

CULTURAL HEGEMONY IN A CONVENIENCE STORE WOMAN BY SAYAKA MURATA THROUGH THE USE OF A COMMON STANDARD

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Abstract

Using Gramsci's hegemony theory, this study reveals the cultural hegemony through normal standards that describe the character in Sayaka Murata's novel *Convenience Store Woman*. The study itself aims to demonstrate how the character with hegemony uses the standard as a tool of cultural hegemony in the workplace, family, and society. This research employs Gramsci's theory of geopolitical imperialism with a focus on cultural hegemony. According to the findings of this study, Keiko Furuhashi experiences hegemony—in particular cultural hegemony—from the people around her, including those at school, at work, in her family, and in society. The application or creation of certain norms or standards regarding self-image, work, and social status results in the hegemony. In addition, this study revealed that Keiko's character engaged in imitation, lying, adaptation, and efforts to improve herself in order to avoid an "abnormal" status or a negative public impression.

Key words: Cultural hegemony, convenience store woman, Sayaka Murata

INTRODUCTION

In a society that is moving and changing, culture is a tool (Suprayogi, 2019), (Suprayogi & Pranoto, 2020). These shifts were made possible in one way or another by society and the social structure that underpins the culture (Gulö, 2018). We cannot deny that a system governs the development of a culture (Puspita & Amelia, 2020). This system also has connections to religion, morals, and social norms (Samanik & Lianasari, 2018), (Pradana & Suprayogi, 2021). By establishing a specific system, culture can survive on society's influence and intervention (Kardiansyah & Qodriani, 2018). As a result, cultural hegemony as a means by which some individuals or groups can exercise hegemony. As for the definition of hegemony itself, according to (Sartika & Pranoto, 2021) is “a constant and large-scale process of creation with the degree of legitimacy it dictates and provides room for antagonistic cultural expressions to flourish.”. Thus, cultural hegemony means a system built because of the awareness formed by intellectuals so as to produce knowledge, values, (Suprayogi, Samanik, et al., 2021) and norms as a result of the process of events carried

out by the community consciously and without coercion (Qodriani & Wijana, 2020), (Mandasari & Aminatun, 2020). Therefore, the purpose of the existence of cultural hegemony is a form of awareness created by the authorities to create values and norms so as to create harmony in society (Hutauruk & Puspita, 2020), (Afrianto et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, there are several tools that can be used to “how” this practice of cultural hegemony works. Of all these means, literary works can be a means to express issues related to events that occur in society (Sari & Pranoto, 2021). Because as part of cultural work, literary works can be a medium for the events recorded in them (Al Falaq et al., 2021), (Qodriani, 2021). In this case, the writers want to examine the picture of cultural hegemony that occurs in Japanese society. To express it, the writer discusses the characters from the novel by Sayaka Murata, namely *Convenience Store Woman*. As one of the famous work from Japanese writer, *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata reveals some issues related with current situation (Mertania & Amelia, 2020). First time was published in 2018 by Grove Books, the novel itself has succeeded by selling on over million copy in around of the world and has published in thirty-one different countries (Interview with the translator Ginny Tapley Takemori, 2019). This success, one of the reasons was because although a fictional tale, *Convenience Store Woman* is based on social reality with issues that are criticized and overcome, so, in this context, the literary work come from some cultural contexts in the societies (Suprayogi & Eko, 2020), (Nababan & Nurmaily, 2021). In addition, the author believes that the picture of society, especially Japanese society is quite well represented in this novel. It also highlighted by Sara Doel (2019) who stated that *Convenience Store Woman* “depicts several issues facing Japanese society today: the pressure to conform, labor shortages, and a decreasing marriage rate, coupled with the growing number of unmarried singletons”.

