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A Study of the Reason for the Ineffectiveness of Labor Strikes in Emile Zola's *Germinal*

دراسة سبب عدم نجاح إضراب العمال في رواية جرمينال لإميل زولا

Farida Bouadda^{1,*}

¹ University of M'hamed Bougara Boumerdes, Boumerdes, Algeria.

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Abstract

This article deals with Emile Zola's use of cultural hegemony to preclude labor strikes in France. His novel *Germinal* (1885) is about the social Marxists' attempt to organize a strike in Montsou, France. However, the strike, unlike what is expected, fails. The aim of this research paper is to investigate the reason why the social Marxists fail in their attempt. I argue that the strike fails as Zola is a conservative writer and not a radical. His aim is to preserve the status and power of the capitalist system and hinder the spread of the revolutionary thought. In order to accomplish this, he makes use of ideological and cultural hegemony to manipulate his readers into believing that labor strikes will turn into violent social movements. In this article, I use Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony to study the way Zola builds his theory of naturalism upon the narrative of social Darwinism that supports the status of capitalism and hinders the spread of the revolutionary thought.

ملخص

الكلمات المفتاحية:

هذا المقال يتطرق إلى استخدام إميل زولا للهيمنة الثقافية لمنع إضراب العمال في مدينة مونتسو بفرنسا. تتمحور رواية جرمينال (1885) حول جهود الماركسيين في تحدي قوة الطبقة البرجوازية الرأسمالية وتنظيم إضراب العمال في مونتسو، لكن الإضراب كلل بفشل ذريع عكس ما وعد به الماركسيون عمال المنجم. الهدف من هذه الورقة البحثية هو التحقيق في سبب عدم نجاح الماركسيين في تحقيق هدفهم. الحجة التي يعرضها هذا المقال هو أن سبب عدم نجاح الماركسيين يعود لكون زولا كاتب محافظ وليس راديكالي. هدف زولا هو الحفاظ على مكانة و قوة النظام الرأسمالي و إيقاف توسع الفكر الراديكالي. من أجل تحقيق ذلك، قام زولا بتوظيف الهيمنة الثقافية ليجعل القارئ يعتقد أن إضراب العمال لن ينجح بل سيتحول لأعمال شغب. لدراسة هذا الموضوع، سنستعمل نظرية الهيمنة الثقافية لانطونيو غرامشي لنبين أن المذهب الطبيعي لزولا مبني على نظرية داروين والتي كما سيبين المقال، هي إيديولوجية رأسمالية بحتة تمنع توسع الفكر التحرري.

الهيمنة الثقافية
جرمينال
إضراب العمال
الماركسية
نظرية داروين.

1. Introduction

Zola, in his naturalist narrative *Germinal*, projects the fear that stems from labor strikes. His novel is written in 1885, meaning during the Third Republic (1870-1940) and it is set in the 1860s, during the Second Empire (1852-1870). In these times, the industrial revolution was in its pick and the working class was exploited by the bourgeois middle class in the mines of France. The miners work for long hours in the pits in exchange for a low wage. This led to series of strikes and riots led by the social Marxists and anarchists. The publication of *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx in 1848 renders the working class a serious threat to the capitalists. The proletariat gained more power with the foundation of the International Working Men's Association in 1864. It is a federation of workers that unifies all the workers in Europe. The capitalists in that period were terrified of uprisings. For them, the rise of the proletariat to power limits their power and affects their influence. For this, they spread this idea that strikes exchange stability for turmoil. Accordingly, any move against the status quo is to be taken as an act of revolution. (Petrey, 1969, p. 55) *Germinal* is a resume of the upheavals and the cycles of strikes that took place in France during the late 18th and the 19th centuries. Zola projects the strikes that jolted the bourgeois in France. He also strongly denounces the atrocities committed against the working class. For him, the bourgeois in France are greedy. They exploit the deprived working class to generate more wealth. Their actions leave the path open for the social Marxists and anarchists to instigate the miners to go on strike. The social Marxist Etienne Lantier follows the ideas of Karl and organizes a strike in Montsou due to pay cuts and the hazardous working conditions. However, unlike what he plans, the strike turns out to be mayhem.

