in *The Selection*'s character relationship²⁴.

"Actually, now that I think of it, maybe I shouldn't tell you. Sometimes I forget that we're competing against each other." Oh. She had secrets of the Maxon variety. This I had to know. "I know just how you feel, Marlee. I think we could become really close friends. I can't bring myself to think of you as an enemy, you know?" "Yeah. I think you're so sweet. And the people love you. I mean, you're probably going to win. . . ." She seemed a little defeated at the idea. I had to will myself not to wince or laugh at those words. "Marlee, can I tell you a secret?" My voice was full of gentle truth. I hoped she would believe my words. "Of course, America. Anything." "I don't know who will win this whole thing. Really, it could be anyone in this room. I guess everyone thinks that it'll be them, but I already know that if it can't be me, I'd want it to be you. You seem generous and fair. I think you'd be a great princess. Honestly." It was almost all the truth. "I think you're smart and personable," she whispered. "You'd be great, too." (Cass, 2012:200)

In the novel, America is a family-loving person. Besides Aspen, she tries to stay in the selection because she wants her family to be proud of her and also keep getting compensation. This condition also happens to Cass, she is also a family person who likes to be a housewife and watch her kids grow at home²⁴. She implicitly likes to position herself to America as she inherited a lot of traits of her. With her loving traits to her family and friends and does not seem to be a strong female character made Cass be judged to be an anti-feminist. Cass denied it and said it is ridiculous to have strong character means she has to take on the characteristics of a man. America, based on her opinion, has the strength to sacrifice and protect the people if she can do it. Those efforts alone are already considered as strong²⁴.

Underneath the anger, I could see he was heartbroken, but it wasn't my fault it turned out this way. "Aspen?" I asked quietly, getting him to look at me. "When you left me in the tree house, you crushed me." "Mer, I said I—" "Let me finish." He huffed, then was silent. "You took away my dreams, and the only reason I'm here is because you insisted I sign up." He shook his head, irritated at the truth. "I've been trying to put myself back together, and Maxon really cares about me. You mean so much to me, you know you do. But I'm part of this now, and I'd be stupid to not let myself see what happens." "So you're choosing him over me?" he asked miserably. "No, I'm not choosing him or you. I'm choosing me." That was the truth at the core of everything. I didn't know what I wanted yet, and I couldn't just let myself be swayed by what was easy or what someone else thought was right. I just had to give myself time to decide what was best for me. (Cass, 2012:325-326)

At the end of the novel, America shows another form of love. Not to her lovers, family, or friends, but herself. She always sways around between her feelings for Aspen, her ex, and Prince Maxon. However, she can conclude that the real one she can choose is herself. This decision made by herself also is a form of strength that Kiera Cass mentioned before. Through America, Cass tried to give the message what can go beyond caste is the act of love which can make her keep going on through obstacles despite her shortcomings because of her caste.

In conclusion, Kiera Cass is assumed as someone who does not side with the lower class. She positioned her character to be able to find a solution by only believing in love when reality is not that easy. She made her character to be like that because from her background which was mentioned before that she can easily change universities and majors, she is a part of a higher class and cannot be able to understand the feeling of a lower caste.

CONCLUSION

The author of *The Selection* demonstrated that caste differences are absolute. They have different opportunities, different jobs, and naturally different incomes, which results in social discrimination. In the novel, social discrimination occurs primarily in job, partner, and lifestyle aspects. Based on the novel's data, the author attempted to depict the conditions of social discrimination in the United States of America in the 1900s. The novel's discrimination, on the other hand, was difficult to resolve because it was so bound by the caste's rules and norms. In reality, it is people from different social classes in society who are the cause, not the caste. Time also gradually resolves and lessens the boundaries between people's social classes, bringing them closer to equality.

The United States of America is not an absolute monarchy kingdom, but the author created a new background history about it as a graduate History major. This was done to give the caste system credibility. At first, it appeared that the author's position leaned more toward the lower castes. America Singer is a rebellious character who defies convention by refusing to marry someone from a lower caste than herself. This demonstrates Cass's desire to demonstrate that a caste is merely a number and that feelings are more important. Cass, on the other hand, was unable to provide a solution to the problem from the perspective of the lower castes. The solution came from Maxon Schreave, a member of the highest caste, and only a portion of it was shown; he was also motivated to do it because he has feelings for America.

Cass' biography detailed her life, including how she changed majors and even universities to pursue her crush. As a result, it's no surprise that Cass saw feelings and love as the solution to America's problem, as she had experienced them herself. We can consider her to be of a higher social class based on her background as someone who can easily change majors and universities. As a result, America Singer's representation of the lower class is unlikely to show because America was created as a character who prioritized feelings over others. Cass would know what to prioritize more in that position if she were of a lower caste—for example work, but she has never been in one. As a result, she would never be aware of it. On the other hand, her novel implicitly encourages us to be ourselves more and believe we can overcome the obstacles we face—something that is difficult to believe nowadays.

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