

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of Study

Ideally, people should act in accordance with their own interests, but, in the practice of hegemony, people are manipulated by the dominant's ideology. As a consequence, they actively give their consent to be ruled by the dominant class. Gramsci refers to the people who keep giving their 'spontaneous' consent to be controlled by the ruling group as a 'subaltern' class (Gramsci, A., 1999, p. 20). For Gramsci (1999), a subaltern class always becomes a subject of the ruling class' activities (p. 207). Furthermore, he also asserts that,

[a subaltern class] has not yet gained consciousness of its strength, its possibilities, of how it is to develop, and which therefore does not know how to escape from the primitivist phase. (Gramsci, A., 1999, p. 371)

There are a number of phenomena that represent the operation of hegemonic power in society since hegemony exists in every terrain of life whether in a political, social, or economical aspect. For example, in the context of political, the practice of hegemony is vividly portrayed in a relationship between the political elites and the citizens. A study conducted by Timo Duile (2020) clearly presents the practice of hegemony in Indonesia in which he explains the way the political elites insert religion and sense of nationalist thinking into their political languages. As the result, Indonesian citizens are unconsciously made to focus their attentions on these matters only instead of other important aspects such as economic problems, social inequality, or environment. This issue is represented in 2019 presidential election in Indonesia during which both candidates struggled to win the heart of the masses by using nationalism and religion in their discourse.

However, the study also reveals how this hegemonic practice is challenged by Nurhadi-Aldo campaign initiated by Indonesian students through which they encouraged the citizens not to vote for both candidates since, according to them,

both Jokowi and Prabowo had little concern for public's needs. This *golput* campaign has successfully attracted the attention of thousands of Indonesian people on social media. Hence, it can be said that the campaign succeeds in challenging the hegemony of the dominant class by making religion and nationalism, or common sense, established by the dominant class become visible. In addition, it also shows that the practice of hegemony is never complete. Therefore, it can be noted that the portrayal of hegemony can be scrutinized through the language used by the dominant class. In this study, it can be seen how the political elites in Indonesia dominate the minds of the citizens at large and, thus, establishes hegemony. Even though it encounters resistance, the political elites still managed to maintain its hegemony.

Moreover, not only in political aspect, hegemony also occurs in educational institution. It's proved by a study conducted by Syukur Muhammad (2019) which investigates hegemonic practices in college life, precisely at Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia. The study reveals that there's a practice of hegemony done by the seniors or upperclassmen to the freshmen. In order to make the freshmen actively participate in the organizational activities at college, the upperclassmen use both consent and force. In terms of consent, they reassure the freshmen that joining organizational activities in campus is extremely crucial. Meanwhile, in the context of force, the upperclassmen impose sanctions on whoever fails to meet the upperclassmen's interests. As a consequence, many freshmen are willing to join the organizational activities since they're afraid of the punishments.

However, the existence of hegemony not only can be examined through real life events, but it also can be learned through literary works like novels because most authors are inspired from reality in writing the novels. One of the novels through which hegemonic power can be scrutinized is *The Handmaid's Tale* novel by Margaret Atwood. It's a dystopian fiction, which is the kind of genre that can be regarded as a warning against the negative impacts of certain changes in society (Mirzayee, M., 2019). Hence, dystopian novel represents what

the future will be like for certain society if they don't start changing what needs to be changed in order to create a better future.

As a dystopian novel, *The Handmaid's Tale* presents the story that is not entirely fictional. Atwood was inspired by the conditions that ever happened in the real world specifically by the rise of right wing alliance during the presidency of Ronald Reagan in the US as well as the environmental concerns during the Cold War due to toxic wastes, nuclear weapons, genetic engineering, and power plants (Sethna, C., 2020). The novel has won many prestigious awards (as cited from Mirzayee, M., 2019), including the Governor General's Award in Canada, the Booker Prize in Britain, the Los Angeles Times Fiction Prize in the United States, and the Arthur C. Clarke Science Fiction Prize. Moreover, the novel has also been adapted into TV series *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017-present) which had been nominated for many famous awards.

The Handmaid's Tale novel was published in 1985. The novel is Atwood's sixth novel which was written while she was in the United States, specifically both in Alabama and West Berlin, in the mid-1980s (Joodaki et al., 2013). The novel tells a story about a state named the Republic of Gilead and is told from the leading character's point of view called Offred who is one of the Handmaids whose role is to conceive her commander's baby. In the novel, she narrates her present in which she lives as a Handmaid and her past life in which she lives with her family. Throughout the story, it can be seen how the ruling class attempts to lead and dominate the society through various tools including religion which is used to manipulate or indoctrinate the subordinate groups. It's done by the ruling class in order to achieve the active consent of those over whom it rules, which is known as hegemony.