The specific problem under study is to expose the way Zola makes use of Social Darwinism to prevent strikes and the spread of the radical revolutionary thought in France. Zola argues against workers' unification. For him, the strike is not the right medium to attain social change. The assumption that this article provides is that Zola is against strikes because he is conservative and not a radical. His aim is to preserve

the capitalist system and preclude the revolutionary thought imbedded in the philosophies of Marxism and anarchism. In order to accomplish this, he relates his theory of naturalism with the capitalist narrative of social Darwinism to argue that man is controlled by internal and external forces that are beyond his reach. He uses this to explain the unequal distribution of wealth. However, this narrative is proven by critics to be immoral meant to serve one class at the expense of the other. The objective of my research is to question the legitimacy of the hegemonic narratives that Zola uses in order to prove his point.

This article deals with the literary methods used by the novelist in order to preclude strikes. As a research methodology, I will use Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony to argue that Zola uses ideological and cultural manipulation to secure the consent of the mass and to achieve a political agenda.

Most analyses found about *Germinal* focus on discussing the realism of Zola or the behavior of the workers in the strike. In his analysis, Christian Borch exposes where the realism of Zola resides. He says that his chief realism is to be found in his idea that strikes are linked to revolutions as during his time strikes were very common. (2012, p. 26) Maia points out the way Zola focuses on the portrayal of how the crowd has its own mind which differs from that of the individual. (1992, p. 115) F.W.J. Hemmings discusses how *Germinal* is a study of crowd behavior and he extracts different examples of mass psychology from the novel. He also emphasizes the idea that Zola argues against the crowd. (Bloom, 2004, p. 24) In another article, it is discussed how Zola is considered a witness to his age which is why his novels are beneficial for historical facts. Historians of modern Europe take Zola's *The Rougon-Macquart* as important sources to study the second half of the nineteenth century, especially *Germinal* which they gave a great attention. (Schalk, 1994, p. 83) Accordingly, through my research in the literature, and as far as I know, there is no research that discusses the reasons that led Zola to portray a failed strike in *Germinal* and how he uses capitalist narratives to prevent the spread of the revolutionary thought.

2. The image of the social Marxists

Zola in his *Germinal* demonstrates how the social Marxists use the suffering and afflictions of the miners to achieve a political agenda. He emphasizes their hypocrisy and portrays them in an unfavorable image. For him, these people are a threat to stability and democracy as they are determined to reach their goal regardless of the safety of the miners. The character which Zola associates with social Marxism is Etienne Lantier. Etienne prefers the strike as a solution for social change.

In the first pages of the narrative, we get instances that Etienne is a hero who would bring about justice by his method. As the novel progresses, we discover that he is unlike what the laborers thought. During the strike, Etienne is shown to be egocentric and narcissistic. For the sake of fulfilling his political goals, he pushes the strike further not caring about the safety of the workers. Before the strike, Etienne seems to be ignorant of social Marxism; for this, he starts reading books and newspapers and anything that comes to his hands. Etienne is shown to be a person who has a hard time understanding the theories of social Marxism and communism. The narrator, in describing this, says that "this remained vague; he knew not how to realize this new dream...He simply said that it was a question of getting possession of the government first of all. Afterward, they would see." (154) Accordingly, unsure of how to reach his goal, he starts preaching social Marxism, his new religion. He tells the miners that they are exploited for profit and how they need to revolt if they want to change their status quo. In the midst of his mission, he realizes how his speeches affect the consciousness of the miners. This way, arrogance starts to take hold upon his thinking. The narrator states:

The whole settlement grouped round him. The satisfaction of his self-love was delicious; he became intoxicated with this first enjoyment of popularity; to be at the head of others, to command,...this filled him with pride, and enlarged his dream of an approaching revolution in which he was to play a part. (112)

Etienne's quest revolves around his self-interests. The taste of leadership blinds him and makes him lose

his sense of judgment. Even though he is uneducated about crowd behavior, he engages in his mission and he works hard to convince the miners to go on strike under his leadership.

