

The Fire of the Seas: A Novel About the Bitter Discrimination in Our Society

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to discuss about the topic of discrimination and elaborate it through the form of a creative novel. Three topics are explored: the reasons for discrimination, how discrimination can continue to perpetuate, and how indirect discrimination can also hurt victims. These questions are answered in the narrative story in a novel with the help of the Social Dominance theory and Becker's theory of Economic Discrimination. Sapphire is a fire-wielding mermaid who is discriminated against because of her power over fire. She finds out that discrimination can exist because the dominant group does not want to lose their privileges, and how discrimination still runs rampant because of the propaganda spread by the king, which is supported using the legalizing myths in Social Dominance theory. Sapphire also witnesses and suffers some indirect forms of discrimination, especially about lack of interaction and wage differences.

Keywords: discrimination, indirect discrimination, social dominance, economic discrimination, fantasy, merfolk

INTRODUCTION

A novel is an invented prose narrative with a bountiful length that tells a story about human experience in an imaginative way, most often through a connected sequence of events involving a group of people in a specific setting (Burgess, 2020). A novel also has some advantages compared to other storytelling forms when it comes to the setting and character development. With a novel's bountiful length, a writer has more rooms to write detailed settings and worlds for the readers to immerse folks in, compared to other forms of fiction like short stories (Johnson, 2020). I want to create a novel that represents the struggles and conflicts human beings have to face in this current modern society, with enough space for me to mete out the details of the world and its characters.

Young adults also earn several advantages through reading novels. A researcher experimented on giving giving prescriptions in the form of reading books for mentally unhealthy people, and it became a substantial treatment to help people with mental health problems (Robertson et al., 2008). In addition, students who have read about tough situations like date rape from young adult novels are also more emotionally prepared to handle the situation if it ever happens (Scherff & Groenke, 2009). I wish to give young adults a that can help improve their quality of life, and that is why I decided to write a novel targeted for the young adults.

As for the genre, I choose fantasy. Fantasy is one of the most popular genres in the young adult novel market as of now. In 2018, bookstores in America have sold over 20 million copies of young adult fantasy books alone (Watson, 2019). Young adult fantasy books provide temporary escapism for young adults to escape their reality for a moment and enjoy the fictional world that fantasy books can give. Not only that, reading fantasy books may also bring advantages to the readers. Research stated that young adults who read fantasy books have a higher understanding of pretence and higher imagination, leading to artistic skills (Painter, 2016). Based on a research in Fall 2012, students who have read a lot of young adult fantasy novels are also more likely to appreciate literature and have stronger reading skills than others (Ostenson & Wadham, 2012).

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For the topic of the thesis, I want to focus on discrimination towards people who are discriminated for things they were born with. Even in a liberal and developed country like America, gender discrimination is still very present. Women are still discriminated against and are not seen as ideal leaders than men (Fisk & Overton, 2019). Discrimination towards youths is also seen everywhere. A study conducted by Patti Verbanas found that 101 black young adults with reported more than 5,600 experiences of racial discrimination in total, with the average of more than five experiences per day (Verbanas, 2019).

Several minority groups of people in Indonesia also suffer discrimination in their own country. First, research has found that there is a rise in homophobia and transphobic actions (Wieringa, 2019). Another example is discrimination towards Chinese-Indonesians. Many Chinese-Indonesians have been called malicious words, such as communists, unpatriotic, and zoosadists (Sarahtika, 2018). The National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) has recorded that there are at least 101 reported cases of discrimination happened between 2011 to 2018. Those reports include not allowing Chinese-Indonesians and other minorities races to access public services, the disbandment of racial customs and practices, discrimination towards minorities' land ownership rights, and limited access to employment because of their race (Bhaskara, 2018). I want to bring up in my story how discriminating against people based on things that they could not control is wrong and should be stopped.