For the researcher, hegemony can be understood as a condition in which certain social group is imposed or manipulated by the dominant group's ideology. This ideology, which is introduced by the dominant group through various mediators, governs the way they think and behave. In this sense, these people, who are in control, do the things that benefit the dominant group. They actively and continuously give their consent to live their lives based on the interest of the

dominant group. They're willing to do so because they perceive it as normal, acceptable, or they don't have any choices because the practice of hegemony is inevitable and it occurs in every terrain of life.

In general, hegemony is understood as a domination of certain group over another group by using consent as its underlying practice and coercion as its shield in facing resistances of the dominated group which can occur at any times. It's proved by Robert Cox's statement (as cited in Houssay-Holzschuch, M., 2020) which says that hegemony is a domination of one group over another by promoting its interest to be accepted by another group as desirable and natural or, in other words, as common sense. Furthermore, Ranajit Guha states that consent undeniably correlates with coercion; there will be no hegemony without force. It's because the dominant group will always find resistance during its hegemonic practices (Houssay-Holzschuch, M., 2020). In line with that statement, Raymond Williams (as cited in Kim, S., 2015) emphasizes that the practice of hegemony must be continuously recreated, renewed, and protected since it'll always be continually challenged, limited, resisted, and altered.

Antonio Gramsci is most famous for his notion of hegemony. There are two important relationships underpinning Gramsci's notion of hegemony which are consent versus coercion or force and civil society versus political society or the state. According to Gramsci (as cited Houssay-Holzschuch, M., 2020), hegemony relies more on consent rather than on coercion. Consent is achieved when the dominant group's interest seems to be the society's interest at large. In order to do so, the ruling group must take at least some values in that society and transform them into the worldview of the ruling group (Jones, S., 2006, p. 46). Thus, by doing so, the ruling group is able to impose its power in a 'natural' way since the ruled group will perceive the ruling group's worldview as their own. In addition to that, the ruling class also needs to allow the ruled groups to voice their aspirations as well as giving them particular privileges in order to win their active consent (Jones, S., 2006, p. 47-48).

However, even though the ruling class has obtain the active consent of the masses, there's always an opportunity for the ruled groups to challenge the

hegemony of the ruling class. In this case, the ruling class needs to use coercion in order to maintain its power. Hence, for Gramsci (1999) hegemony is protected by the armour of coercion (p. 532). In this sense, Gramsci argues that,

The 'normal' exercise of hegemony on the now classical terrain of the parliamentary regime is characterised by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent. Indeed, the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority (Gramsci, A., 1999, p. 248).

Furthermore, Gramsci has argued that (as cited in Jones, S., 2006, p. 48) hegemony is a never ending process which means that a social group or a ruling class has to impose leadership even when it has succeeded in winning the power. In other words, the ruling class must be aware of the changing needs or minds of the masses and, hence, willing to keep recreating its worldview. Thus, it can be said that hegemony is a practice that must be maintained not only by using consent but also coercion since the ruled group may form resistances. It's in accordance with Gramsci's representation of power which is borrowed from Machiavelli's portrayal of centaur, half-beast and half-man; a combination of coercion and consent. In this sense, Gramsci argues that power will be more willingly accepted and obeyed by the masses when coercion or violence can be incorporated at any times (Houssay-Holzschuch, M., 2020).

Moreover, Gramsci relates the idea of consent and coercion with political and civil society. Civil society refers to the institutions which are sometimes perceived as private, but, in fact, civil society is in the domain of the state since it's created as well as operated by the same bourgeois law. Meanwhile, political society is ordinarily called as the state. The only difference between civil society and political society is that civil society functions through consensus, while political society operates through force (Daldal, A., 2014). In this sense, civil society gives a major contribution in maintaining the hegemony of the dominant class. This statement is asserted by Gramsci (as cited in Daldal, A., 2014) who states that without having the consensus of the masses, the effort of the repressive apparatus of the state or political society will be futile. The political society includes the apparatuses like the police, army, and juridical system, while the

mass media, education system, churches, associations, literature, and spatial features are categorized as civil society (Houssay-Holzschuch, M., 2020).

Several studies have conducted researches related to Gramsci's concept of hegemony. One of the studies conducted by Anat First (2016) examines Gramsci's concept of common sense and good sense in the Israeli television industry. The result of the study is that there are three divisions represented on Israeli TV. The first division is related to nationality. It's portrayed by a total absence of Arab Israelis on TV that reflects the existence of common sense which marginalizes the Arab Israeli groups. The second division is linked with a common sense which regards women as inferior to men. The last division is represented by the occurrence of hierarchical position between two ethnic groups due to the existing common sense. Therefore, the study presents that common sense governs the programs on Israeli TV. This study is useful to understand common sense as a key element in the practice of hegemony.

