



Critical analysis of the representation of social problems in *Gada' Al-'Id* Movie by Lucien Bourjeily (sociological approach to literature)

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This article has undergone peer review and was presented at the Islam in World Perspectives Symposium 2024 on August 14, 2024

Keywords

Criticism,
Social Problems,
Gada' al-'Id Movie,
Lucien Bourjeily

This research intends to discuss the social problems criticized in *Gada' al-'Id* movie. The aim of this research is first to explain the social conditions of Lebanese society as a background for the emergence of criticism. Second, to analyze the forms of social problems criticized in *Gada' al-'Id* movie. The material object of this research is *Gada' al-'Id*, a movie by Lucien Bourjeily released in 2017. This research uses social criticism theory with Gillin and Gillin's concept of social problems as an analytical tool. The research method used is qualitative descriptive, and the approach used is the sociology of literature. The data collection technique in this research was carried out using the note-taking method and literature study. The research results show that the existence of sectarianism in various fields, the rise of westernization, the economic crisis, migration of the younger generation abroad, population decline, and the prevalence of migrant workers are the social conditions of Lebanese society that motivate the emergence of social criticism in *Gada' al-'Id* movie. Furthermore, there are some data criticizing eight social problems in this movie, namely politics, economy, family, customs, religion, gender, morals, and technology. The researcher found that the most dominant problem criticized in this movie is the political problem of confessionalism, which significantly impacts social, economic, religious, and even family issues.

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Introduction

Social problems classified into nine aspects, namely political, economic, educational, family, customs, religious, gender, moral, and technological problems (Gillin & Gillin, 1948). These social problems are then interesting topics to be discussed by many people from various circles. One form of public awareness of the existence of various social problems is the emergence of social criticism. Social criticism is a response or satire directed at an event or incident that occurs in society. This usually arises because of dissatisfaction with the reality that is considered not in line with existing norms. Social criticism can be expressed

through various media, one of which is literary works. In this case, the author focuses the discussion of social criticism on literary works in the form of a movie with the title *Gada' al-'Id*.

Gada' al-'Id movie or better known as Heaven Without People was released on December 6, 2017. The movie has a comedy drama genre but contains a lot of social criticism in it. *Gada' al-'Id* is one of the works of a Lebanese writer and director named Lucien Bourjeily. His works are known to be controversial because they contain a lot of criticism and satire of social problems that occur in Lebanon. The movie only takes place in one setting where a family finally gathers and has lunch together on Easter. However, through the dialogs of the lunch, the audience is brought to see the social life conditions in Lebanon more objectively, such as the existence of sectarianism in various fields, the depravity of government performance, the more liberal thinking of the people, and the phenomenon of population migration which is quite high when compared to other Arab countries. The purpose of this study is to explain the social conditions of Lebanese society as the background for the emergence of social criticism in Lucien Bourjeily's *Gada' al-'Id* movie and to analyze the forms of social problems criticized in Lucien Bourjeily's *Gada' al-'Id* movie.

Method

This study used the note-taking and library research method (literary study) using qualitative descriptive. Collecting data by searching from various sources, both books, journals, or articles related to the research theme. The approach used by researchers is sociological approach to literature. The sociological approach to literature works considers literary works in relation to social problems that exist in society. The sociology of literary works focuses on the content of literary works, goals and other things contained in the literary work itself and related to social problems (Wellek & Warren, 1994).

Result and Discussion

Social Conditions of Lebanese Society

a. Political System

Lebanon is known as a country that adheres to confessionalism as its political system. Confessionalism is a system of government that distributes political power

based on religion. This system has been used since 1943 through an unwritten agreement called the National Pact as a result of negotiations between Maronite Christian, Sunni Muslim and Shia Muslim leaders. Furthermore, in the 1989 Taif Agreement, which was agreed to stop the turmoil of the civil war in Lebanon, there was an agreement on constitutional reform related to the division of political positions between Maronite Christians, Sunni Muslims and Shia Muslims, both in parliament, ministries, and other positions based on the ratio of the composition of religious communities (Hibatullah, 2021). Officially, there are 18 recognized religious sects in Lebanon, consisting of 4 Muslim denominations, 12 Christian denominations, Druze, and Jews. So with that many official religions, the confessionalism system is considered the best system to reduce disputes between groups.