In addition, I want to highlight how the perpetrators of discrimination can continue their acts of discrimination without the society turning their backs on them. Even though discrimination has been a problem in Indonesia for years, we can still see it happening even until now. Most often, the perpetrators of discrimination in Indonesia did not get punished or even reprimanded for it. The answer is legitimizing myths. Legitimizing myths includes the doctrines that are widespread in our world right now (Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). Governments and even common people can legalize myths and spread doctrines that allow discrimination to continuously happen in our society. This also happens in Indonesia, where Chinese-Indonesians are seen as unpatriotic and communists (Sarahtika, 2018), and thus allowing the acts of discrimination to continuously happen to them without the government taking any responsibilities to protect its people (Rahman, 2020).

I also want to discuss how someone can discriminate against other people. Based on a research conducted by Andrew Altman and published in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, there are three types of discrimination, which are direct, indirect, organizational, and institutional/structural discrimination (Altman, 2020). However, my thesis will only include two types of discrimination, which are direct and indirect discrimination. Direct discrimination is the type of discrimination that is often acknowledged by everyone, as it is discriminating a certain group of people explicitly towards them. One of the examples is if a restaurant put a sign on the door stating that they refuse to serve people from a certain race or sexual orientation (Lundahl & Wadensjo, 2015).

On the other hand, indirect discrimination imposes actions that may bring disadvantages for a certain group, but the perpetrators of said actions do not have any intention to disadvantage them (Altman, 2020). An example is seen when a white female grows up in a community full of white people, and the stereotype that black men are dangerous and brutal are running rampant in the community. When the white female goes out and meets a black male, she intentionally avoids him in order to consider her own safety as she thought that all black males are brutal. In this case, she isn't trying to discriminate black people by doing this. However, black people will see it as a form of discrimination, where the black male is intentionally avoided just because of his skin color and gender (Altman, 2020).

For the theoretical framework, I use the social dominance theory proposed by Devereux, Sidanius, and Pratto, as well as Becker's theory of discrimination. The social dominance theory

is a multi-level theory of how societies maintain group-based dominance (Pratto & Stewart, 2012). It explains how they can remain stable in power and perpetuate themselves as the more powerful group in the society continuously (Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). It observes how there will always exist a certain group of people—whether it be religious, ethnic, racial, or national—that holds more power than the rest of the people and enjoy special privileges in the society and at least one other group of people which holds considerably less power or ease in the way of life, an example includes the relationship between the ruling elites of South America and their indigenous people (Pratto & Stewart, 2012). Not only that, the dominant groups of people tend to enjoy superior health services as well as economic and educational opportunities, while the subordinate groups may struggle trying to find decent healthcare services, education, or even jobs (Pratto & Stewart, 2012).

This theory also proposes the concept of legitimizing myths, which is consensually held values, attitudes, beliefs, stereotypes, conspiracy theories, and cultural ideologies (Pratto & Stewart, 2012). Anyone and everyone can hold a role in legitimizing myths. However, most legitimizing myths are regulated by people in power, like the government, church, etc. The role of legitimizing myths is to disguise and allow both institutional and individual discrimination to continue (Pratto & Stewart, 2012). Some examples of legitimizing myths are promoting the idea that Native Americans were “savages” in the 1800s to allow the United States to expand its territory. Not only that, it is now widespread to the world that the United States is a democratic world that promotes freedom, which caused other nations to see the US’ actions as “democratizing” rather than “colonizing” (Pratto & Stewart, 2012).

I use this theory in my story by showing how the mindset and the dominant’s need to maintain balance in the society that water-wielding merfolk are superior and fire-wielding merfolk are inferior to be the main reasons of discrimination towards the fire-wielding merfolk. I also highlight how legitimizing myths helps water-wielding merfolk continue their discriminatory behavior towards the fire-wielding merfolk. Through legitimizing myths done by the monarchy, the other merfolk believe that fire-wielding merfolk are beneath them, are dangerous, and do not belong in the ocean world, thus giving a “proper” reason that allows discriminatory actions against them.