According to Hemmings, Etienne's political transformation revolves around his realization of the effects that his ideas exert upon the mind of the working class. Even though his ideas and reasoning are chaotic and contradictory, the miners take them without analyzing them. This is mostly because he is talented in demagogic oratory. (Bloom, 2004, p. 25) In some passages, we see how Etienne sometimes is haunted by the idea that his strike might turn into a disaster. Regardless of this, the popularity that he gains prevents him from analyzing the situation. The narrator states: "Vague ideas were working within him for the first time: a feeling of superiority, which placed him apart from his mates". (249) In her analysis, Annette Magid mentions the way Zola compares between Etienne and the International. Souvarine tells Etienne that the story of his career looks like that of the International. The power that Etienne gains, his alteration into an egoistic and narcissistic leader, resembles that of the International. When the International climbed to power, it gained huge popularity among the low social rank. This organization, before it shattered at the end due to internal quarrels, constituted terror among the bourgeois capitalists. Zola uses this simile in order to make his readers experience the fear and threat that come from the historical revolutionary agitators. (Baratta, 2012, p. 58)

According to Zola, the social Marxists are a threat to the stability of France. They are manipulators who build plans that suit their goals at the expense of the safety of the laborers. They convince the miners that strikes and revolt are the only paths to achieve social change without stating the dangerous outcomes that might come. Once they secure the trust of the deprived, they become corrupters. For Zola, the social Marxists think they can control the strikers when in reality they are ignorant of crowd behavior.

2.1 The image of Christian socialism

Zola deals with different kinds of socialism. In addition to the social Marxist outlook of Etienne;

we find that of Christian socialism. This ideology is portrayed through the priest L'abbé Ranvier. Again, just like that of Etienne, it is described as ineffective.

For the novelist, the ones who embrace any type of socialism are not the right people to lead as their true concern is to gain power using the plight of the workers. The priest Ranvier preaches the deprived miners about justice and labor strikes in ambiguous concepts. With vague religious words, the priest speaks about his prophecies on how the workers will gain power and bring God back to earth. For the novelist, Ranvier's ideas are idealistic and utopian just like that of Etienne.

Ranvier can be taken as "ineffectual". (Priestland, 2009, p. 109) William Pfaff argues that the enlightenment and the rise of science mark the end of the dominance of the church especially in the political sphere. (Schwarz, 2014, p. 256) The power shifted from priests to the atheist middle class. Ergo, the church turned to socialism to show its support to the proletariat against the middle class. As the working class constitutes the majority, the church exploited their affliction in an attempt to regain its power. This is what led Zola to create the character Ranvier. (Zakarian, 1972, pp. 130-132) Thus, for the novelist, the socialists are hypocrites and manipulators who transform into authoritative men to fulfill their pride and secure a position regardless of the safety of the laborers.

2.2 Anarchism and Terrorism

Zola refers to the quarrel between social Marxism and anarchism and he condemns both as destructive. Souvarine is against Marxism and the methods of Etienne. Instead of the strike, he prefers violence. Just like the case with Etienne, Zola rejects the anarchist Souvarine and relates his method to terrorism.

The anarchist Souvarine does not prefer work stoppages; instead, he seeks for rioting and violence. In the course of the novel, we see how he is ready to kill anyone just to spread his ideology. Souvarine believes in terrorist tactics that would jolt the rulers and instigate the workers. His aim is to push the workers to set fire in every corner and destroy everything. He considers the ideas of Etienne as

fooleries and he argues against Karl Marx by stating that "Marx is still only thinking about letting natural forces act. No politics, no conspiracies, is it not so? Everything in the light of day, and simply to raise wages. Don't bother me with your evolution!" (94) Souvarine claims to be anti-authoritative unlike the Marxists; however, his actions prove the opposite. Souvarine works his way without thinking about the safety of the workers and he follows his methods without caring about the disastrous consequences. The path that he follows calls for collective ownership and agreement, yet he is isolated from the other workers. For Zola, such a man can never lead. At the end of the novel, when Souvarine discovers that the strike fails, he sabotages the mine causing the death of two miners. For Souvarine, this is a mark that he wants to leave in order to prove that anarchism will end the capitalist system. Souvarine "had left his mark; the frightened world would know that the beast had not died a natural death". (299)

In his article, Hemmings mentions that the Russian novelist Turgenev relates anarchism with terrorism. He also associates them with nihilism, meaning the sense of destruction and meaningless in life. Zola was so affected by Turgenev's view. (Bloom, 2004, p. 27) In *Germinal*, Souvarine is portrayed as a terrorist ready to kill himself with no glory. In our era, these men are taken as suicide bombers. (Birchall, 2002) Indeed, this is seen in the passages that connote his reasoning. He says: "we must destroy everything, or hunger will reappear. Yes, anarchy and nothing more; the earth washed in blood and purified by fire! Then we shall see!" (95) In his analysis, Hemmings argues that "Souvarine emerges as a bugbear." (Bloom, 2004, p. 29) When Souvarine watched the accident of the mine that he has caused, the narrator comments: "He threw down his last cigarette; he went away.... He was going tranquilly to extermination, wherever there might be dynamite to blow up towns and men. He will be there, without doubt..." (311-312) Souvarine's reasoning horrifies Etienne. However, we see how Etienne, when he becomes filled with pride and arrogance while delivering his speeches, transforms into a voice of terror: "His face changed: he became serious and put on airs, while his growing ambition

inflamed his theories and pushed him to ideas of violence. (112)

