

# Eva's Personality Development: A Psychoanalytic Approach on the Movie *Freedom Writers*

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**Abstract**— This research describes about Eva's personality development by using Freud's theory of psychoanalysis. The researcher was using qualitative research. The data are in the forms of utterance of Eva's in the movie *Freedom Writers*. The researcher getting the data based on downloading the movie and watching the movie. The data are collected using documentation. The researcher describes Eva's personality using psychoanalysis approach by Freud; *id, ego and superego* which is showed the changing of her personality and how she dealing with it. The result of this research is, Eva's personality is changed through time and her conscious mind or the way she thinks. Based on a psychoanalytic approach, Eva experienced the id, when she was had a bad experience with the white people and her dad was jailed. The ego, when she has seen another side of white people to her. She was debating herself and her id. And superego, she starts to make her mind more logic because she could decide between right and wrong in her eyes. No doubt or regret or hate anymore.

**Keywords**— Psychoanalysis, Eva's development personality, *Freedom Writers* movie

## I. INTRODUCTION

Everyone has their problem in their life, I believe it. It is also colourful like a rainbow and like two symbols of sad or joy, black or white. The memories of happiness are the best one but what happens when the bad memories come to haunt you? The story begins when I talked about this movie, *Freedom Writers*. *Freedom Writers* movie is based on *The Freedom Writers Diary*, it was adopted from the book *Freedom Riders* before changing the name become *Freedom Writers*, by teacher Erin Gruwell and the students who compiled the book out of real diary entries about their lives that they wrote in their language class, class 203 to be exact, at Woodrow Wilson Classical High School in Long Beach, California. *Freedom Writers* is a true story that happens in 1993 when the conflict about racial and gang tension and murders happened. Besides, the movie was published in 2007. The story started in room 203 at Woodrow Wilson High School, Long Beach California. There are two main characters in this movie, Erin Gruwell and Eva Benitez. The story was talking about diversity in races, gang, and whom they belong to and also fight for territory. This story tells us about the differences that happened in a class. The real war that describes what happened outside put it in class, how different are they can be seen obviously. In the 1960s was a year that there was a conflict between the black and the white people. It still happens when the movie was made and even up till now.

The story happened when there was an integrated program hold by the school at Woodrow High School. The students

were from various backgrounds. There were from Asia, Afro-America or Black people and white people. They were joining the gangs that belong to where they come from. In the movie, the students always sat based on their races. Until one day, Erin Gruwell who was working there as an English teacher, was giving a different atmosphere to the class. At first, the students didn't care about the school, what they care were they reach sixteenth and graduate. The students also didn't care about their friends in class but their gangs. The solidarity and unity bond them into one. They had their reason why they become like who they were right now.

The pride, respect and owning the territory also the fight or gunshot almost happen every day. Grow up in a conflict place, indeed will change someone personality and character, whether it is good or bad experience or memories. People have always been aware that exposure to overwhelming terror can lead to troubling memories, arousal, and avoidance: This has been a central theme in literature from the time of Homer (Alford, 1992; Shay, 1994) to the present (Caruth, 1995) (1). Eva Benitez, one of the characters of this movie has a strong personality in the movie. The first time it shown Eva, in the movie, she has a tough experience when she was a child until she was in senior high school. Eva has a bad experience during her childhood. When she was 5 years old, she was waiting for her father to go to school and in front of her house, there was her neighbour who was washing a car. In a light speed, she saw her neighbour was being shot. Not that long American police came to her house and arrested her father in jail by the American Police. Her father was suspecting

in the murderer of her neighbour. Even Eva knew the fact that her father didn't kill anyone. It happened suddenly, at the same time she saw a murdered and she lost her father. Being arrested doesn't mean she cannot see her father but surely she got hurt. She loves her father. Besides, Eva was a kid that time, she had lacking affection from her father. It was shocking her, she only 5 and everything was like a clap of thunder. Later on, it changes her life, her mindset and her belief.

Since that time Eva's personality made her hate, especially she hates the white people. Moreover, Eva has already seen unfair, discriminate during her lifetime. Based on the movie, Eva is hardly accepting Erin as her teacher, because Erin is white people and she was showing her disliking toward the white people. Eva's character is one of the representatives about diversity. Her life portraying how she struggle between herself and her identity, her own America. Herewith this movie, the researcher focusing on Eva's character. As it is shown that Eva has trauma about the past when she was a child. The trauma that Eva has is called *Post-traumatic stress disorder* (PTSD). It is a disorder that develops in some people who have experienced a shocking, scary, or dangerous event. In the story, Eva has strong to mind that hard to break in.