Becker’s theory of Economic Discrimination observes how discrimination can be seen through several actions, like wage difference and lack of interaction (Lundahl & Wadensjo, 2015). An article written by Kevin M. Murphy titled *How Gary Becker Saw the Scourge of Discrimination* revealed that Becker’s theory of discrimination is housed under the Economy field (2015), and it uses a unique perspective on analyzing discrimination, which is through the wage and interaction received by different groups of people, mainly between dominant and subordinate groups of people. There is a discussion in his study about how someone can discriminate against others. Becker proposes how discrimination can be seen through the rates of contact with each other. If a group receives zero interaction from the superior while another group receives common and intensive contact, the taste of discrimination will arise (Lundahl & Wadensjo, 2015). Becker observed that discrimination has economic consequences for both the people being discriminated and people who are discriminating others. One of the examples he mentioned is racial discrimination. If an employer does not want to have black employees, then the employer would have to pay more money for hiring more white employees (Murphy, 2015).

I use this theory in my story through the lack of interactions and the difference in wages that my main character and people of her kind suffer from. This theory will help me significantly in putting attention to how people from different groups receive different treatments just because of their gender, race, and skin color. While the theory focuses more on racial discrimination, which is a prominent problem during Becker’s time, I take the core of the theory to craft my creative work. The core is that discrimination only brought nothing but disadvantages both to the discriminator and discriminated. It also helps me create discriminatory interactions in the

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merfolk society, especially in the working places, where fire-wielding merfolk are being isolated, ignored, and paid less.

THE CONCEPT OF THE CREATIVE WORK

Theme

My theme is that indirect discrimination starts chaos and forges discord in the society. To relay this theme to the readers, Sapphire, my main protagonist, will have to go through a series of events where she realizes how the majority of the merfolk population is discriminating against the fire-wielding merfolk, including her parents, who are willing to accuse her of terrible things to hide the fact that their family has a fire-wielding daughter. This causes her to feel hurt, lost, and angry. She believes that it is not fair that fire-wielding merfolk are looked down upon, and slowly try to bring a change into Scyrius where they would not discriminate against them.

Plot

Sapphire, the daughter of one of the most powerful noble families, has been cast out by her own parents after they discover that she had the power of fire, something that is seen as forbidden and disgusting by the merfolk world. Her family accused Sapphire of lies to hide the fact that the family has borne someone with the power of fire. They sent her to the Rim, the most dangerous prison in the merfolk world.

There, she met Vanora, who was known as one of the top criminals. Aqilus, her partner, then made a grand entrance to free her, and she agreed to a temporary truce with them. Not long after, Sapphire finds out that fire-wielding merfolk are being discriminated against heavily in Scyrius. They suffer from being ostracized, receiving less wages, and even suffer verbal abuse and humiliation. Sapphire then steeled herself to solve this problem by eradicating the roots of discrimination and achieve a peaceful Scyrius.

Sapphire then met the leader of the fire-wielding community and revealed the existence of the Eye of Fire, a rare, powerful spell that could be used by Sapphire alone. She also found out how Aqilus and Vanora had deep hatred and grudges towards Hanzrael, the king of Scyrius, because he had killed his big sister. She also found out how her parents had been imprisoned in the same castle where Hanzrael resides. Finding their goal to match each other, they go towards the palace together.

Sapphire's parents then revealed that they have abandoned her not because they don't love her, but doesn't want her to fall in the hands of Hanzrael, who loathed fire-wielding merfolk to the bone. She also realized that she would not be able to break her parents' jail without defeating Hanzrael. The three slipped into the palace to confront Hanzrael personally, and Sapphire found out that Vanora was actually the princess Sereia, Hanzrael's one and only child. Hanzrael revealed that he was the sole reason why the merfolk hated fire-wielding merfolk through spreading the rumor that fire-wielding merfolk are dangerous and vicious. He revealed that he hated the fire-wielding merfolk for their betrayal for the human kin, just to get power to overthrow the supreme dominance of the water-wielding merfolk. As a water-wielding merman himself, Hanzrael would not let their dignity and privilege be harmed. By using the power of the Eye of Fire Sapphire holds, Hanzrael was successfully overpowered by the three of them. Vanora then killed her own father, and they set off to create a better Scyrius free of discrimination towards anyone.