From several issues that insist within this novel, the writers only focus on issues related to norms and values in Japanese culture. Because in these norms and values, cultural hegemony occurs by creating standards of normality in society (Fakhrurozi et al., 2021), (Yulianti & Sulistyawati, 2021). One such hegemony, for example, is in the status attached to women in Japan, which is also depicted in the character or characters in Sayaka Murata's novel (Purwaningsih & Gulö, 2021). According to (Suprayogi, Puspita, et al., 2021), there are two terms that are good and bad for a person (woman) in Japan, namely *Make'Inu*

(loser) and *Kachi'Inu* (winner). Both terms target the status of Japanese women, that for those who have not (or are not) married until over the age of 30 and do not have children (Puspita & Pranoto, 2021), they are seen as losers (*Make'Inu*), even though the woman has a successful career (Istiani & Puspita, 2020).

In addition, the practice of hegemony also occurs in several other aspects outside of career and status (Samanik, 2021), (Kardiansyah & Salam, 2020). The practice is created from the normal standards that exist in a family, school, workplace, and society itself (Isnaini & Aminatun, 2021). As for when someone is like a character in a novel who looks far from “normal”, while others force him to change himself and adjust to become someone who is accepted in society (Kuswoyo & Siregar, 2019), (Fithratullah, 2019). As for the violence and cold treatment experienced by Keiko's character, another researcher Totsuka revealed that *Convenience Store Human* shows more "Normal" people's violence than Keiko's strange-looking behavior. Thus, "Normal" people or the general public roughly treats Keiko as "Imperfection" and excludes her from the general public and forces her to become a normal figure (Qodriani & Kardiansyah, 2018).

The healing process or indirect pressure shows the practice of cultural hegemony represented in the characters in the *Convenience Store Woman* novel, namely Keiko Furuhashi. Keiko who feels that she is not normal, or at least is aware that other people see her as abnormal, wants to change or adjust herself to be accepted by those around her. From there, we also see that the process of willingness to adapt is a symptom of Keiko's hegemony of culture and views in the society where Keiko lives. As for looking at it more deeply, this research was made by the writer. The purpose of this research, despite to revealing how a cultural hegemony occurs in society, is also to provide other interpretations of literary works in order to broaden the horizon of knowledge for others.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research have focused on reveal social issue in society with sociological approach. It is because sociological approach is more concerned an individuals and their relationship with society, like cultural, economical or political aspect (Pranoto & Suprayogi, 2020), (Pranoto, 2021). It is able to help researchers to draw an understanding of a literary work and its correlation with certain phenomena that exist in society. However, the author uses

specifically theory under the umbrella of a sociological approach, namely cultural hegemony by Gramsci (1973). As previously mentioned, cultural hegemony occurs when there is a system that exerts indirect influence on individuals or groups with educational and cultural-based settings (Puspita, n.d.). As asserted by (Journal et al., 2021), they believes that, the way the ruling affirms their domination to the people is by controlling their ideology, norms, and values. Thus, in turn will give them total control to their economic, politic, and all their systems. Meanwhile, specifically, Artz and Murphy (2000) discussed cultural hegemony in their book *Cultural Hegemony in the United States* in which they stated that people are surrounded by power: corporate power, media power, and power of boss over worker, power of teacher over student. Besides, to make it this is clear, the writer uses Gramsci's geopolitics of imperialism which focuses on indirect domination of a group of people that is carried out without coercion. The medium used in this practice is culture, so it can be said that the hegemony that occurs is cultural hegemony.

As for looking more deeply, the author will describe other studies that also use this approach. First, in 2020, Nam Sang-hyon & Yo Jaejin wrote a article with title *The Problems of the Absence of an Inner Self and of Moral Education in Contemporary Japan Echoed in Convenience Store Human*. This article discusses the *Convenience Store Human* as a critique that has implications for contemporary Japanese society, especially people who want to switch from humanism to post-humanism. From their research question, namely, "How can we judge ethically if we don't have a conscience?", which is in the introduction, the researcher answered, "If we don't have a mind, of course we can't judge ethically or not something, but we're just human beings who follow all the demands like in manuals, like 'Mind Notebook'" (Amelia & Dintasi, 2019), (Kardiansyah & Salam, 2021). Based on the finding, the writer just focused on how the lack of self inner have influence to people act, specially in case of the character in the novel. In other words, the writer only focuses on the influence of self-construction related to morals and ethics whose data comes from oneself. In their article, they do not discuss further the relationship between the construction of society and culture that exists in the formation of standards that are created to judge a person. Therefore, this research is intended to complement the studies that have been written previously by focusing on sociological studies, namely Gramsci hegemony, to reveal the practice of cultural hegemony that occurs in the novel *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata.