Even there are many students in the movie; the researcher is focusing on Eva's character. Since the movie begins, the story was highlighting Eva's character. The researcher chose her because of her role, and about her life, which is portraying her past, even up till now. Eva has a strong mind that hard to break in. This research aims to know Eva's personality development using psychoanalytic approach by Freud theory; *id, ego and superego*, and how she dealing with those (*id, ego and superego*).

Psychoanalytic theory and practice originated in the late nineteenth century in the work of Sigmund Freud in 1956-1939 (2). Freud conceived of psychoanalysis as a research method, a therapeutic technique, a theory of mental functioning, a theory of psychopathology, and a theory of human development (3). According to Freud's psychoanalytic theory, personality develops through a series of stages, each characterized by a certain internal psychological conflict. It means that there would make someone be someone like who they are right now. It builds their personality by the experienced they had. The way he thinking and feeling would affect his behaviour. (Hockenbury and Hockenbury 2001).

In 1923, concern over some technicalities in psychoanalytic terminology stimulated Freud to write *The Ego and the Id* (4). In line with Freud, as stated in the explanation delivered by Arminjon, Ansermet, and Magistretti (2010) so as by Toksöz (2018) which states that Freudian psychoanalysis is divided into three aspects, namely *id, ego, and superego* (5). *The id* has no contact with reality, it strives constantly to reduce tension by satisfying basic desires. Because its sole function is to seek pleasure, or it called the pleasure principle (6). In other

words, the *Id* is inseparable from the unconscious. It is an unstructured part which does not care about reality, and it is interested only in the here and now. That's to say, it knows no morals or values, and it does not make plans for the future (7).

*The ego* works on reality principle whereas *superego* is driven by morality principles. In *ego* and *superego*, a person acts consciously on the basis of his own understanding of what is right or wrong socially and individually (8). According to (9), *the ego*, which "consists of those functions which have to do with the individual's relation to [their] environment" (Brenner, 1974, as cited in Berger, 2012, p. 84). *The ego* is the structure that negotiates between the *id* and the *superego* to bring balance to the two differing structures. *The superego* is moral police representing the parental prohibitions; it is the critical agent (Freud, 1933). As in (10) it has social and cultural requirements, and substitutes for one's father, boss, master, or even the God in his/her mind. Having certain norms and rules, the *superego* watches the *ego* in its movement. If its norms are not fulfilled the *superego* punishes the *ego* with the feelings of tension, inferiority and guilt.

Rest of the paper is organized as follows, Section I contains the introduction of the background and the aim of the research, Section II contain the related work about psychoanalytic and the relation of this reserach, Section III contain the methodology of this reserach, Section IV would be discuss about reserach finding and discussion, section V explain the conclusion and the suggestion for teh future research.

## II. RELATED WORK

In Herouach's research, in *Psychoanalysis and Literature, Mary's Character in Lessing's Novel 'The Grass is Singing' as Case Study*. On his study, he was described the psychoanalysis and the relation with Mary's life with the issue of socio-individual conflict. The finding is Mary's life is not as peace as dreamed of when she was adult. When she was child she had a bad trauma about her father and her mother. Her father who always get drunk and her poor mother. Those, made her aware about having family. Due to social statues, she then married Dick Turner. But the life she wants seem not like what she wants. There was a little doubt and debate between herself that time. Then, she decided to marry. When she was married, she also had a bad experiences, which she always remember her father and her mother. She tough her life like her parents. At the end she had a tragic life, which is led her to death. In psychoanalytic approach, Herouach described that throught her trauma and between society and her behaviour, it is influenced by her traume when she was child to present life and it is appear in stages, *id, ego and superego*. The second journal is from Dochnahl in 2018 about *Psychoanalysis and Star Wars: The Force Awakens: What the Film Says about Gender Ideology*. On his study, he was using two types of psychoanalytic approaches; they are by

Freud and Jung. He was discussing about the relation gender ideology in the movie Star War. Both of those researches are using psychoanalytic approach that the same the researcher using here. The difference is the object of the researcher. The researcher is investigating Eva's personality development in the movie *Freedom Writers*.