In addition to having a major influence on politics, sectarianism also plays a considerable role in the social sphere. Quoted from Deutsche Welle, an international broadcaster media, "In Lebanon, most social services are provided by non-state actors, including political organizations and religious charities, which often regard themselves as representatives of particular groups. However, this sectarian-based welfare has resulted in a highly fragmented and unregulated system, and the politicization of people's access to social benefits. As a result, citizens who are loyal to certain political or religious leaders are more likely to receive social assistance from them than citizens who are considered disloyal" (Hodali, 2023).

b. Socio-economic

Social welfare is not equally shared by the Lebanese people. There is a clear disparity between the lives of the rich and the poor. The social disparities of Lebanese society can be clearly witnessed in its major cities, such as Beirut. The capital of Lebanon is often referred to as the Paris of the Middle East because Lebanon is known as the most westernized Arab country. This pattern of westernization can be seen in the habits, social activities, and lifestyles of its people. It is this lifestyle that shows the inequality of social status between the rich and the poor. This inequality is partly due to the disappearance of the middle class in Lebanon. As quoted from Deutsche Welle, the decline of the middle class population in Lebanon is due to economic contraction. This can be seen from Lebanon's GDP growth in 2015 which was only around 1% due to political instability. In addition, public debt continues to rise, reaching more than

140% of GDP in 2016. These problems have degraded the status of the middle class into a low-income group (Holleis, 2023).

According to a survey conducted by Gallup, 21% of people in Lebanon wanted to leave the country permanently in 2016 and the number continues to rise to 63% by 2021. This is due to the slow growth of the Lebanese economy as well as the failure of economic reforms in 2016, which is one of the causes of the prolonged economic crisis experienced by the country. In addition, there has also been a reported increase in the percentage of Lebanese who find it difficult to maintain their income year on year since 2008. The economic downturn has also been accompanied by prolonged power outages and a fuel crisis that has caused fuel and food prices to rise to unaffordable levels for many families (Loschky, 2021).

In addition to the difficulty in maintaining income faced by most of the population, the younger generation in Lebanon in particular has difficulty finding employment. The uneven distribution of the population could be one of the reasons why it is difficult to find a job. It was found that 88.1% of the Lebanese population lived in urban areas while 11.9% lived in rural areas in 2015 (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2018). The density in urban areas increases the competition for young people to develop their careers. The difficulty in finding a job and the lack of career advancement in Lebanon has led many young people to migrate in order to find work and a decent income abroad.

c. Society and Identity

The total population of Lebanon as of 2017 when the movie *Gada' al-'Id* was released was 6.1 million with a female population of about 3.3% more than men. Until now, the population in Lebanon has shown a downward trend over the years (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2024). The negative net migration rate due to the large number of outgoing migrants compared to incoming migrants is one of the reasons for the decline in Lebanon's population.

The next cause of the decline in Lebanon's population is the decline in the birth rate. This decline has been accompanied by an increase in life expectancy, which in turn has led to an increase in the old-age population. Despite having a high life expectancy, the elderly in Lebanon are vulnerable to various difficulties. There are several

challenges that must be faced by the older generation in Lebanon, including housing arrangements, social relationships, and health, both physically and mentally (Abdulrahim et al., 2015).

A small proportion of the elderly in Lebanon live alone, while most live with their children. Most of the elderly who live alone are of high socioeconomic status. They usually live on remittances from their children abroad. The lack of care that can be provided directly by the children makes most Lebanese families hire migrants from Sri Lanka, Ethiopia and the Philippines to provide skilled services for their elderly parents. However, in reality, these migrant workers are not only in charge of caring for the elderly, but also serve as domestic helpers. It is not uncommon to find cases of abuse and racism among these migrant workers.

1. Social Problems Criticized in *Gada' Al-'Id* Movie by Lucien Bourjeily

a. Political Issues



“إن ترشح شخص غير ماروني، ماذا سيحدث؟”
“لن يصوت أحد له.”

“If someone who is not a Maronite runs, what would happen?”

“No one would vote for him.”

This is a critique of the distribution of positions in Lebanese politics based on religion. A person running for president is usually a Maronite Christian, so if someone other than a Maronite runs, no one will vote for them.



