



**THE PURSUIT OF PROSPERITY:  
A REFLECTION OF AMERICAN DREAM IN  
NICHOLASA MOHR'S *A VERY SPECIAL PET***

**A FINAL PROJECT**

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement

For S-1 Degree in American Cultural Studies

In English Department, Faculty of Humanities

Diponegoro University

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## **PRONOUNCEMENT**

The writer honestly states that this project is compiled by herself without taking any results from other researchers in S-1, S-2, S-3, and in diploma degree of any university. The writer also ascertains that she does not take any material from other publications or someone else's paper except from the references mentioned in bibliography.

Semarang, April 2019

Novia Sitorus

## **APPROVAL**

**THE PURSUIT OF PROSPERITY: A REFLECTION OF  
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### **MOTTO AND DEDICATION**

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*

- **Philippians 4:6 NIV**

*Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

- **Matthew 6:34 NIV**

*Senantiasa carilah jawaban dari dalam dirimu. Janganlah terpengaruh oleh mereka yang berada di sekelilingmu, juga oleh pikiran maupun kata-kata mereka.*

- **Eileen Caddy**

*This final project is dedicated to  
My precious parents, the Sitorus family  
for their prayers and endless support*

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Semarang, April 2019

Novia Sitorus

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## ***ABSTRAK***

*Dalam penelitian ini, penulis menggali nilai-nilai yang mencerminkan American Dream dalam cerita pendek *A Very Special Pet*. Setelah nilai-nilai American Dream ditemukan, penulis menganalisis secara lebih dalam nilai-nilai American Dream sebagai gambaran mencari kemakmuran dalam cerita *A Very Special Pet* yang ditulis oleh Nicholasa Mohr pada tahun 1975. *A Very Special Pet* menceritakan keluarga Fernandez sebagai imigran yang bermigrasi dari Puerto Rico ke El Bronx, Kota New York. Penulis menganalisis seberapa kuat nilai-nilai American Dream menjadi alasan mereka untuk bermigrasi melalui Pendekatan Kritik Sosiologis. Dengan menggunakan metode studi Pustaka, penulis dapat mengumpulkan sumber dan data yang mendukung penelitian ini. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa nilai-nilai American Dream yakni kesetaraan (equality), kebebasan (freedom), kemakmuran (prosperity), dan kesempatan (opportunity) merupakan nilai-nilai yang menjadi pendukung bagi keluarga Fernandez dalam mencapai mimpi mereka.*

*Kata Kunci: American Dream, Kesetaraan, Kebebasan, Kemakmuran, Kesempatan*

## ABSTRACT

In this study, the writer examines the values that reflect the American Dream in the short story *A Very Special Pet*. After the values of the American Dream discovered, the writer analyzes more deeply the values of the American Dream as a representation of achieving prosperity in *A Very Special Pet* story written by Nicholasa Mohr in 1975. *A Very Special Pet* describes a family, the Fernandez family as immigrants who migrated from Puerto Rico to El Bronx, New York City. The writer analyzes how strong the values of the American Dream are their reasons for migrating through a Sociological Criticism Approach. Besides using the library research method, the writer can collect sources and data that support this research. This study discovers that the values of the American Dream such as equality, freedom, prosperity, and opportunity are values that support the Fernandez family in achieving their dreams.

Keywords: American Dream, Equality, Freedom, Prosperity, Opportunity

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As a whole, the United States of America is known as a nation of immigrants. There are two great reasons for this case. First, the nation is permanent, always built, and continues to be improved by generations of immigrants and their children. Furthermore, despite now America remains to bring in numerous immigrants than any other nation in the world (Shulbuchverlage, 1998:13). The immigration patterns have changed over time for individual and entire cultures. From the migration appears, recognizing the presence of a cultural transformation. This state strengthened by Douglas K. Stevenson in his book, *American Life and Institutions* declares that these changing patterns have influenced America and how Americans observe the whole world (1996:19). Therefore, migration leads to some changes. The situation of environmental, cultural and economic are a concern for the community when migrating. Many countries such as Puerto Rico faces this condition where the native society move to another region. According to the *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society: Return Migration to Puerto Rico* in 1968, it is said that:

“Initial migration from Puerto Rico is almost entirely to the United States, and almost all the migration streams lead to New York City. Considerable subsequent movement takes place, but at the 1960 census 70 per cent of the U.S. population that was of Puerto Rican birth was to be found in the New York City metropolitan area, and in 1950 it had been 83 per cent. This rare degree of spatial homogeneity in Puerto Rican emigration simplifies the analysis considerably” (Hernández, 1968:452).