In the term of cultural hegemony, the writer look further to other research, namely *Cultural hegemony in Charles Dickens's A Tale of Two Cities (2014)* by Meysam Ahmadi. Ahmadi in his research focused on a novel by Dickens which describes the upheaval of British society and politics in the 19th century (Suprayogi, Pranoto, et al., 2021), (Kardiansyah, 2019). Broadly speaking, the topic discussed by the writer is how cultural hegemony is depicted in the story in the novel. To find out more, the writer uses Gramsci's theory of hegemony, which states that power does not have to be achieved by coercion, but can also be done with other media that are consenting. This hegemony then works in fields whose territory is close to ours, we are not aware that schools and education, as well as community habits, are areas that are prone to be objects of a hegemony. That way, from the writer's exposure in his journal, he found these signs during the period of the French Revolution. British society at that time, which was influenced by some things from France, was also hegemonized through the mass media and the field of education. There are people at the top, who are joined as aristocrats. They want to perpetuate their power and domination, so they determine ways to do that. However, instead of doing it by force, they choose a subtle way, namely through campaigns, elections, dissemination of information in the media, and also inserting certain ideologies in the field of education. They know that by concentrating on gaining people's approval, their power and influence can be best channeled. That's where cultural hegemony works.

On the other hand, we see the same case in Gustin Fadiliyanti's (2020) research entitled *Cultural Hegemony as Reflected in Hailsham Academy in Never Let Me Go by Kazuo Ishiguro*. Gustin's research is based on Gramsci's theory which says that good hegemony is not by coercion or direct appointment of power, but by subtly disseminated influence. In the case of Gustin's research, the object of research is the Hailsham Academy clan which shows signs of hegemony over the other students (Qomariah & Sucipto, 2021). The scope of their hegemony is also diverse, ranging from ideology, social institutions, to social stratification. Furthermore, in the school, there is no punishment and coercion in their environment, but they use consensus to achieve something. In addition, they also do not practice coercion, because what they show is more like the spread of ideological influences, perceptions and certain values, which are propagated through educational institutions and the educational model they apply. That way, students don't realize that they are

hegemonized, they don't know there are outside influences that affect their interests, habits, and lifestyle while at school. Cultural hegemony works well, the authorities in the school practice it subtly. Therefore, according to Gustin's research, the Hailsham Academy figure completely shows the practices of cultural hegemony. Thus, from the three studies above, the writer wants to examine the character of Kieko Furukura in the novel *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata with the cultural hegemony approach of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937).

METHOD

The methodology of this study is descriptive-qualitative. This research possesses a number of characteristics, one of which is the capacity to generate general issues from a specific event or phenomenon. In addition, this study is also library research because it collects additional data by thoroughly reading data sources and locating data related to the authors' concerns. In terms of data collection, this study relies on qualitative data from both primary and secondary sources. The novel *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata served as the source for the primary data, while narratives and dialogues can be used for the qualitative data in qualitative research. As a result, it takes from its dialogue and narcissism. In the meantime, secondary data was gathered from other writings about the novel and the author's theory; consequently, in addition to scripts or texts, the text data sources include books, articles, and journals. The author also carried out this research by noting quotes that were indicators of the issues that the authors raised from these two data sources. The writer then gathered them and looked at them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With a sociological approach to literature, namely Gramsci's hegemony, the author finds several hegemonic practices that occur in the *convenience store Woman* novel. The hegemony experienced by the main character in the novel, Keiko Furuvara, revolves around daily events that occur in society, family, school, and workplace. As part of a society, Keiko gets an indirect influence on many things related to her status and existence. Since childhood, Keiko was introduced to the concept of "normal" which is embraced by the people around her, including family and society. The concept then provides certain standards that must be met by Keiko. This concept shackles Keiko, starting from trivial things such as dressing, talking, communicating, and developing her career and status in

society. Thus, indirectly, there are rules that apply in the society where Keiko lives. Those rules must be fulfilled so that he can get the title as a "Normal" person.