إلياس: هذه الأيام، يتم تعيين الأشخاص ولا يعتمدون على الانتخابات.

Elias: These days, it is no longer an election, but an appointment.

In this scene, Elias criticizes the upcoming elections in Lebanon. The many cases of bribery to elect certain leaders made him say “it's no longer an election, but an appointment” because it is certain that the one who gives the most bribes will be the one who gets the most people's votes.



ربيع: كان ذلك قبل عام 1943، ولم يُكتب في الواقع في الدستور. كان هذا تقليدًا.
ريتا: نعم. ما تغير في اتفاقية الطائف كان التكافؤ الديني في البرلمان.

Rabih: That is from 1943, and it was never actually written in the constitution. It was a custom that remained.

Rita: Yes. What changed in Taif was just religious parity in parliament.

This criticism refers to the division of power in Lebanon based on religion where the president would be a Maronite Christian, the speaker of parliament would be a Shia Muslim, and the prime minister would be a Sunni Muslim. This was originally an agreement that was not even written into the constitution, but it has stuck and cannot be removed until now.



ريتا: هل الوزراء خبراء في مجالهم؟ لا. ولم يحدث هذا أبدًا في تاريخ لبنان، لماذا؟ لأنهم يعينون الوزراء بناءً على طائفتهم الدينية، وليس خبراتهم

Rita: Are ministers experts in their field? No, they are not. And that will never happen in the history of Lebanon, why? Because they appoint ministers based on their religious affiliation, not their expertise.

This criticism is based on disappointment and anger that the cabinet built by the head of state does not contain people who are competent in their fields but people who are of the same religious group as him.

b. Economic Issues



جوزفين: نعم. من كان ليتوقع أن تستمر مشكلة انقطاع الكهرباء لمدة 27 عامًا حتى يومنا هذا.

Josephine: Yes. Who would have predicted that 27 years later, the power still goes out every day!

This scene criticizes the availability of electricity which, despite decades of neglect, has not been changed by the government regarding electricity supply in Lebanon, resulting in frequent blackouts.



ريتا: عملك جيد وتتقاضى راتبًا جيدًا لكن لا يسمحون لك بالتكلم أو الانتقاد.

Rita: In Dubai, you work well, you get paid well... "But shut your mouth!"

Many Lebanese migrate to Dubai for better jobs and income, even if they are asked to keep their mouths shut about the bad things they witness. This is because of the lack of income they can earn if they choose to continue working in Lebanon even with the same pressures.



إلياس: لا تتقاضى أموال كثيرة لأن الكثير من اللبنانيين عادوا للبلاد ولديهم ديون.

Elias: And you don't really make money. Many Lebanese come back in debt.

While the money that migrants make while working in Dubai can be substantial, the cost of living in the country is equally high. The hedonistic lifestyle has also caused many Lebanese to return home with debts.

c. Family Problems



نهي: إنه يزعجني كثيراً. أحرق ورقة في الصف، وعثروا على وافي ذكري كان قد أخفاه داخل علبة سجائر. لقد طردوه.

Noha: He is giving me such a hard time. He burned a paper in class, and they found he had a condom hidden in a cigarette pack. They expelled him.

Many children lose the role of one or maybe even both parents and this is one of the factors for juvenile delinquency. Parents not only have to support their children physically, but also mentally and emotionally. In this case, Samy—Noha's son—is missing the role of his father who lives in Saudi Arabia, while the mother tends to be conservative and does not try to understand her son, so the relationship between the two is not good.



سامي: أصبحت بعمر 17 عامًا وأنا بالغ. أعرف ما أفعله!
نهي: بالغ؟ حقًا؟ ماذا عن حادثة السرقة في المدرسة؟ وحرق صناديق القمامة في الصف؟ هل كل هذا تصرف شخص بالغ؟

Nabil: I'm 17 years old, I'm a grown up. I know what I'm doing!

Noha: You're a grown up? Really? So grown up that you stole and set fire to a trash can in class?

Teenagers tend to feel like adults at the age of 17. One of the reasons is the legalization of some things that were not allowed before they reached this age. The role of parents as friends and companions for children is very necessary at this time. An attitude that seems patronizing will cause children to be more difficult to control in supervision because they tend to disobey and want to explore many things at this age.