After long discussions, the miners embrace the strike. However, unlike what they expected, the strike turns into plight. In his novel, Zola portrays how the social Marxists fail to lead the strikers.

3. Strikes as a synonym to violence

In his essay, *The Experimental Novel* (1893), Zola relates his theory of naturalism to social Darwinism and argues that men are controlled by external and internal forces. This way, under certain conditions, they devolve backward. Zola takes this idea to study the behavior of men in a group. In his novel, the workers in the strikes, due to heredity, hunger, and the environment, are seen to display irrational behaviors. He believes that individuals in a group, or as it is known in his time, the crowd, will lose their rationality and engage in rioting and violence. The social Marxists think they can control the crowd; however, the strike proves the opposite. This leads Zola to conclude that strikes are not the right path to lower labor exploitation. Strikes, instead, are a threat to stability. Accordingly, he works his novel in a way that makes his readers experience what it feels like to go on strike under the leadership of the social Marxists and the consequences of the interference of the anarchists in the direction of the strike.

In order to study the behavior of workers in the strike, Zola bases his theory of naturalism upon the Darwinian evolutionary theory which is described by the principle of natural selection. The mechanism of this principle is described by the idea of the survival of the fittest. Highly influenced by the Darwinian revolution, Zola states that unlike animals, humans have a brain, however, the dichotomy breaks down when biological factors, like hunger and heredity, takes place. This way, biological needs reduce “humans to an animalistic survival of the fittest.” Men’s desires and hidden needs are a response to the environment they live in. As men are dragged by biological instincts, this makes the soul absent to the point where men degenerate into animals’ level. (Schwarz, 2014, pp. 256-257) In *Germinal*, the grinding poverty reduces the strikers into animals

able to kill to fill their stomach. This causes violent confrontations. The characters, however, are unaware of this. This makes Etienne illusions that he can control the strikers. Unlike Etienne’s plans, during the strike, the strikers display anti-social treats. When they refuse to work, the company refuses to pay them. The lack of food deprives the strikers of their humanity. When the miners are stimulated by the speeches of Etienne, they turn into a fierce mob. “And in this growing ferocity, in this old need of revenge which was turning every head with madness, the choked cries went on, death to traitors, hatred against ill-paid work, the roaring of bellies after bread”. (222) This way, the strikers lose their rationality and engage in destruction. They degenerate into fierce animals destroying the machines of the mines and killing with absolute violence. Bonnemort, “drunk from hunger, stupefied by his long misery... under the influence of no one knew what malicious impulse” (241), loses his rationality and savagely kills the bourgeois Cécil. Catherine, fed up of years of hunger and deprivation, is observed during the strike as a violent girl filled with the thirst to kill. Due to the environment that Jeanlin lives in, he kills a soldier like a savage animal.

And suddenly, as a cloud threw its shadow, Jeanlin leapt on to the soldier’s shoulders with the great bound of a savage cat, and gripping him with his claws buried his large open knife in his throat. (379)

Jeanlin is among the characters that project the effect of the environment upon the mind of people. When Etienne asks Jeanlin the reason why he killed the soldier, he replays that he doesn’t know. Accordingly, Zola shows that a powerful force controls people. For Zola heredity, as well, affects individuals. In the novel, Etienne inherited the tendency to alcoholism from his mother and the violence that he displays in several scene stems from this inheritance. In this article, I argue that Zola’s aim is to show that men are controlled by internal and external forces; therefore, the strike instigators cannot lead the strike or predict its events as they themselves lacks the free will.

In her analysis of *Germinal*, Susanna Barrows argues that Zola projects the extent to where the crowd is submissive to the power of instincts instead of

following the lead of rational guidance. In addition, men in a group act like a single body, meaning that group behavior is contagious. (Borch, 2012, p. 27) This way, Etienne is unable to lead or control the strikers as the miners transform into creatures when they are in a group.