Characters

Sapphire Arilleur is a 19-year-old merfolk who wields the power of fire, the "taboo" element in Scyrius, the merfolk world. The fire element is seen as taboo as merfolk cannot comprehend the fact that fire can exist inside of an ocean world. This causes the merfolk population to fear and

hate the fire-wielding merfolk, including Sapphire. She is the only daughter of the Arilleur family, one of the twelve most powerful noble families in the merfolk ocean world.

Vanora 'Sereia' Astrales is a 21-year-old merfolk and is already one of the most notorious criminals in Scyrius. Through her deeds, she is known as the 'Elusive Assassin' and the 'Phantom Thief' by the merfolk. She is very charming and has a way with words. She can also be a flirt and can talk about any topic with everyone, as she is very knowledgeable. With her tongue as her weapon, she has successfully infiltrated a lot of nobles' houses and properties by pretending to be someone else.

Aqilus 'Nereus' Tritonn is a 21-year-old merman and is the nephew of Hanzrael. He is smart with his hands. He is a very curious being, and he has swum up to the surface a couple of times to observe human beings and has adapted a couple of their technologies into his own creation. He is incredibly reckless and showy, having a thrill to see his inventions breaking down objects and houses, and cares little for the consequences of his inventions and actions. Because of this, he has been known as the 'Bomber King' by the merfolk.

Hanzrael is a water-wielding merman, the king of Scyrius, and the father of Sereia, now known as Vanora. He is known as one of the most powerful merfolk alive as he can wield two elements, earth and water, something that is very rarely seen in Scyrius. He loathes the existence of fire-wielding merfolk as they used to betray Scyrius in the past, a secret that only a few high-ranked people know to hide the ocean world's dark past. He despised them even more when he realized that fire-wielding merfolk were seeking power in order to overtake the supreme reigning position of water-wielding merfolk. As a water-wielding merman himself, to protect their privileges and power, he seeks to destroy every single fire-wielding merfolk.

Lynna and Yuval Arilleur are Sapphire's parents as well as the head of the Arilleur family. They are very proud of their accomplishments for Scyrius, which includes inventing Seha'run, a vehicle not unlike the motor-boat which exists in the human lands, that is powered by both water and wind elements. As one of the twelve most powerful noble families in Scyrius, Lynna and Yuval make sure that they have a pristine image to keep their dignity in the ocean world. For this, they have groomed Sapphire, their only daughter, to take over as the leader of the Arilleur family in the future. However, when it was revealed that Sapphire has the power of fire, they were devastated. They know that if Hanzrael ever finds out that Sapphire is a fire-wielding mermaid, she will be in great danger. Because of this, they were forced to accuse Sapphire of trying to murder them to save her from Hanzrael's clutches.

Conflict

There are two types of conflicts that exist in my story, which are internal and external conflicts. Internal conflict happens inside the character's mind or heart, and it happens when a character has an inner turmoil that's causing some emotional pain (Edwards, 2020). Edwards also added that there are two types of internal conflicts, which are person vs. self and person vs. destiny (fate/luck/god). In the story, I only use one internal conflict type, which is person vs. self. On the other hand, external conflict pits the characters against some exterior force or world-view and happens outside the character's body (Edwards, 2020). Based on the same article by Edwards, there are five types of external conflicts, which are person vs. person, person vs. nature, person vs. society, person vs. technology, and person vs. supernatural. However, I only use two types of external conflicts, which are person vs. person and person vs. society.

In the novel, my main conflict is about man vs society. This type of conflict happens when a novel sets a character against a tradition, institution, law, or some other societal construct (Edwards, 2020). Sapphire is going to raise conflict within the society to restore the fire-wielding merfolk's good name, which many people disapprove of. She has to prove to them that

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fire-wielding merfolk are good merfolk that can also help protect Scyrius. In addition, she also has to show that she herself is not a murderer. Man vs man conflict also appears in my story, though it is not as major as man vs society. The heart of this type of conflict involves two characters with opposing outlooks, opinions, or goals (Edwards, 2020). In this case, Sapphire has a conflict with both of her parents as well as the king of Scyrius in order to reach her goal, which is to create a non-discriminating society for fire-wielding merfolk. Lastly, I also include man vs self in my story. This conflict happens when a character is battling inner demons, has an inner moral conflict, or simply striving to become a better person (Edwards, 2020). While this type of conflict is very minor in my story, it is also an important conflict as Sapphire debates with herself whether she wanted to prioritize pursuing her parents for questions and possibly revenge, or helping the fire-wielding merfolk create a better society for them.

