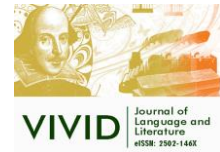




Available online at : <http://jurnalvivid.fib.unand.ac.id>

Vivid: Journal of Language and Literature

| ISSN (Online) 2502-146X |



Literature

Cultural Hegemony in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series

Shalih Dzakiyyah Farda

English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Andalas University

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Received: April 20, 2018

Revised: August 27, 2018

Available online: September 25, 2018

KEYWORDS

Hegemony, manipulation, ideology, imposition

CORRESPONDENCE

E-mail: shalihdf@gmail.com

A B S T R A C T

This article discusses the issue of politics and hegemony in Harry Potter, a fantasy series by British author J. K. Rowling. The work is apparently coded with class systems and hierarchy in its society, and how it can be seen as a reflection of real-life society. It explores how the ruling group tries to keep the power only on the hands of the few by inserting their views and ideologies to their people, and thus resulting into a certain status quo that the ruling group finds desirable. The seven novels of Harry Potter are analysed through Marxist perspective using Antonio Gramsci's theory of Cultural Hegemony, in which the people in power impose and spread their ideas to those below them as a way to control them. It is concluded that the series also involves criticisms on class domination, corruption on power, and rebellion.

INTRODUCTION

In a society, there will be a certain system that leads and controls in order to keep the balance and maintain the peace. This system often emerges as a particular institution, i.e. the government, which gives boundaries on how people should act and behave. However, a ruling group may have other agendas to keep the power only on the hands of the few. Due to their high position, an institution often inserts their political views and ideologies into their people to the point that they impose the society's way of thinking. This is where capitalism plays a part in a structured society. The ideology that they spread drives people to a certain status quo that the ruling group finds desirable. It has been really embedded to the mechanism that people deem it normal to think in such ways as how the ruling group has designed it. Their idea is seen as legitimate and becomes the universally accepted norm without people questioning whether it is wrong or right. This sort of imposition is known as cultural hegemony.

The issue of cultural hegemony can be seen in a famous fantasy novel series, *Harry Potter*, written by British author J. K. Rowling. Although the story revolves on the struggle of a wizard

boy, Harry Potter, on fighting against the evil power of Lord Voldemort, the wizarding society in the series is heavily influenced by the presence of a certain group of people, namely the Ministry of Magic. Essentially, it is an institution that governs and manages the British wizarding world. However, the Ministry people who hold the positions of power would maintain their governance only for themselves, so that they will gain as much benefit as possible. They do so in a way that convinces the majority, in this case the British witches and wizards, that their authority is necessary and natural. They are trying to achieve the maximum amount of control with the minimum amount of conflict by hegemonizing the ideologies in the society.

The writer believes that the relationship between the ruling group, the powerful people of Ministry of Magic, and the manipulated society, the common people of British wizarding community, is a depiction of cultural hegemony. J. K. Rowling puts this as a critic in her work in order to reflect the corrupted capitalism within a governmental system as seen in the real world.

THEORY AND METHOD

Generally, the traditional definition of ‘hegemony’ is political rule or domination of one group over another. The dominant group implants their ideas to the society in order to maintain their position, which gives advantages for them over the oppressed group. As this domination extends further than merely in the aspects of politics and economy, the ideology is then embedded into the ‘culture’ of the society itself. It has become a part of their daily life, and thus is considered as a normal thing occurred in their system. This sort of situation is then known as the term ‘cultural hegemony’.

Cultural hegemony is a concept developed by Antonio Gramsci, an Italian philosopher. It lies under Marxist theory, a philosophy that focuses attention on social history in relation to political economy. Marxism specifically deals with the issues of classes and power in society. In a regime dominated by the ruling class, it may be unavoidable that things such as capitalism and hegemony happen. The domination is done by the more ‘powerful’ group, which in Marxist is known as the *bourgeoisie*, by imposing their beliefs to their subordinate and less powerful community, known as the *proletariat*. This condition results in class struggle, and Marxist predicts that if the proletariat realizes their disadvantageous circumstances, the situation may erupt rebellions from them to strive for establishing a classless society.

The writer uses Gramsci’s ideas in order to reveal hegemonic tendency shown in the seven novels of *Harry Potter* series. The analysis revolves around the relation of the dominant group over the oppressed group, how much it influences the life of the subordinate, and what output arises from the instability of that domination.

DISCUSSION

The existence of capitalism in a society has raised many problems in extensive sectors. Capitalism, according to Marxist, is the creation of class inequality in which the proletariat—workers who sell their labor power for a wage in order to make a living—enables the capitalists who own and control the means of production to recover a profit at the expense of the workers

(Hitchcock 16). The capitalists, also known as the bourgeoisie, will reinforce various agendas in order to get, keep, and maintain their economic power, and thus Marxist believes that the motive extends not only in economic aspects, but also to all social and political activities.