Ultimately, Zola believes that none of the socialists can control the masses – a violent, almost animalistic force of nature. Zola terrifies his readers with his accounts of the uncontrollably violent strikes and demonstrations. His bourgeois characters saw a scarlet vision of the revolution that would inevitably carry them all away, on some blood-soaked fin de siècle evening... these same rags and the same thunder of clogs, the same terrifying pack of animals with dirty skins and foul breath, would sweep away the old world, as their barbarian hordes overflowed and surged through the land. (Priestland, 2009, p. 109)

In *Germinal*, Zola emphasizes the fear that the strike displays for the bourgeois. In a scene, Zola shows how the bourgeois are terrified of the crowd to the extent where they take the stable as a haven. This way, Zola shows the strikers as an uncontrollable force that cause destruction instead of progress.

3.1 Moment of awareness

At the end of the novel, Etienne realizes that the crowd is an uncontrollable force. Gradually, he discovers that individuals in a group are a force that brings destruction and it cannot be guided. And here, Zola shows the ineffectiveness of labor strikes.

At the end of the novel, Etienne sees how his plans are shut down and his authority and pride wane when he witnesses how the strikers slip out of his control. This cyclonic power that he wanted to exploit to achieve political gains is a force out of reach. This way, the novelist projects how the strike is an ineffective movement for social change and the way the social Marxists are not the right leaders to trust. In his analysis, David Baguley argues:

In Zola's 'socialist' novel, the socialists power to be largely ineffective, for as Etienne comes to acknowledge, events had been and would be determined by a force greater than the individual's

ideas, an anonymous force, the will of the masses, in whom alone hope for the future could be invested. (Nelson, 2007, p. 142)

At the end of the novel, the strikers throw stones at Etienne. His influence completely wanes; and here, he realizes that he was never their leader. In fact, it is the crowd, with all its internal and external needs, which was commanding him and the strike as a whole. Looking at the outcomes of Etienne's social movement, it brings no positive results to the miners. During the strike, they starved; some of them perished brutally, and others regret their decision to trust their leader.

Zola connotes the social Marxists' shortcomings. For him, these people do not have the power to lead or control. They are reckless to the point where they organize strikes when they are ignorant of the destructive puissance of the crowd. Zola champions the idea that strikes or any kind of uprising cannot achieve social change in France; contrary, it would bring plight and destruction, and the social Marxists cannot lead or control the crowd unlike what they promote

3.2 Promoting the role of the government

The novelist condemns the influence that comes from the radicals. Instead of the strike or any social movement, Zola suggests the role of the government to achieve reform within the capitalist system and he calls the capitalists not to provoke the workers.

For the novelist, the capitalists have a great role in the contribution to the suffering of the workers. Their rules and actions stimulate the workers to revolt. Thus, he calls them to ameliorate the working condition in the work place. Therefore, Zola blames the capitalists and not the capitalist system. Deneulin, even though he is a capitalist, he does not violate the right of his employees. His mine holds good and safe equipment unlike the other capitalists presented in the novel. Deneulin is also presented as a hard working man. Therefore, Zola condemns the ones who want success without efforts. This character is known to be a good manager and all his employees respect him, unlike the other mine owners. The novelist calls the wealthy to look and see who are below them to avoid

a revolution. In one of his letters, Zola states:

Germinal is a work of pity and not of revolution... What I wanted to do was to cry out to the fortunate of this world, to those who are the masters: 'Beware, look below ground, see those wretches who are working and suffering. Perhaps there is still time to avoid the final catastrophes. But hasten to be just, for otherwise here is the danger: the earth will open up and the nations will be swallowed in one of the most terrible upheavals of history. (Birchall, 2002)

Zola is surely sympathetic to the working class, yet he does not prefer the strike as a method for social change. Zola was accused of insulting the working class by one of the reviewers. In a letter sent to the Figaro, Zola defends himself by arguing:

'My only desire has been to show them such as our society makes them, and arouse such pity, such an outcry for justice, that France will at last cease to allow herself to be devoured by a handful of ambitious politicians, and devote herself to the health and happiness of her children.' (Bloom, 2004, p. 35)

Zola highly supports the republican government. The term Republican is linked to those who identify themselves with Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. (Birchall, 2002) Hence, for the novelist, in order to preclude labor strikes, the government has to protect the rights of the workers. Politicians have to address the affliction of the poor members in society. In case they don't, the mass will rise as what happened during the Paris Commune in 1871.