CONCLUSION

Through writing this creative work, I highlight how there may be underlying explanations why a person may discriminate against other people. I also explain how discrimination can still be actively perpetrated even until now. Last but not least, I show how indirect discrimination is also a type of discrimination and why it can also be harmful.

In my story, I explore the main reasons why fire-wielding mermaid are loathed and discriminated against in Scyrius. I first demonstrate that many merfolk hate the fire-wielding merfolk because most merfolk think that they are abnormal and an existence that defied the beliefs of nature in Scyrius. This is done through Strom Muriel's document, where he highlights the fact that the power of fire caused by fire-wielding merfolk could destroy all, as their fire could not be extinguished either by ocean water or the water conjured by water-wielding merfolk. Another reason why many merfolk hate the existence of fire-wielding merfolk is because the water-wielding merfolk, who holds the dominant power in Scyrius, do not want to lose their dominance, power, and privileges. It is explained in the conversation between Sapphire and her parents. They explain how fire-wielding merfolk's power could threaten the balance in society, as water-wielding merfolk has been enjoying the privilege that comes with the fact that they are the majority of the population in Scyrius and is also the most needed and influential power. I elaborate the water-wielding merfolk's privileges through a scene in Infinite Alley, where their wristbands are much more ornately decorated compared to the wind, earth, and fire-wielding merfolk working in the same area. In addition, water-wielding merfolk also hold more power, as they are more often seen giving orders to other merfolk compared to the other power-wielding merfolk.

Next, I illustrate on how discrimination can still be perpetrated in the story through legalizing myths, mainly done by Hanzrael, the main antagonist in the story. He makes many propagandas and posters that spread the belief that fire-wielding merfolk are a dangerous population that needs to be suppressed, as their powers are vicious and can threaten the safety of Scyrius. Hanzrael also posts a large poster advertising a court date for a fire-wielding merman who has been caught for using the power of fire in public, painting him as a dangerous being who can endanger the population of Scyrius by using his power. Meanwhile, other merfolk who wields the power of water, wind, and earth can use their powers openly in Scyrius. By doing this, Hanzrael is deliberately justifying the discrimination that he and the merfolk population had done towards the fire-wielding merfolk. I also add some dialogues in the battle scene how Hanzrael intentionally painted a bad and barbaric image of fire-wielding merfolk, and advertise how they are a danger to Scyrius and must be suppressed. Because of this, the acts of discrimination can be seen as a saving grace done by the good population of the merfolk in Scyrius instead of a horrific action that should be stopped.

To show how indirect discrimination can also be harmful in the story, I wrote some scenes in one of the most popular marketplaces, Infinite Alley. Here, readers can see how a certain fire-

wielding mermaid is discriminated against through indirect actions, which is not coming through her shop to buy her goods because she is a fire-wielding mermaid. As she cannot control or ask where the shoppers can buy their goods, she also can not protest to the kingdom, and thus her shop is in danger of having to be closed down from lack of income. In addition, I also add some scenes where some fire-wielding merfolk workers are ignored and shunned. While water, wind, and earth-wielding merfolk can be seen talking and having fun together, they choose not to interact with fire-wielding merfolk, and this can be seen as a form of discrimination. An indirect form of discrimination can also be seen through the difference in wages. I describe this form of indirect discrimination through Sapphire's talk with Lorelei, where she uncovers the fact that fire-wielding mermaid receives ten to twenty percent less wage compared to the other merfolk. Fire-wielding merfolk who receives less wage has no option but to buy dilapidated and small caves as their living spaces, whilst other merfolk can enjoy deep and large caves where they can place many of their furniture and living accommodations.

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