Society in fictions is not altogether considered perfect. Instead, the author often conveys their criticism on the corrupted system by showing the instability of the society itself. Capitalism is one of the biggest issues that creates clash and separates people in two large groups, and this issue is quite apparent in *Harry Potter* series. The wizarding world that J. K. Rowling builds so thoroughly depicts two different sides of a society, in which one side dominates over the other. Generally, the magical community in Great Britain (i.e. England, Scotland, and Wales) and possibly also Ireland is led and governed by the Ministry of Magic. It is headed by the Minister for Magic and its main intention is to preserve magical law. During most of Harry Potter's time at Hogwarts, his wizarding school, the Minister for Magic was Cornelius Fudge.

Although at the beginning Harry is not directly connected to the Ministry of Magic, the impact of its governance is apparent, not only for him but also for the witches and wizards alike. For instance, there is an apparent prejudice in the structure of the governing body itself. Since the ancient time of the wizarding world, blood purity becomes an ideology for some wizards to keep from generations to generations. There are families who pride themselves on their ancestry as a pureblood, and thus think of the non-purebloods to be below their social status. Furthermore, they also consider that the slightest contact with Muggles, people with no magical abilities, as something that is disgraceful and dishonorable for their family reputation. This ideology, whether the wizards are aware of it or not, can be seen in how the Ministry of Magic runs. For instance, Cornelius Fudge appears to have a connection with Lucius Malfoy, one of the aristocratic wizards of the wealthy Malfoy family who believe strongly in the notions of blood purity and the superiority of pureblood wizards. Due to his social status, Lucius has such a high influence on the Ministry, which often allows him to receive privilege and even act according to his will. This is proven by the quotation below from *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*: "Malfoy's been giving generously to all sorts of things for years... Gets him in with the right people... then he can ask favors... delay laws he doesn't want passed... Oh, he's very well connected, Lucius Malfoy..." (155). It shows that his influence may even affect the law, as he once avoids imprisonment by claiming that he was not acting under the effect of a spell, and thus cleared of all charges without further inquiry. The fact that Lucius escapes punishment simply because of his connection, wealth, and status indicates that there is a clear favoritism in the play of class construction.

On the other hand, wizards that are Muggle-friendly and have relations with Muggles are deemed to have lower social status compared to the purebloods. One of the examples is Arthur Weasley, who apparently receives a rather discriminative treatment due to his Muggle-loving nature. Even though he also works in the Ministry, his office is "dingy" and "slightly smaller than a broom cupboard" (132). It is even located in a shabby corridor next to an actual broom cupboard, depicting comparison of Arthur's workplace and a lowly room. Moreover, Arthur and the Weasleys are labelled as 'blood traitor', because although they are pureblood by ancestry, their tolerance to Muggles and Muggle-born wizards place their reputation in a low position in the wizarding society. The unfairness that Arthur receives depicts how wealth and

social status leads to unjust prejudicial treatment. It is as though in order to be in power, an individual or a group is considered superior than the others.

This ideology has become embedded in the magical community that it affects the decision-making of the Ministry of Magic, particularly the Minister himself. Even though the Ministry does not support the reign of terror of Lord Voldemort, at the same time it also does not exhibit the expected attitude of a government on facing a potential threat. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, when Harry announces the return of Voldemort, the Ministry chooses to deny and conceal it with the reason that it will “start a panic that will destabilize everything [they] have worked for in the last thirteen years” (707). To preserve the Ministry’s best interest and to maintain its reputation, Fudge, as the official of the highest rank in the Ministry, is willing to go to a great length to manipulate the wizarding newspaper, the Daily Prophet, to filter the information only about the ones he considers necessary. Instead of telling the truth, Fudge prefers to indulge the public with what they want to hear instead of what they need to hear as long as it is efficient on saving the Ministry’s credibility. The rights of the public are cut simply because the people in power wish to keep the authority only to themselves, as they are aware that their position and social stability might be under a threat. By dominating the media and driving them into believing a certain point of view, the Ministry of Magic has portrayed a great control and domination over the magical community.