Accordingly, for Zola, strikes and the methods of the social Marxists and anarchists are not the appropriate solution to the problems facing the working class. It is the government which has to issue regulations to assure the right of the workers. However, in my article, I argue that the reason that leads Zola to portray the radicals in a negative image and portrays their strike as a disastrous social movement is his position in society. As a member of the middle class, he wants to preserve the capitalist system and prevent the spread of the radical revolutionary thought. As a form of hegemony to secure the endorsement of the proletariat and hinder their rise to power, Zola based his theory of naturalism upon the capitalist philosophy

of Darwinian evolution.

4. Results and discussion

The reason that leads Zola to portray a failed strike is to prevent the spread of the revolutionary thought. Zola is a conservative and not a radical. Accordingly, his aim is to hinder strikes and the social Marxist and anarchists' rise to power and preserve the capitalist system. In order to do this, he uses his literature to secure the consent of the working class. *Germinal* manipulates people's opinions by making them experiencing the disasters that come from strikes and following the lead of the radicals. To reinforce his position, he makes use of ideology and culture. His theory of naturalism has a capitalist outlook as it is built upon the capitalist narrative of social Darwinism. Zola's naturalist novel, *Germinal*, holds the philosophies of natural selection, the survival of the fittest, evolution, and determinism at its core. This way, Zola indirectly prevents the revolutionary thought and preserves the legitimacy of capitalism. However, social Darwinism is known to be manipulative that aims at reinforcing the legitimacy of the dominance of the capital over the labor.

The Marxist Gueorgui Plekhanov argues that art holds a hidden ideology behind. This way, any literary work stems from an ideology. (Eagleton, 2002, p. 15) In *Germinal*, Zola praises the individual and condemns the crowd; this proves a belief in a certain ideology. He also openly criticizes the mine owners, yet he does not criticize capitalism. In his analysis of *Germinal*, Hemmings argues:

He could not dream of disguising the need for social reform: *Germinal* was an urgent warning to *laissez-faire* economists who blinked this need; but he was equally anxious not to seem to side with socialists of any description who proposed to substitute a new economic order which would be immune from the abuses of the old. His method was to remove the whole problem from the realm of economic argument and treat it in its human aspect alone. (Bloom, 2004, p. 22)

Antonio Gramsci states that the capitalists create with their emergence "the organizers of a new culture." (1971, p. 5) The 18th century is a century that

normalizes the ideologies that support capitalism. Due to the cycles of strikes and revolutions, the working class is manipulated to believe and live by these capitalist ideologies when in reality they do not serve their class interest. In his novel, Zola promotes these ideologies as a hegemonic tool to prevent strikes. In his *Prison Notebooks*, Antonio Gramsci argues that when power is maintained through ideology and culture, it is difficult to challenge or overthrow. When ruling is done through consent, the social order is not even questioned notwithstanding the contradiction. Gramsci adds that it is ideas which control people. These ideas are taken from the current reality. **(1971, pp. 12-192)**

Ideas and opinions are not spontaneously “born” in each individual brain: they have had a centre of formation, or irradiation, of dissemination, of persuasion—a group of men, or a single individual even, which has developed them and presented them in the political form of current reality. **(Gramsci, 1971, pp. 192-193)**

Natural selection is an ideology derived from Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* (1859) and the idea of the survival of the fittest belongs to the work of Herbert Spencer. These ideas connote that only the strong one who can survive and the weak members in society are to be left to their fate. **(Lyle, 2008, p. 305)** Zola promotes these narratives and argues that it is forces of nature which leaves the miners poor and the middle class wealthy. He promotes the idea that only the strong one who can achieve success. At the beginning of the novel, Etienne embraces revolt, and then, when the strike fails, he starts to accept the notion of the survival of the fittest. He wonders: “Was Darwin right, then, and the world only a battlefield, where the strong ate the weak for the sake of the beauty and continuance of the race?” (341) This way, Zola promotes his capitalist outlook through Etienne’s conclusion.