### III. METHODOLOGY

Type of this research is descriptive qualitative research. The data are in the forms of utterance of Eva's in the movie *Freedom Writers*. The researcher getting the data based on downloading the movie and watching the movie. The data are collected using documentation. The researcher describes Eva's personality using psychoanalysis approach by Freud; *id*, *ego* and *superego* which is showed the changing of her personality and how she dealing with it. The first researcher doing was searching movie then downloading movie. Later, the researcher was watching the movie until finish and taking some notes to mark some conversations to be described as the data. Then, analysing the data based on the psychoanalytic approach.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The finding of this research according to psychoanalysis approach Eva's personality development continues the *id* (when she was a child), *ego* (when she met Erin Gruwell) and *superego* (when she was in the courtroom). Here are the conversation and the description that indicates the process of her development.

*'It was the first day of school, and I was waiting for my father*

*to take me to the bus.'*

*'Roberto!'. Eva called him when he washed his car in front of her house.*

*'Eva!' He called her back.*

*'And I saw the war for the first time.' Eva saw a gunshot happen in front of her. She saw someone shot Roberto. Soon after, her father came and helped Roberto.*

*It happened when American police (white people come to Eva's House) 'Eva! Eva!' Her father called her.*

*'Police! Open up!' The police said.*

*They took my father for retaliation. He was innocent, but they took him because he was respected by my people. They called my people a gang because we fight for our America*

On this part, Eva's mind-sets already build about her definition of the White people. Even she comes from America, but her America was different from others. She, constantly hate America because of what happened to her and her family. Her family also hate the white people and so her gang. She doesn't believe with them, the white people. Eva also explains the reason why she hates white people in the class when Erin taught in.

*'I'm a teacher. It doesn't matter what colour I am.'*  
Erin stated

*'It's all about colour. It's about people deciding what you deserve, about people wanting what they don't deserve, about whites thinking they run this world no matter what. You see, I hate white people.'*  
Eva said.

*'You hate me?'* Erin asked.

*'Yeah.'* Eva said.

*'You don't know me.'* Erin answered.

*'I know what you can do'. Eva said emotionally. 'I saw white cops break into my house and take my father for no reason except because they feel like it! Except because they can. And they can because they're white. So I hate white people on sight!'* she continued with the anger.

On this conversation, Eva only believes in what she saw. She doesn't care about the other reality but her mind that the white people don't care with them and only care with what they want because she saw by herself that there is no excuse to explain about had to happen with her father. *The id* has no contact with reality, it strives constantly to reduce tension by satisfying basic desires. Because its sole function is to seek pleasure, or its called the pleasure principle<sup>1</sup>. So here, Eva's desire that she hates people, she also cannot think clearly because mostly she was fighting with the white people.

Then, her mind-sets starting to argue with her *ego*. Based on Dochnahl's statement that the ego, which "consists of those functions which have to do with the individual's relation to [their] environment" (Brenner, 1974, as cited in Berger, 2012, p. 84). At this stage, she starts to doubt her ego, her past life about hating white people. She saw another side of the kindness of what people. She starts questioning her paradigm towards white people. Erin Gruwell, little by little changes Eva's personality that makes her believe that not all white people can do the bad things to her. It began when there was a gunshot at the minimarket, when her boyfriend Paco, shot Cindy's boyfriend. Eva always thinks about what might happen later.

*Paco was scared. In the car, he said, "You can't go against your people, your blood." The same words my father used so many times. Only I saw Paco. The others were turned away. So when the police questioned me,*

*I knew I had to protect him.*

After the accident, there was a tight tension between Cindy and Eva. It was described in the movie when the expression of Eva feels guilty and both Eva and Cindy just staring each other, like they had telepathy to communicate. In her own taught, she was thinking about what Cindy might do to her. But after a while, Cindy didn't do anything to her. Eva knows losing someone she loved was hurt and it hard to cure it. Eva starts with her ego, between what she believes and reality. It was soon a dilemma to her when she has to a witness in the court. One side, Paco is

her boyfriend and they are in the same gang and the same line. But, the other, she knew the reality that what Paco did was wrong and it might hurt other people, Jamal, who was suspected as the shooter at that time. Also, Cindy, she might seek the truth of who was the shooter who shot her boyfriend. Eva angry with herself, it can be seen when she seems cannot deal with herself.

*'You know what you're gonna say in that courtroom?' her mother questioning Eva.*

*'I know what I have to say.'* Eva said.

