

Self-Reliance, Simple Living, and Happiness in the Man Who Quit Money

Khairul Hisyam Baharuddin
Universiti Malaysia Kelantan
khairulhisyam@umk.edu.my

Nazatul Syima Mohd Nasir
Universiti Malaysia Kelantan
syima.mn@umk.edu.my

Fairuz A'dilah Rusdi
Universiti Malaysia Kelantan
fairuz@umk.edu.my

ABSTRACT

For some, self-reliance, happiness and simple living form the basis of their living. For others, helping the less fortunate and vulnerable people within their communities and selflessness are the foundation of their lives. Different theories have been proposed in literature to explain the two concepts of living. The simplistic voluntary lifestyle (VSL) is an oppositional strategy of living, which discards excessive consumption and materialistic culture characterizing consumer lifestyles. VSL involves the transition from the consumption-driven lifestyle to intrinsically satisfying pursuits. his kind of life is contrary to the capitalist culture, characterized by overconsumption and environmental degradation. Emerson's theory of self-reliance and voluntary simple living theories encourage individuals to practice a sense of independence. In the novel, 'The Man Who Quit Money,' the character Suelo shuns the capitalist way of life and living happily without the material things that make people happy. Capitalism leads to increased consumption and environmental degradation. On a personal level, it causes social divisions and competitiveness. It also causes people to forget about their spiritual responsibility to take care of each other.

Keywords: *voluntary simplistic lifestyle, the man who quit money, self-reliance, life happiness, simple living*

ABSTRAK

Bagi sesetengah orang, berdikari, kebahagiaan dan kehidupan sederhana menjadi asas kehidupan mereka. Bagi yang lain, membantu orang yang kurang bernasib baik dan terdedah dalam komuniti mereka dan sikap tidak mementingkan diri adalah asas kehidupan mereka. Teori yang berbeza telah dicadangkan dalam kesusasteraan untuk menjelaskan dua konsep kehidupan. Gaya hidup sukarela yang ringkas (VSL) ialah strategi hidup yang bertentangan, yang membuang penggunaan berlebihan dan budaya materialistik yang mencirikan gaya hidup pengguna. VSL melibatkan peralihan daripada gaya hidup yang didorong oleh penggunaan kepada usaha yang memuaskan secara intrinsik. jenis kehidupannya bertentangan dengan budaya kapitalis, dicirikan oleh penggunaan berlebihan dan kemerosotan alam sekitar. Teori berdikari Emerson dan teori hidup mudah sukarela menggalakkan individu mengamalkan rasa berdikari. Dalam novel, 'The Man Who Quit Money,' watak Suelo menjauhi cara hidup kapitalis dan hidup bahagia tanpa benda material yang menggembirakan orang. Kapitalisme membawa kepada peningkatan penggunaan dan kemerosotan alam sekitar. Pada peringkat peribadi, ia menyebabkan perpecahan sosial dan daya saing. Ia juga menyebabkan manusia lupa akan tanggungjawab rohani mereka untuk saling menjaga.

INTRODUCTION

With the increasing costs of living across the globe today and the need to make ends meet, people increasingly believe that leading simple and self-reliant lifestyles is complicated and old fashioned. However, for others, self-reliance, happiness, and simple living form the basis of their living. For such people, helping the less fortunate and vulnerable people within their communities and selflessness form the basis of their lives. Self-reliance encompasses being true to oneself and exercising such virtues as responsibility, discipline, and confidence while remaining connected to one's cultural roots. On the other hand, simple living involves engaging in different types of voluntary activities to simplify one's lifestyle.

Different theories have been proposed in contemporary literature to explain the two concepts of living. Emerson's self-reliance theory explains how individuals live by their cultures while remaining virtuous, while the voluntary simplistic lifestyle theory explains how individuals live simple lives. This paper uses the two theories to analyze self-reliance, happiness, and simple living in the novel, *The Man Who Quit Money*.

METHOD

The Emerson self-Reliance Theory

Emerson's theory of self-reliance has been used in explaining how people achieve happiness by being true to themselves and promoting better living within the community (Chari, 304). The theory formed the central subject of the American Transcendentalist movement. Today, the theory is considered to be one of the most influential formulations of individualism in the United States.

In his theory, Emerson describes self-reliance as the idea of living in which an individual defies all the preceding principles. He encourages individuals to exercise free will to discard conformity constraints and embrace nature (Liang 1352). The theorist posits that in nature, everything occurring harmoniously with divine providence. He asserts that people cut themselves off from the conventions that define life by conforming to the existing social bonds. According to this theorist, people should step up from customary thoughts attributed to the societal rigidity and are guided by spirit in their lives. He further states that for people to gain their sense of independence, there is the need to abandon all that has been learned, seek the firsthand knowledge, and make it their truth (Kouassi 90). This means that individuals should go back to living in their cultures.

Although the language used by the theorist in expressing his views is not humble, he clearly shows that acting on personal decisions places individuals above the masses (Liang, 1353). He states that all people have the potential to optimize their self-esteem, and no one is superior to others. He further reveals that anyone can achieve happiness since it requires an alteration in the mental pattern of an individual.