ريتا: تعرفون جميعًا بأني لا أريد أن أنجب أطفالًا.

Rita: You all know that I am against having a child.

Many young people today are against having children (childfree). They think that life is already hard enough, so why add another burden to it. In this scene, it is also mentioned that another reason Rita does not want to have children is because one's life is less valued in Lebanon. Even if she ends up having a child, Rita doesn't want it to be Lebanese.



ليلى: إنه اختبار حمل وأنا حامل.
سيرج: هل أنت حامل؟ أنت...

Leila: It's a pregnancy test, and I'm pregnant.

Serge: You're pregnant? You're...

Many adaptations of western culture have caused the younger generation to tolerate things that are considered immoral in eastern culture, one of which is having sex before marriage. Even so, when pregnancy occurs, it will cause problems in the family. This is because the older generation still clings to their eastern cultures, so they do not share the same views. In this scene, in addition to worrying about Leila's pregnancy that occurred before they were married, Serge is also confused because of the religious differences between the two that are not yet known to the family.



سامي: أمي، عليك أن تقرري. إما أنا لص أو مدمن مخدرات أو مجرم. اختاري واحدًا. لا تتهميني بشيء مختلف كل يوم.

Samy: Mom, you have to decide. Either I am a thief or a drug addict or a thug. Choose one. Not a different accusation every day.

Constantly confronting children is one of the characteristics of a toxic relationship in a family. There are two possible impacts that can affect children in this case, the first is that children often blame themselves continuously or children may even do what their parents accuse them of doing because they are too fed up.

d. Habit Problems



أنطوان: يا بني، الشيطان الذي تعرفه أفضل من الذي لا تعرفه.

Antoine: My son, the devil you know is better than the one you don't.

This is one of the bad habits of the older generation. In this dialog, the “devil” in this context is the government. If all elders adhered to the concept stated by Antoine, it would be impossible for their country to achieve change.



ربيع: التقليد عبارة عن قانون غير مكتوب، لكن لا يزال الناس يطبقونه لكن بمرور الوقت، يصبح مثل الدستور.

Rabih: Custom is an unwritten law, but still obeyed. And over time, it becomes like a constitution.

Customs or habits that become unwritten laws and are still adhered to by the community can have good or bad effects. In this context, Rabih is of the opinion that the custom that prevails in their community has an unfavorable impact. This custom involves the allocation of seats in government based on certain religious groups.



غابي: يحظى الإنسان بالحرية في الدقائق الخمسة الأولى في حياته فقط.

Gaby: Freedom is only the first five minutes of a person's life.

A person never really has freedom in life. Ever since he was born his life has been determined by his parents. As one grows up, one is bound by various rules. The habit of parents imposing their will on their children should be reduced. Each individual does need to be taught about the obligations they need to do, but the fulfillment of one's rights is also something that must be given.



سامي: في أمريكا، يمكنك القيادة بعمر 16 لديهم قوانينهم هناك.
سيرج: في أمريكا؟ نحن في لبنان.

Sami: In America, you can drive at 16.

Serge: In America? We are in Lebanon.

In this scene, it can be seen that most teenagers in Lebanon tend to follow western culture, especially America. Serge's sentence "we are in Lebanon" shows that it is appropriate for a person to follow the customs and culture of the place where he lives. One of the reasons is because certain cultures or rules that are considered good in one region may not necessarily be suitable if applied in another region.

e. Religion Issues



كريستين: هناك تطرف في كل مكان يا أبي، حتى بين المسيحيين.
أنطوان: بالتأكيد. هذا لأنه يتم خداعهم.
نهي: من قبل من؟
أنطوان: من قبل الكهنة.

Christine: There is extremism everywhere, even between Christians.

Antoine: Of course. That's because they're being fooled.

Noha: By whom?

Antoine: By the priest.

Basically, the extremism of a sect within a religion is caused by none other than the influence of the religious leaders themselves. Each sect thinks they are the most righteous compared to the others. This then leads to inter-religious hatred, both in general and specifically in Christianity itself.



ربيع: يعيش في لبنان من دون الانتماء إلى طائفة؟ يجدر به الانتحار.

Rabih: Live in Lebanon without a religion? You better kill yourself.