According to Henry Mitterand, Zola does not make class distinctions a cultural and transitional one. Instead, he makes it seem like a natural and eternal phenomenon. This shows that he adopts a conservative outlook. **(Brady, 1981, p. 63)** This ideological leaning

does not serve the interest of the working class. It makes them think that capitalism is the only systems that can exist and their poverty is determined by fate. This way, Zola erases class struggle out of history. Ian Birchall argues that for Zola, determinism holds this idea that if we realize that a particular cause has an effect, then by taking an action, we can accomplish the desired consequence. Determinism connotes the precondition for humans to take hold upon their environment. However, this philosophy is hypocritical meant to preserve the system. He adds:

The notion that knowledge precedes action belongs to the ideology of a minority class, such as the pre-1789 bourgeoisie. The working class, because of its position in production, cannot first acquire enlightenment and then make the revolution; it can only acquire enlightenment in the process of making the revolution. **(Birchall, 2002)**

This way, the workers will continue to believe that capitalism is the only system that can exist. This philosophy is a hypocritical one as it serves the interest of one class only. Hemmings mentions how the Marxist thinker, Georg Lukács argues that Zola’s ideas emanate from the bourgeois thought. **(Bloom, 2004, p. 22)** In fact, several critics argue how social Darwinism is immoral and manipulative. Social Darwinism have long been celebrated as an ideology of progress and power, yet history shows that it is full of hypocrisy, misunderstanding, and manipulation. As an intellectual, Zola is aware of that, yet he employs it in his novel.

Evolution, natural selection, and the survival of the fittest are highly criticized for being unacceptable, scientifically and morally. **(Lyle, 2008, p. 305)** David Schwarz argues that Zola and his contemporaries misunderstood Darwin. The biologist David Quammen states that natural selection is materialistic and dispiriting. Basing his thinking upon Darwin’s theory of evolution, Zola concludes that under certain conditions, humans devolve backward. However, this is a misunderstanding of Darwinism. In fact, Zola couldn’t fathom the fact that the process of mutation and recombination of genes happens accidentally, and variation, caused by this mutation and recombination

of genes, is undirected by need or purpose. Hence, this renders the idea of natural selection with no solid base and heredity does not necessarily lead humans to devolve backward as what Zola indicates in *Germinal*. Etienne, for example, is said to be an inheritor of a tendency to alcoholism from his mother; however, this does not mean that the violence that he displays in several scenes emanates from alcohol as Zola suggests. This, in addition, does not mean that it is going to be transmitted to his future generation. Killing Chaval does not mean that it is alcohol which speaks through the genes to make him commit the murder. In fact, alcohol has nothing to do with his desire to kill as Zola suggests. His affection for Catherine and the feeling of hunger influence his action. (Schwarz, 2014, pp. 257-258) In his analysis of Zola's naturalism, John Orr states that the theory of heredity is absurd. If we are to follow Zola's reasoning, human actions then, are meaningless due to determinism. This is one of the reasons that lead intellectuals of modern psychology to highly criticize it and stand against it. (1977, pp. 87-88) Ergo, social Darwinism, as understood by Zola, has no solid base. Notwithstanding several critics show that it is immoral and corrupted meant to manipulate the general opinion; still, Zola employs it in his novel as he is aware of the effect it holds. The fear of the rise of the crowd motivates him to use his naturalist narrative as a tool to rig the opinion of his readers.

Zola, in *Germinal*, transmits the idea that the laborers cannot have power over the capitalists, and capitalism is the only system that can exist. His novel denotes that it is forces of nature that determines the fate of people and men has no influence on events. And here, strikes are the worst decision to take as the radicals are unable to control the crowd due to these forces. However, this is a strategy followed by Zola to preserve capitalism and prevent strikes and the social Marxists and anarchists' rise to power.

5. Conclusion

Germinal is a novel that projects how the strike led by the social Marxists and anarchists is doomed to fail. In order to portray this, Zola argues, through his theory of naturalism, that individuals in a group

will lose their rationality and engage in violence. The result is affliction and plight. Zola suggests instead, the role of the republican government to help the workers. He also calls the capitalist to improve the working conditions. However, as argued in this article, this is a manipulation to promote an ideology. The novelist relates his theory of naturalism with the capitalist narrative of social Darwinism in order to hinder the rise of the working class to power and preserve the power of the capitalists. This way, Zola employs ideological and cultural hegemony to make his readers believe that following the guidance of the social Marxists and anarchists would lead to misery and strikes are destined to slip out of control. Social Darwinism is proven to be manipulated to serve the need of the upper class, yet Zola makes use of it due to his class position. This demonstrates the reason behind the failure of the strike in *Germinal*.

Conflict of Interest

The author declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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