*'Yeah. You know how that is.' Her mother makes sure that Eva knows what to do.*

*'I know.'* Eva answered with annoy expression.

*'And that man that put your father in prison. He knew he was sending an innocent man. But, you know. He was just protecting his own.'* Her mother reminds Eva about what had happened to her father.

*'What the hell does everybody want from me?'* she kicks the gate while she cannot keep her emotion.

The next stage is her *superego*. It is moral police representing the parental prohibitions; it is the critical agent (Freud, 1933). In this stage, Eva is like she has a new sight of the light of her doubtful towards white people. She knew better about reality, her belief and truth. It happened a little when she felt guilty at the time. But, those feelings were growing up and open up her mind. She was in the integration class which have a different point of view based on their paradigm. It is different when she was with her gang that shared the same belief about something. She starts to know about being right and wrong in people eyes. She could judge people but was it right in society. She also more aware of her environments. Like a child wants ice cream. She saw another child in front of her, even she wants ice cream, she knew it's not appropriate to take someone else ice to fulfil the desire of wanting ice cream. For *superego*, if its norms are not fulfilled the *superego* punishes the ego with the feelings of tension, inferiority and guilt (Freud, 1933 and Toksöz, 2017). On this dialogues between her and the judge below explain Eva's *superego* was working.

*'And what time was that?' the judge asked Eva*

*'I told you, 9:00, 9:30.'* Eva confirms.

*'And you had a clear view of the defendant, Grant Rice, in the store?'* the judge questioning again.

*'I told you he was playing the video game.'* She explained.

*'Then what happened? What did you see?'* the judge wants a clear answer.

*'Well, he got all whacked because he lost the game, And then he started shouting and all, threatening everybody.'* She said.

*'He threatened everyone? He threatened you?'* The judge wants to make sure.

*'No. The guy who ran the store. He wanted his money back for the game.'* She answered.

*'And what did the store owner do?'* The judge wants information in details.

*'He shouted back. And they were fighting. Then he, the defendant, knocked something over and left the store.'* Eva was giving a statement.

*'And then what happened? What did you see?'* the judge wants the answer truthfully.

*'I saw... I saw... Paco did it. Paco killed the guy.'* Eva answered, with little, hesitate but soon she said it, vividly.

This stage, Eva paused her sentence when she was telling the truth. There was a flashback and Eva's movement in the court; she saw Jamal's mother and his siblings, her mom and Cindy. Based on the look of her face, she was arguing and debating between herself; her thought and reality. *Superego* is representing of moral in society. She knew if she tells the truths she might be ostracized by her family or else she might be well-known as a liar. Big decision but must be decided to continue life. There also another factor that made Eva's personality change, it is when she and her classroom meeting with some people to tell the story and went to the museum and with Miep Gies when she talked about *Diary of Anne Frank*. One of her words that still in mind when she said *'I am not a hero. No. I did what I had to do because it was the right thing to do. That is all.'* Those words are changing the entire atmosphere in class, include Eva reactions. Somehow, she was spacing out after Miep Gies saying those words. In the end, she and her friends at class can be friends and no discrimination about races, gangs in whom you belong to.

## V. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

Based on the explanation above, Eva's personality development is parallel with her growth up by using the psychoanalytic approach. She was experiencing the id when she was a child. It is an unstructured part which does not care about reality, and it is interested only in the here and now. That's to say, it knows no morals or values, and it does not make plans for the future<sup>2</sup>. The id was described when she only believes in what she sees for the first time and unconsciously made her mind-sets. The desire that blocks out the outside world of her life. Her desires to believe that white people are always against her. Then, the ego during her teenage. Stated by Dochnahl, the ego, which "consists of those functions which have to do with the individual's relation to [their] environment" (Brenner, 1974, as cited in Berger, 2012, p. 84). The ego is the structure that negotiates between the id and the *superego* to bring balance to the two differing structures. Between the reality, the kindness she got from her teacher and the treatment by her friend, Cindy especially whom boyfriend was killed by Paco, didn't harm things towards her. And the last is about her *superego*. *The superego* is moral police representing the parental prohibitions; it is the critical agent (Freud, 1933). Her *superego* leads her to see the real things in real life that she, might be, never imagine before. She can get punishment for the thing she did but she knew the right and wrong thing she had done. There's a

limitation on this research. It is only focus on one character, Eva's personality. The researcher suggests for the future research that it can be has relation between personality form psychoanalytic approach and the power or social statuses.

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