Sectarianism in Lebanon is based on religion but has influenced every aspect of it. Therefore, if one lives in Lebanon without belonging to a religion, they will be alienated because they do not belong to any group.



أنطوان: ما الفرق بين ماروني وكاثوليكي ومسيحي أرثوذكسي؟

ربيع: ما الفرق بين الماروني والسني والدرزي والشيعية والبوذي؟

Antoine: What is the difference between a Maronite, a Catholic and an Orthodox Christian?

Rabih: What is the difference between a Maronite, a Sunni, a Druze, a Shia, a Buddhist?

Rabih's sentence is a sarcasm that he conveyed to Antoine. The dialog mentioned that Antoine did not mind the different sects of Christianity. However, when it comes

to other religious groups he becomes unpleasant, so Rabih makes a comment indicating that religious differences are also not something that should be disputed.

f. Gender Issue



ريتا: جعلها تترك مهنتها كطبيبة وتقضي أيامها في تنظيف ومسح براز الأطفال!

Rita: He made her quit her career as a doctor and spends her days cleaning and wiping baby poop!

This is a critique of the patriarchal practices that are prevalent in Lebanon. Men think that women should only stay at home and take care of all the household chores, while men work outside the home and tend not to help with the housework. They view housework as something feminine and feel humiliated if they do it.

g. Moral Issues



ذوفان: لدي حق الدفاع عن نفسي.

إلياس: ليس لديك أي حقوق.

Zoufan: I have the right to defend myself.

Elias: You don't have any rights.

This scene is a form of criticism of the practice of racism that still occurs in Lebanon. In this scene, Elias accuses Zoufan, the household assistant in the house, of being a thief because of his status. In addition to denigrating Zoufan's status and considering her a slave, Elias is also racist towards Zoufan's skin color and generalizes her as a Sri Lankan nationality.



إلياس: يحمل صورة امرأة محجبة. ماذا تفعل في حقبتك؟ ليلي حمود؟ مقرف!

Elias: a veiled woman? What is it doing in your purse? Leila Hammoud? Disgusting!

This is another scene of racism committed by Elias in this movie. If his previous act of racism was against the Zoufan race, in this scene his racist attitude is against Leila's religion. He insults and demeans Leila because it turns out that Leila is a Muslim while their family is Christian.

h. Technology Issues



سيرج: هذه خالتي نهي وهذا سامي ابنها، هو مشغول حاليًا بهاتفه

Serge: This is my aunt Noha and this is Samy, her son, busy with his cell phone.

This criticism is aimed at the younger generation who tend to be busy with their gadgets at all times to the point of not paying attention to their surroundings. Excessive use of devices certainly has a negative impact on individuals and can even affect people in the surrounding environment. In addition to criticizing technological issues, this scene also criticizes ethical issues where someone should not be busy with their cellphone when they are in a forum or event.



سيرج: يثير سامي الأمور على فيسبوك

نهي: ماذا تعني؟

سيرج: إنه ينشر دائماً صور الحفلات والأصدقاء والفتيات.

Serge: Samy was very excited on Facebook.

Noha: Excited?

Serge: He's always posting pictures of parties, friends and girls.

In this scene, it is mentioned that Samy is always uploading photos of parties, friends and girls. This shows that technology tends to be used in a negative direction by the younger generation. Social media is mostly used as a place to show off, ranging from good achievements in life to bad achievements, such as promiscuity.

Conclusion

The social conditions of Lebanese society that underlie the emergence of social criticism in *Gada' al-'Id* movie are sectarianism in various fields, the rise of westernization, the economic crisis, the migration of young people abroad, the decline in population, and the prevalence of migrant workers. There are criticisms of eight social problems in the *Gada' al-'Id* movie, namely political problems with the main topic related to elections and government performance, economic problems with the main topic related to the availability of electricity and population migration, family problems with the main topic related to the relationship between parents and children, habit problems with the main topic related to the perspective on life and western culture, religious problems with the main topic related to denominations in religion, gender problems with the main topic related to patriarchy, moral problems with the main topic related to racism, and technological problems with the main topic related to the use of gadgets and social media. The researchers found that the most dominant problem criticized in this movie is the political problem of confessionalism which has a major impact on the social, economic, religious, and even family fields.

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