In general, migration is a general term for population movement in demographics, which is population mobility or more specifically mobility territoriality which usually means spatial, physical and geographical motion (Shryock and Siegel, 1980). The *Great Migration*, happened in 1910-1930 lead many people African Americans to move out of the South. Furthermore, it delivered in the journal the *Great Migration* that declares:

“It began between 1916 and 1918, when more than 400,000 southern blacks went north; at times, entire communities and church organization packed up and moved virtually intact to New York, Detroit, Chicago and other northern cities” (Rodger Doyle, 2004:25).

The significant changes in the pattern of immigration that occur due to war, revolution, hunger, persecution, and religious tolerance make people believe that America is a better place to find a more decent life (Shulbuchverlage, 1998:23). Moreover, there are other factors that make millions of people choose migration as their new journey. Rubenstein (2016:81) affirms that “people decide to migrate because of push factors and pull factors”. He further says that a push factor is an inducement for people to move out of their area. On the other hand, a pull factor makes people move to a new area. For them, migration is not a big step that is easily achieved because push factors and pull factors act an important role.

The description concerning the concept of immigrants in achieving *American Dream* first appeared in a book written by James Truslow Adams in 1931 entitled *The Epic of America* which says that: “American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement” (Cullen, 2003:12).

In this case, the *American Dream* relates to how someone pursues a decent and prosperous life, in the language of the writer called pursuit prosperity. Adams delivered that the core of the *American Dream* is a dream of a country where a life is expected to be better, brighter, and more complete for all individual and given the opportunity according to their abilities or achievements.

The pursuit of prosperity is relevant in this present era. With the opportunity for migration, many people require to leave their region to a new area. According to that, the reason people migrate is to improve living conditions and achieve their dreams. Consequently, some people did the same thing as the Fernandez family

until currently, improve their financial and reach a new goal. Therefore, obtaining the concept of the *American Dream* alive to this present.

On these terms, the writer found a depiction of people who immigrate in one of prose works written by Nicholasa Mohr entitled *A Very Special Pet*. Mohr was born in New York City while his parents were from Puerto Rican. In the prose, she told a story of a family, who migrates become immigrants, the Fernandez family. The main purpose of the family to move from their homeland to New York City is to find new hope with a more decent life. When they moved to the area, there were various culture shocks they experienced. This problem is not only caused by the modernity of the city, but there are other factors, namely cultural diversity. The necessity of understanding the condition culture and modernity in the city is a principal factor in cultural shock. Some immigrants have the idea that the *American Dream* leads them to improve social class and also have a positive impact and even worse for those who cannot adapt to these conditions.

In the story of *A Very Special*, there is a pet that is a hen, joncrofo. At that time, Mrs. Fernandez was worried about the food she would serve eaten with her family. On the other hand, the school holidays and Christmas will come early. Their financial condition is not good. Besides, the price of goods become rise. Therefore that makes Mrs. Fernandez kill joncrofo as meat meal. She tried to kill the hen. However, her children saw what their mother was doing at that time. They like joncrofo. Consequently, joncrofo did not die. Mrs. Fernandez treated their pet's injuries. In this instance, a pet is a symbol of the *American Dream*. Someone tried to kill the dream, although the dream come back to life.