What Keiko didn't know was that the standard of normalcy that existed in society didn't just happen. That standard has passed through many ages and religious types of people face. And of course, that standard cannot be separated from the influence of Japanese culture in general. From another novel by Sayaka Murata, *Earthlings*, society is considered an inherent part of Japanese culture. Although Japanese society is considered as a separate society individually, they are actually a group of people who adhere to the rules, norms, values, and standards that were created (Murata, 2020). In Japanese society, the culture that puts forward the norms of "agency" is still a consideration taken by someone as part of society. Thus, the existence of certain norms or standards can be binding.

Another thing, the standard of normality can also be understood as one of the instruments of cultural hegemony. The cultures contained in the standard of normality, which are passed down from generation to generation, are also transmitted unconsciously from one person to another, becoming the practice of a cultural hegemony. Although the culture referred to here is not just culture in a narrow or traditional sense, but rather a description of the norms that occur in society; the practice of hegemony is not completely gone. Because, instead of disappearing with the arrival of an era, the hegemony also evolves according to the development of the times and the society in it.

Cultural Hegemony in School

The hegemony that occurs around the school is seen in a scene that describes "how Keiko should behave". On one occasion, Keiko is seen as someone who is strange and not the norm because she has a different response from her friends when she gets a pair of guys fighting:

There was also that big commotion soon after I started primary school, when some boys started fighting during the break time. The other kids started wailing, "Get a teacher!" and "Someone stop them!" And so I went to the tool shed, took out a spade, ran over to the unruly boys, and bashed one of them over the head. Everyone started

screaming as he fell down clutching his skull. Seeing as he'd stopped moving, my attention turned to the other boy, and I raised the spade again. "Keiko-chan, stop! Please stop!" the girls shouted at me tearfully. Some teachers came over and, dumbfounded, demanded I explain myself.

"Everyone was saying to stop them, so that's what I did." (Murata, 2018: 10)

For Keiko, the most appropriate way to end a fight is to hurt the fighting party, so they can stop fighting. However, for the community or people around the school, this action is considered as something strange or outside the form of normality. Keiko is considered strange because it breaks up a fight by hurting the two fighting parties. From there, she received a reprimand from the teachers who said her actions were wrong and dangerous. Though, Keiko's intentions were really good, she just wanted to stop the fight. However, because of the standards at school that don't want or can accept Keiko's actions, a strange or unnatural label is attached to Keiko. Thus, we can see that cultural hegemony occurs in norms that come from the past, which states that violence should not be fought with violence. This norm is approved by all sections of the people in the school, so when someone acts outside this norm, then he or she will be labeled as bad or abnormal.

Cultural Hegemony in Work Place

There are several things related to the practice of hegemony that occurs at Keiko's place of work. We know, culture is also related to what we show to others. Something that can relate to fashion, how to behave, how to act, and how to communicate. Just like the norms above, all of these things also have a measure that is considered good depending on the assessment in the community itself. A society that gives a measure of whether something is appropriate or not, appropriate or not, good or not, suitable or not, appropriate or not, and many other standards. On one occasion, Keiko's character was faced with a situation that indicated that she had been hegemonized through the way she behaved and looked. As this narrative shows:

People would notice if I copied her exactly, though, so what I do is read blogs by people who wear the same clothes she does and go for the other brands of clothes and kinds of shawls they talk about buying. Mrs. Izumi's clothes, accessories, and hairstyles

always strike me as the model of what a woman in her thirties should be wearing. (Murata, 2018: 20)

This standard of appearance is imitated by Keiko as an effect that she has been culturally hegemonized. She tries to fit herself into the various aspects of her workplace, just so that she can be accepted. As for other examples, we can see:

“We’ve got quite similar tastes, haven’t we? I like your bag too,” Mrs. Izumi said with a smile.