As the wizards of blood purity ideology rises and rules, the people with other blood status begin to realize their position in the society. The awareness of their situation leads to a condition called the class struggle, which is the conflict of interest between the two different groups where the wizards of the so-called lower social status have conflicting ideas with those who sit in the higher position. They do not necessarily demand to replace the pureblood domination with their own regime, but they simply ask for equity and fairness, in which everyone has equal contribution instead of a condition where the people in power abuse their authority to manipulate the life of the less powerful people. However, in order to obtain this equality, they have to struggle and fight for it. Although it may have occurred gradually, the rebellion begins to surface from the fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Due to Ministry’s ignorance for the sake of keeping their absolute rule, the group of people with conflicting interest builds a society called the Order of the Phoenix. Yet, the main intention of the Order is not to put the Ministry’s regime to stop, but to battle against Voldemort’s reign of terror with their own belief. This shows that for their opinion to be heard, they have to crawl their way to the top and convince the public what they believe is true. Interestingly, the Order of the Phoenix does not only consist of the non-purebloods. There are other pureblood wizards, who aim for the same common goal of demolishing the idea of blood purity, that contribute to establishing a classless magical community. There are even Ministry workers who are willing to risk their affiliation with their job only to achieve the egalitarian society. This means the class struggle does not only come from people of the same background, but rather from people with the same ideology and interest. As quoted from a member of the Order in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, “You are on the same side now. Time is short, and unless the few of us who know the truth do not stand united, there is no hope for any of us” (GoF 712). Their struggle to reach their desire indicates that they have to be united to overshadow the ruling group’s existence.

Unlike the Ministry that is headed by an authoritative figure, the Order has no certain leader, except the fact that it is founded by Albus Dumbledore. Until his death by the end of the sixth book, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, he constantly gives advice and be involved in battles that he becomes the leading person of the society. Nevertheless, the Order is composed of a communal group with no individual interest. Every single person works together as a unity to reach the common good. However, Harry's existence and position both in the society and in the Order's structure creates quite a paradox, particularly due to the fact that he is labelled as 'The Chosen One'. Harry represents togetherness in a battle, but at the same time also symbolizes an individual whom everyone hopes to end Voldemort's terror. Yet, instead of playing hero and wanting to be in the front line, Harry's goal is always about acting responsibly, even if it means sacrificing himself. This becomes a quality that the other powerful individuals do not own – the selflessness of putting a community's interest over an individual's.

The conflict of interest between the Ministry and the Order depicts the relationship of a ruling group and a subordinate community. The Ministry represents the bourgeoisie, the capitalistic people in high position who wish to remain ruling and keep the advantages of their power only for themselves. The Ministry, as the governing body itself, abuses its power and only prioritizes the interest of a handful of people instead of taking everyone's common goal. The Order, on the other hand, represents the movement of the proletariat, as they are exploited and manipulated by a higher power. However, as the magical community's welfare is threatened, the Order raises their awareness upon the importance of recognizing their unjust position in the society. They do this by rebelling against the unfair treatment of the bourgeoisie to achieve a common good, which is to establish a classless society with equity and impartiality.

By the end of the series, the Order manages to overthrow the hegemonic ideology of the Ministry. Cornelius Fudge is forced to resign from his position for concealing the truth from the public and failing to keep the peace in the magical community. In the aftermath, after the struggle is over and the people uniting to reach their common goal win the battle, a member of the Order named Kingsley Shacklebolt succeeds as the Minister. This shows that an absolute control of a governing body will not result in a good end. Instead, a society without class system that sees people for their equal rights will eventually preserve.

CONCLUSION

Through the seven books of *Harry Potter* series, J. K. Rowling does not merely show the journey of a wizard boy on conquering the power of evil. The society in the wizarding world reflects an obvious hierarchy and class system of two different sides: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. These two groups are represented by the power-hungry Ministry of Magic and the rebellious Order of the Phoenix respectively. As the Ministry manipulates and imposes their ideology to the public in order to maintain their position and gain the advantages only for themselves, the Order as the representation of the rest of the magical community becomes aware of their stance. They do not wish to be working under the control of the Ministry, and thus form a rebellion for the sake of achieving their own goal. This conflict of interest between the two large groups show a class struggle, in which one side wishes to keep the power only in their hands and the other sees the necessity to demolish power by rebelling, so that they will reach a fair, classless system of a society. At the end, Rowling demonstrates that hierarchical structure

with a certain class overpowering, dominating, and hegemonizing over another is not a desired society, and that a rebellion may occur from the other group to eliminate a particular ideology and gain equality.

REFERENCES

- [1] S. J. Jones, *Antonio Gramsci*. Routledge Critical Thinker. London: Routledge, 2006.
- [2] C. Mouffe, *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1979.
- [3] L. Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-friendly Guide*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- [4] E. Vollmer, "Harry's World: An Exploration of J.K. Rowling's Social and Political Agenda in the Harry Potter Series." *UW-L Journal of Undergraduate Research X*, 2007.
- [5] L. A. Hitchcock, *Theory for Classics: A Student Guide*. New York: Routledge. 2008.
- [6] R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- [7] J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. New York: Scholastic, 1999.
- [8] J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. New York: Scholastic, 2000.
- [9] J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. New York: Scholastic, 2003.
- [10] J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. New York: Scholastic, 2005.