The values reflecting *American Dream* in the story of *A Very Special Pet* are the major issue because of the struggle of a family in reaching their hopes in a new land. They hope to return to their homeland with happiness but, the family situation worsens. Becoming an immigrant is the choice of the Fernandez family

will get a decent life even though they have various problems both in achieving the *American Dream* when immigrating. The writer will discuss the existing *American Dream* issues and things that reflect the ideal of *American Dream* experienced by the characters in the story. Besides that, the writer will also find out whether *American Dream* is a reason why people immigrate.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Intrinsic Aspect**

#### **2.1.2 Setting**

Setting is a part of time and location that a story takes place. Abrams (1999:285), in his book entitled *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, explains that “the overall setting of a narrative or dramatic work is the general locale, historical time, and social circumstances in which its action occurs”. Further, Abrams states that setting is classified into several aspects including place, time, weather conditions, social conditions, and mood or atmosphere. Place deals with what geographical location is like in a story. For the time, it explains when the historical period in a story occurs both in the time of the day, month, year, and others. Weather condition describes the weather or climate conditions that occurred at that time such as sunny, rainy, stormy, and others. The description about the daily life of human can be seen in social conditions. Hence, how feeling created at the beginning of the story can be known in the aspect of mood or atmosphere.

### **2.2 Extrinsic Aspect**

#### **2.2.2 American Dream**

The term *American Dream* first appeared in a book *The Epic of America* by James Truslow Adams there stated that “...the dream of a land in which life should be richer and fuller for every man” (Cullen, 2003:12). The *American Dream* can be defined as the dreams of immigrants. These immigrants believe that the persistence and hard work will provide new hope for the prosperity of their lives. Even though each dream is different from one to another, in general, the dreams related to equality, freedom, prosperity, liberty, public virtue and opportunity. The *American Dream* has a reason for finding the happiness that makes it the basis of immigrant thinking (Fossum & Roth, 1981:29). Furthermore, the writer will

explain below clearly the elements which are the core of the *American Dream* concept.

### **2.2.1.1 Equality**

In *American Dream*, equality has a deep sense for everyone, especially for immigrants at that time who seek equality of race, gender, and social status. According to Ralph Dolgoff in his book entitled *Human Nature and The American Dream*, explains that *American Dream* upholds the value of equality that everyone is equal in all things but everyone has equal opportunities in achieving their needs (1984:91).

### **2.2.1.2 Freedom**

Freedom becomes an absolute thing for someone to do something according to their confidences and desires. Based on Hollinger and Capper, in their book entitled *The American Intellectual Tradition*, the meaning of freedom is “first of all, the opportunity is formulated in the choices that are available, debating the whole and then the opportunity to choose” (1989:235). In the aspect of the *American Dream*, freedom is the basis for an individual to have the opportunity to do something based on the way of life.

### **2.2.1.3 Prosperity**

Prosperity is one of the pull factors for immigrants who migrate. According to Former Secretary of State in Legatum Institute, Iain Duncan Smith (2016:1) declares that:

“Prosperity is about wellbeing and people feeling they have the opportunity and ability to both run and enjoy their lives. Real national prosperity is when all income groups feel they have a full share in their nation prosperity”.

The immigrants are beginning a new season with the purpose of achieving prosperity. Although they have many challenges, they make prosperity a basic need that must be pursued. For them, by utilizing the opportunities and efforts to work hard, there is hope for a prosperous life. These are the reasons why immigration greatly has influenced the character of American society. The efforts of immigrants in achieving their new hopes made them know a new land, America. For them, America is a land that promises prosperity. The dream of a better life had attached to immigrants (Carpenter, 1955:110).

#### **2.2.1.4 Opportunity**

Opportunity is the best condition that someone holds and has a big chance to get a great result. According to Douglas K. Stevenson in his book *American Life and Institutions*, “Opportunity is good chance or favorable condition for advancement or progress” (1996:170). The great migration was an excellent opportunity that every individual has, especially for those who immigrate to avoid slumps and afflictions they got before. On the other hand, when the immigrants decided to move, they have a great chance to achieve their goals. Migration delivers an opportunity for immigrants to reach their better life needs. In that case, the dream can realize entirely from the opportunity they accepted.