The Theory of Voluntary Simplicity

The notion of voluntary simplicity has been used to explain the concept of simple living. According to Alexander and Ussher (68), overconsumption in the world's affluent societies has been associated with a myriad of adverse outcomes. These include consumer malaise, environmental degradation, and increased levels of global poverty. Transition to a more sustainable society, therefore, requires people to move from lifestyles guided by enormous consumption patterns to more ecological and simple living.

The simplistic voluntary lifestyle (VSL) is well-defined as an oppositional strategy of living, which discards excessive consumption and materialistic culture characterizing consumer lifestyles (Osikominu and Bocken 3). The VSL notion involves the transition from the consumption-driven lifestyle to intrinsically satisfying pursuits. To successfully meet their simple living desires, people who practice this living strategy aim to provide for their material needs in a simple and direction approach to minimize spending and effort when pursuing nonmaterial satisfaction (Saygil and Erkan 243). In most cases, it involves acceptance of lower-income and low levels of satisfaction in exchange for more free time. However, for other people, simplistic voluntary lifestyle means opposing the current high consumer lifestyles and pay systems and directing time and energy on helping the vulnerable and less fortunate in the society without expecting anything in return. Such people live simple and sustainable lives and only accept non-monetary gifts from people instead of working to earn rewards or recognition. Finally, individuals who practice the VSL are commonly found in Western societies and are often well educated and capable of meeting their basic needs. They, however, choose this path for their spiritual and self-satisfaction.

RESULTS

Self-Reliance and Simple Living in the Novel

One principle of both Emerson's theory of self-reliance and the simplistic voluntary theory is the conservation of the environment. While nature provides almost everything that man needs to survive, the overuse and overconsumption of natural resources caused by human beings have resulted in environmental degradation and other problems currently faced by many people worldwide (Liang 1352). Both the self-reliance theory and the voluntary simplistic lifestyle models oppose overconsumption and encourage people to seek happiness by exercising a sense of responsibility for nature through reduced consumption.

The promotion of environmental conservation by disregarding the culture of consumption in the novel, 'The Man Who Quit Money,' can be seen throughout the self-reliant and simple life of Suelo. At the age of 39, he discards all his money by placing it in a telephone booth and begins to live a life without money. Unlike modern Americans who overuse nature's resources in the construction of houses and engage in unsustainable consumption, Daniel Suelo leads his life as a steward of nature. He lives in a small cave in Utah's canyonlands where wild animals and fruits, and picks expired groceries from dumpsites forages. Throughout this journey, he does not engage in any form of environmental degradation. He says, "My philosophy is to use only what is freely given or discarded and what is already present and running" (Sundeen 10). With this kind of life, he remains attached to nature and does everything within his capacity to conserve it.

Compared with the lives of other Americans, Suelo's life is considered to have a lower impact. Considering that he lacks vehicle and home ownership, his carbon dioxide production is insignificant. The other activities that he engages in, such as foraging wild fruits and spearfishing salmon imposes zero environmental costs as there is no production or transportation. He also rescues processed food from the trash cans preventing the expenditure of energy and disposal in landfills. Moreover, he does not also use wrappers, plastic bottles, and cans. To illustrate Suelo's passion for nature, his friend Damian Nash says, "He desires to have the smallest ecological footprint and the largest impact in improving the world" (Sundeen 21). He further reports that Suelo's goals is to make little gains while giving as much as possible. This kind of life is contrary to the capitalist culture, which is characterized by overconsumption and environmental degradation.

Secondly, Emerson's theory of self-reliance and voluntary simple living theories encourage individuals to practice a sense of independence. With the current dependence on money and the complicated lifestyles that many Americans live, it is difficult for people to engage in simple living and self-reliance due to the societal norms. Today, people believe that the key to individual happiness has luxurious lifestyles with a lot of money at the disposal of individuals, and people who have contrary opinions or beliefs are considered backward and outdated. The two theories encourage individuals to live their lives in a manner that brings self-satisfaction and happiness regardless of the societal norms. Emerson's theory of self-reliance argues that for one to achieve self-reliance, people should cut themselves from societal conventions that cause rigidity and exercise a sense of independence. Similarly, the VSL theory asserts that people who adopt this lifestyle are educated folks who seek happiness in independent thinking.

In the novel, 'The Man Who Quit Money,' the character Suelo exercises independence as proposed by the two theories by shunning the capitalist way of life and living happily without the material things that make people happy. At 39, when the capitalist system requires individuals to acquire wealth and invest in various economic activities, David Suelo discards his remaining amount of money that he has and begins to live a life with no money (Sundeen 19). This kind of life is contrary to the capitalist culture in which people use the money to make purchases of basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. When the ranger from the Bureau of Land Management found the canyon land in Utah, which is considered government property, his sense of independence and detachment from the use of money comes into play. When asked to evict the land, he asks, "Are you saying this because you are paid, or do you believe it?" (Sundeen 18). With this statement, he tries to show the ranger that he should not just follow orders but think independently. Through his sense of independence, he can influence the ranger who decides to separate his personal and professional opinions and acknowledges the excellent work Suelo is doing in the canyon land.