Furthermore, there are also studies that scrutinize the portrayal of hegemony in novels. One of them is a study by Mona Hoorvash & Selma Rezvanjoo (2017) that analyzes hegemonic practices in the *Treasure Island* novel by Robert Louis Stevenson. The study shows that there's a strong hegemony occurs in the novel. However, the study also reveals that the dominant class experiences resistances in its hegemonic practice; war of maneuver and war of position. Hence, this study gives insight into how the subaltern class challenges the dominant class' hegemony, and it also demonstrates the strategies used by the dominant class in order to maintain its hegemony. Another study conducted by Umi Nisbatul, F. Z. and Fatma Hetami (2019) analyzes Lois Lowry's novel *The Giver* by using Gramsci's theory of hegemony. In the study, they examine the 'sameness' occurred in the novel which is regarded as a form of hegemony imposed by the ruling class. In this sense, the ruling class uses both consent and coercion in order to create utopian society. Therefore, this study reveals how consent and force are co-exist in the practice of hegemony.

Hegemony not only exists in a novel but also in a play. It's proved by a study by Wajiran (2013) that examines the concept of hegemony in the play *Man*

and Superman by George Bernard Shaw. In the study, he identifies that there are three kinds of hegemony in the play, which are the hegemony of men over women, rulers over the citizens, and the old over the young. Thus, this study shows how hegemony exists in different forms of relationships or context.

From the previous studies mentioned above, none of the researchers start their analyses by making a categorization of Gramsci's crucial notions in hegemonic practice which are consent and coercion. Even if there's a categorization of consent and coercion, the researcher didn't explain them deeply. As the result, other studies fail to reveal the relation or the co-existence of consent and coercion in the process of hegemony. Meanwhile, in this study, the writer intends to examine further Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony by analyzing the portrayal of hegemonic power in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel by Margaret Atwood. Specifically, the writer will investigate the political strategies used by the dominant class in order to achieve the active consent of the subaltern class and, hence, establishes hegemonic power. In this sense, the writer will explain deeply about the co-existence and the importance of both consent and coercion in the maintenance of power.

The reason why *The Handmaid's Tale* novel was chosen to be analyzed is because of its popularity starting from its publishing, in 1985, until the writer decided to use this novel as a corpus, in the year of 2020-2021. *The Handmaid's Tale* novel still continues to become a topic of discussion in the world especially in the European countries until present day because its TV series, *The Handmaid's Tale*, which is adapted from *The Handmaid's Tale* novel, is still airing up until now. Hence, the researcher is interested to analyze this novel because of its influence and prestige not only in the past time but also in the present time. However, in spite of its popularity and how often this novel had been used as a corpus in many researches, none of the researchers analyzed the issue of hegemony in the novel. Hence, the researcher intends to scrutinize the practice of hegemony in the novel since this issue is vividly portrayed in the novel.

Moreover, the concept of hegemony is significant to be discussed since people, in particular the inferior ones, are mostly not aware of the oppression done

by people those in power that can be seen in a study conducted by Timo Duile (2020) and Syukur Muhammad (2019) which vividly portray how the practice of hegemony is dangerous since it manipulates people's minds and controls them to act in accordance with the dominant class' worldview or interest. In addition, in The Handmaid's Tale novel itself, it portrays how the ruling government tricks the subordinate class into living based on the ruling class' interest. Therefore, this study will analyze this issue deeply in order to give the readers insights about how hegemonic class imposes and maintains its hegemony. Hopefully, this study will help the readers to be aware of the hegemonic practices imposed on them.

1.2. Research Question

How is hegemonic power of the ruling class portrayed in The Handmaid's Tale novel?

What are the political strategies used by the ruling class in maintaining its power?

1.3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate how hegemonic power of the ruling class is portrayed in The Handmaid's Tale novel and reveal the political strategies used by the ruling class in maintaining its power.

1.4. Scope of the Study

This study intends to investigate the hegemonic power and the political strategies of the ruling class in The Handmaid's Tale novel by Margaret Atwood through Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony.

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study hopefully can be used as a reference in analyzing hegemonic practices that exist in literary works as well as in external world. The result of this research aims at providing the insights in sociological and literary studies. In addition, this study also intends to give benefit to the readers who are planning on discussing the issue of hegemony.