### **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

In analyzing this study the writer uses two methods, Method of Research and Method of Approach.

#### **3.1 Method of Research**

The writer uses library research to find the data. According to M. Nazir in his book entitled *Research Methods*, the definition of library research is a technique in collecting data by reviewing books, notes, and reports that relate to the problem be solved (1988:111). In this method, the writer analyzes the topic by reading some supporting books in the library and searching from the internet to find more some of articles and journals to support the analysis. The primary data of this study is *A Very Special Pet* prose which is written by Nicholasa Mohr. The secondary data is taken from other sources related to the topic.

#### **3.2 Method of Approach**

The writer uses a sociological criticism approach to interpret the extrinsic elements. Based on X. J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia in *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama* (2010:2036), sociological criticism approach is “examines literature in the cultural, economic, and political context in which it is written or received”. They describe the conditions in culture and economy can give influence in describing or writing the context of a story.

## **4. DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Intrinsic Aspect Analysis**

#### **4.1.1. Setting**

According to Abram's theory of setting, setting is part of a story that explains place, time, weather conditions, social conditions, and mood or atmosphere. In this case, the writer choose setting as an intrinsic aspect because the description of *American Dream* issue in finding the pursuit of prosperity can be clearly understood when viewing the details of time, place and social condition. The parts of setting have a close attachment with the problems experienced by each character. As a consequence, setting has a definite relevance to the pursuit of prosperity experienced by the Fernandez family.

##### **4.1.1.1. Setting of Time**

*A Very Special Pet* describes of the family's life journey, the Fernandez family who became immigrant. They moved from Puerto Rico to El Bronx, New York City. In the story, the depiction of year explains their beginning become immigrant in El Bronx. This is recognized from Nicholasa Mohr's interpretation that said "Our struggles as displaced migrants, working-class descendants of the tabaqueros (tobacco workers) who began coming here in 1916" (98). On the other hand, the *Great Migration*, which is an appearance of large-scale population movements, has become the highest demographic in getting job opportunities in industrial cities and avoiding racism. These are the main reason for millions of people moving to new areas to maintain their lives. The Fernandez family started their immigration journey in 1916 and experienced some culture shock in the new land they have chosen. In addition, going from the hometown to El Bronx, New York City is a new step towards facing their financial condition. The financial condition of Fernandez family does not seem to improve because Puerto Rico did not keep their needs.

##### **4.1.1.2. Setting of Place**

In the story of *A Very Special Pet*, there are some places that describe toward setting of place. They live in a small apartment in the El Bronx area of New York City. The apartment has five small rooms with a kitchen. For two of their pets, a cat and a hen are keeping in the back room of the house, in the kitchen. Their home is the major setting of place in this story because every conflict that is experienced by each character and others mostly occurs in the house. In addition to apartments, the surrounding environment is also setting of this story place such as underground trains, highways, and workplaces for Mr. Fernandez (99).

#### **4.1.1.3. Setting of Social Condition**

The social condition in the story of *A Very Special Pet* is to greet an upcoming holiday and the celebration of Christmas. For celebrating school holidays, Mrs. Fernandez usually serves delicious food such as meat on dining table to eat with her husband and children. However, the financial situation did not improve and the price of goods more expensive. Consequently, Mrs. Fernandez feel worry and difficult. In addition to the financial pressure, Mr. Fernandez was sick with a severe throat illness which made their financial condition decrease. She needed to work however she must hold her three children. Hence, the Christmas celebrations that will come on school holidays make Mrs. Fernandez even more confused. From the efforts of Mrs. Fernandez, we can find out that welcoming a holiday at Christmas is very important because it will make families gather and celebrate together (100).

## **4.2. Extrinsic Aspect Analysis**

### **4.2.1. American Dream**

*American Dream* is a term that first appeared in a book by James Truslow Adams entitled *The Epic of America*. In his book, Adams said that dreams from a new land mean to get wealth and happiness. According to him, when someone starts stepping out of their country, new dreams are needed to support the hope of

happiness (Cullen, 2003: 12). Even though they faced challenges, they were not desperate to work. As a consequence, the dreams deliver people to get a decent living.