His sense of independence is also shown by the fact that he does not use money even though he lives in a capitalist system where the use of money is the norm. When met by the ranger who accuses him of trespassing and hands him a ticket of \$120, he says confidently, "I don't use money, I can't pay for this" (Sundeen 19). According to the author, David Suelo does not only use money but has discarded his driver's license and passport and uses the name Suelo, which stands for soil instead of his surname. He even questions the judge on the laws such as the fourteen-day camping limit, which he believes keeps people like him from existing. Suelo is practicing a life of independence as proposed by Emerson's concept of self-reliance and the voluntary simplistic lifestyle theory.

Another essential idea of self-reliance and simple living proposed by the two theories is volunteerism. Stukas, Snyder, and Clary (28) define volunteering as a prosocial behavior in which individuals choose freely to commit a substantial amount of time and effort to help a person, group of people, of course without expecting any financial rewards. People who engage in volunteerism understand the difficulties that other people, especially the vulnerable members of the community, go through and use their time and effort to help in improving the lives of these vulnerable people. In a capitalist society, people believe in working to make money and mostly consider the less fortunate in society as unable to work for pay. Capitalism, therefore, does not encourage volunteerism. Emerson's theory of self-reliance and the notion of a simplistic voluntary lifestyle hold that happiness can be attained by helping others without expecting anything in return.

Throughout his new life journey, Daniel Suelo lives a life of volunteerism, contrary to the capitalist culture, which requires people to make and spend money. Throughout the novel, Suelo uses all that he has to promote the welfare of others through volunteerism ((Sundeen 20). His volunteer activities can be seen through the way he offers help to organizations and people

who are less privileged in the society by cooking for them and sharing his time and belongings with them. For instance, when he is away from his cave in Utah, which attracts hikers during the warm months, he allows them to use his camp freely without charging them for anything. He leaves notes behind saying, *'Feel free to camp here, what is mine is yours. Eat any of my food and read my books. Take them with you if you like.'* (Sundeen 18) When taken to the judge for violation of the law which requires people to stay out of the public property, his love for helping others manifests again. When asked by the judge what kind of punishment he should be given, he suggests volunteering at a facility sheltering abused women and children. He has volunteered in this organization several times and does not have difficulties doing it. When volunteering in such organizations, he does not accept any form of pay or reward but can accept gifts and hospitality. His ability to perform volunteer work for years without expecting any form of payment in return proves that he lives a self-reliant and simple life away from the social beliefs on capitalism.

Moreover, capitalist culture holds that money and material wealth is the source of happiness for individuals and that pursuing spiritual growth and other forms of fulfillment is a way of inviting poverty (Butler, 2018). Today, many people in the United States work hard to accumulate material wealth as a form of satisfaction. The use of money as a currency further aggravates the situation. It robs them of happiness since they have to purchase everything they have, including medical services, the homes in which they stay, the food they eat, and the clothes they wear (Ahuvia 201). When people have no money, they borrow from friends and financial institutions, ending up in debts. The monetary system has resulted in the creation of social classes that have caused discrimination and disorder in almost all parts of the country. The sense of unity and equality has declined, and people are increasingly fighting poverty by working hard and accumulating wealth. Although money can determine individuals' lives, it does not necessarily generate happiness (Sengupta et al. 23). The theory of simplistic voluntary living and Emerson's concept of self-reliance encourages individuals to attain happiness from pursuing a better spiritual life rather than material things.

Although Suelo does not have or use money, he lives a life of fulfillment, which is guided by his spiritual beliefs. Although Suelo was brought up in a Christian family, he currently leads a life with no religion. His spiritual beliefs are influenced by his readings from holy texts from different religions and the works of philosophers such as Thoreau, Gandhi, and Tolstoy. He says, "All these separate and distant scriptures and authors agree that the only way of truth is non-possession" (Sundeen 26). He even quotes what different Holy Scriptures say about possession and the use of money. According to Suelo, the monetary system has corrupted people in his country and resulted in divisions that would otherwise not have existed.

Moreover, he states that many people have been led by the illusion that money can help them control their past and future, causing them to forget about their spiritual fulfillment. This way, the capitalist system denies people the happiness that they deserve. To break from this societal control and live a simple but fulfilling life, Suelo stops using money and ceases having any possessions.

CONCLUSION

From the novel, American society today is designed in such a way that individuals need money and become a key component of the capitalist system. However, this kind of lifestyle is associated with adverse effects not only on individuals but also on society. First, capitalism leads to increased consumption and environmental degradation. On a personal level, it causes social divisions and competitiveness, leading to increased vices and causes people to forget about their spiritual responsibility to take care of each other. While development is essential in

the current world, people need to be confident and move away from the cultures and beliefs in the societies in which they live to attain happiness through self-reliance and simplicity.

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