It’s only natural that my tastes would match hers since I’m copying her. I’m sure everyone must see me as someone with an ageappropriate bag and a manner of speech that has a perfect sense of distance without being reserved or rude. (Murata, 2018: 21)

To be accepted, Keiko did imitation. She imitates several biological and social aspects of the people around her such as how to dress, behave, talk, and communicate. This is not without reason, because Keiko wants to be “normal” like everyone else around her. She wanted others to see her as a person who was not strange. Thus, the awareness that she wants to imitate and change herself can be understood as an indirect response from the cultural hegemony she experiences.

Cultural Hegemony in Society

The thing that is most at issue in this novel is society itself. In some parts, Keiko is confronted with certain situations that put her in a position to choose to follow the flow of culture in society or just sit back and enjoy her world. However, still, Keiko lives in an era where judgments and norms in society become an inseparable instrument. That problem, for example, is illustrated in a scene that shows that Keiko must accept an invitation to become part of society:

But it’s the only connection I have to the world outside the convenience store and a precious opportunity to mingle with “normal” women my age, so I usually accept her invitations. Today there was Yukari and her young child, and Satsuki, who was married but still childless, and we had all brought cakes along to have with tea. (Murata, 2018: 23)

On other hands, regarding with her career and marital status of Keiko's character:

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“I’m working part-time in a convenience store. My health ...”

I was about to give the usual excuse my sister had made for me, when Eri leaned forward. “Part-time? Oh, so that means you got married!” she said, as if it were self-evident. “When was that?” (Murata, 2018: 50)

Also, when Keiko noticed the snide comments regarding her status:

He stared at me as though I were some kind of alien. “What, you never ...? I mean, if finding a job is so hard, then at least you should get married. Look, these days there are always things like online marriage sites, you know,” he sputtered. (Murata, 2018: 51)

These scenes clearly depict Keiko's position as a party that is considered strange by society. Her status as a part-time worker, as well as single status at the age of 36, is enough to be a requirement to be seen as someone who is not “normal” or strange. Society creates these standards, then indirectly spreads them through interactions in everyday life, so that the influence reaches Keiko. This influence can then be understood as a process of cultural hegemony that occurs indirectly and without coercion. The community around Keiko only responds to her status and circumstances, she may not directly give suggestions to do this or that, but from that indirectness, a process of hegemony occurs from society towards Keiko Furuwara.

Cultural Hegemony in Family

Keiko became the eldest child of her family. However, unlike his sister, Keiko is not married yet and still works as a part-timer. Since childhood, Keiko was considered a strange child, or a little unique, with the ideas and actions that he put out. Even until Keiko grew up, she still felt the feeling that she was not a normal person. Keiko felt she needed to be healed:

The normal world has no room for exceptions and always quietly eliminates foreign objects. Anyone who is lacking is disposed of. So that’s why I need to be cured. Unless I’m cured, normal people will expurgate me. Finally I understood why my family had tried so hard to fix me. (Murata, 2018: 52)

From the narration, it can be seen that there is a consciousness that arises in Keiko. To become normal, Keiko realizes that she needs to do a number of things and changes, so that she can meet the demands and standards that exist in society. He also felt that feeling towards the family around him. Keiko realizes that her family wants her to be a normal person, because for her own family, having family members who are all normal is an unavoidable dream. Therefore, from the indirect influence suppressed by hegemony, Keiko felt the need to improve herself.

CONCLUSION

We can draw the conclusion, based on the findings and results, that Keiko's society's cultural hegemony is achieved by enforcing universally accepted norms. Keiko herself is subjected to this hegemony on a variety of levels and in a variety of contexts, including school, work, family, and society. We can see that the practice of hegemony is actually taking place, particularly in terms of status and culture, as depicted by Keiko Furuwara. One of the indicators that the hegemony is in fact taking place is Keiko's tendency to imitate the mannerisms, mannerisms, and appearance of those around her in order to project a positive image and be regarded as typical. This portrayal of Keiko's character thus demonstrates that the protagonist suffers throughout the novel's entirety. Keiko also has to deal with the standard of normality that comes with her job and status. From there, it can be deduced that Keiko is experiencing hegemony from the society in which she lives because of his desire to improve himself to match the standard of normalcy.

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