The term *American Dream* is generally closely related to the pursuit of prosperity, but the limits of this meaning relate to freedom and independence. It implies that freedom gives someone to get something better than previous achievements. On the other hand, independence is an absolute thing because it is not bound to something. Although a person's dream is related to life expectancy, the pursuit of prosperity is the key to success in one's liberty and freedom (Taher Badinjki 2013:2).

The story of *A Very Special Pet* describes a family who went to a new land looking for better life. As a consequence, the value of the *American Dream* can be seen from their efforts to get welfare. The Fernandez family who came from Puerto Rico and decided to immigrate to El Bronx, New York. The main purpose of this family to immigrate is develop their economic situation and think to live there for a while. With selling the assets, they owned before in Puerto Rico will support to persist in New York City. The economic conditions they had in Puerto Rico were a target to improve everything for a more established life. Accordingly, they are struggling to face culture shock in New York City.

“To finance their voyage to New York, Mr and Mrs. Fernandez had sold their small plot of land the little livestock they had, and their wooden cabin” (99).

The Fernandez family had new hopes after living in New York and prayed to God based on their hope would be achieved. As Fossum and Roth said that *American Dream* is a concept of thought for immigrants to seek happiness. In their philosophy, the *American Dream* became a base for immigrants when they started to achieve their expectations.

“We gonna get everything and we gonna leave El Bronx, Mr. Fernandez would assure them. We even gonna save enough to buy our farm in Puerto Rico- a big one! With lots of land, maybe a hundred acres, and a chicken house, pigs, goats, even a cow. We can plant coffee and some sugar, and have all the fruits trees-mangoes, sweet oranges, everything!” (100).

The dreams they hoped were a description of the *American Dream* which meant that they decided to stay in El Bronx to get something promising. Living in a new land is a big challenge and full of uncertainty, but it becomes a choice for them to get what they want. As head of the household, Mr. Fernandez has found a job as a porter in Manhattan. However, the work did not fulfill the needs of each family members. He always attempts and works hard to fulfill everything by looking for added jobs.

“He still held the same job, but he hoped to be promoted someday to freight-elevator operator. In the meantime, he sold newspapers and coffee on the side, ran errands for people in the building, and was always available for extra work” (99).

In achieving these expectations, the plans they made not realized well. They fought several obstacles that experienced culture shock in the surrounding environment. New Yorkers are foreign to them and is required for them to learn many things. This is recognized from the story that states “City life was foreign to them, and they had to learn everything, even how to get on a subway and travel. Graciela Fernandez had been terribly frightened at first of the underground trains, traffic, and large crowds of people” (99). It means that culture shock experience by Fernandez family can occur. In the middle of their defiance lives, the Fernandez family still maintains their religious life.

“She would never complain; she would pray at the small altar she had set up in the kitchen, light her candles and murmur that God would provide and not forget her and her family... Papi provides for us. We are lucky and we have to thank Jesus Christ” (99).

Being an immigrant in New York City is a choice to this family because of the financial downturn they experienced; they had to go to a new land to get better life. However, in achieving this dream there will be some culture shock that they get and make them survive for the situation. In the story *A Very Special Pet* can be known that the Fernandez family's dreams are very diverse, but they have not been well realized due to strange things.

*American Dream* can be a dominant issue in this story because it can be seen from the process of the family's struggle in achieving the dreams of Mr. Fernandez, his wife and children. They were able to endure life in a big city despite the strange situations they encountered. The effort and opportunity to achieve prosperity are part of their dreams to continue an established life.

#### **4.2.1.1. Equality**

Equality is a critical thing for everyone mostly for immigrants who try get equality of race, gender, and social status. According to Ralph Dolgoff in his book entitled *Human Nature and The American Dream*, explains that *American Dream* upholds the value of equality that all people are equal in all things but everyone has equal opportunities in achieving their needs (1984:91). In the story of *A Very Special Pet*, the writer did not find differences in the equality of race, gender, and social status. In addition, every member of the Fernandez family has not to get discrimination from the surrounding environment. They only took a new struggle with culture shock in El Bronx.

#### **4.2.1.2. Freedom**

The *Great Migration* which happened is a great opportunity for immigrants to get their freedom. They have the freedom to choose according to their decision of life. As for freedom, they accept the freedom of opinion, religion, choosing a place to work and others. In the story of *A Very Special Pet*, Mr. Fernandez has

the freedom to take the job of his choice. This case appears from the side of Mr. Fernandez's work. He works as a laborer and having other jobs. Being an immigrant in El Bronx who has the freedom to choose employment is an opportunity for Mr. Fernandez to improve his family living.

“Eugenio Fernandez had found a job as a porter in one of the large buildings in the garment center in Manhattan. He still held the same job, but he hoped to be promoted someday to freight-elevator operator. In the meantime, he sold newspapers and coffee on the side, ran errands for people in the building, and was always available for extra work” (99).

#### **4.2.1.3. Prosperity**

The efforts of immigrants in achieving their new hopes made them know a new land, America. The achievements of the Fernandez family have not been realized fully because of the problem they meet. In the beginning, this family's goal of immigration to New York was to continue a new life.

“Like so many before them they hoped for a better life, a new future for their children, and a piece of that good life known as the *American Dream*” (ix).

However, due to the challenges met in achieving these efforts, they are always grateful and try to work hard. For them, America is a land that promises prosperity. The dream of a better life is inherent to immigrants (Carpenter, 1995: 110). Achieving prosperity indicates that a dream is a support for immigrants to get out of their land. It shown with the purpose of an immigration agent is to change their lost hopes into a bright and promising new hope. This problem was felt by the Fernandez family when they decided to choose New York as a promising city for their lives.

#### **4.2.1.4. Opportunity**

For immigrants, the opportunity is an important thing to receive. Furthermore, the opportunity gives a big chance for them to improve the conditions of living on new land. The Second World War that had ended served the Puerto Ricans to travel more easily. Accordingly, the Fernandez family were immigrants who had the opportunity to migrate to El Bronx, New York achieve their hopes and dreams.

“But it was after the Second World War, when traveling became cheaper and easier, that the greatest influx began. In 1946, Puerto Ricans could purchase, for a small amount of money, a one way ticket to the mainland. As citizens they did not face immigration laws or quotas and so they arrived by the tens of thousands, first by freighter and later by airplane” (ix).

From the above quotation, it can recognize that the Fernandez family have the opportunity to immigrate because at that time the government was not established immigration laws and quotas. Therefore, this is a golden opportunity for them to leave Puerto Rico and pursue their dreams.

## 5. CONCLUSION

*A Very Special Pet* is a story that illustrates how prosperity pursues the *American Dream* concept perceived by the Fernandez family from Puerto Rico. The reason they immigrated to the city of El Bronx was to reach their dreams in a new land to change the deteriorating economic conditions. They got many culture shocks, but on the other hand, they attained to encounter the situation that happened.

Based on the study the writer examined, in the story of *A Very Special Pet* it can be seen that *American Dream* values are reflected. The Fernandez family is a good reflection of *American Dream* because their family succeeds in achieving their goals. Although getting a lot of struggle, they still attempt to adapt. The presence of culture shocks such as underground trains, traffic, and crowds of people was not obstacles. The opportunity to migrate gives a big chance for the Fernandez family to improve their financial situation. The hard work, dream, and hope make this family succeed in achieving all desires as they wish.

Equality, freedom, prosperity, and opportunity are related components of the values of the *American Dream*. These values become life support for their way of achieving their purposes. Although equality not explicitly described, the other aspects were supported. Freedom presents an opportunity for Mr. Fernandez to work anywhere. Prosperity is the reason for them to reach the *American Dream* of new land. The last result is an opportunity section which is a chance to escape from misfortune and begin the distinct season.

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