

THE DOMINATION OF IDEAS AND INTELLECTUALITY IN GAINING THE POWER AND HEGEMONY IN THE PLAY *MAN AND SUPERMAN* BY GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

*Wajiran**

ABSTRAK

*Penelitian ini dimaksudkan untuk mengungkap konsep hegemoni yang terdapat di dalam drama *Man and Superman*. Drama yang ditulis oleh seorang aktivis sosial dan politik ini mengandung berbagai pelajaran yang penting bagi perubahan sosial. Oleh karena itu, sangatlah wajar jika drama ini dianggap sebagai sebuah propaganda yang dilakukan oleh penulis untuk perubahan sosial. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori sosiologi, khususnya teori hegemoni Antonio Gramsci. Dengan menggunakan teori ini diharapkan akan dapat dipahami keterkaitan antara karya sastra dengan kondisi masyarakat yang melatarbelakangi lahirnya karya ini, sekaligus harapan penulis menciptakan karya sastra ini. Norma-norma dan nilai pendidikan yang ingin disampaikan penulis diharapkan dapat diungkap dengan pendekatan ini.*

Kata Kunci: *dinamika sosial, hegemoni, literature, Man and Superman, perubahan sosial, politik*

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the concept of hegemony in *Man and Superman*, a play written by a social and political activist. This play contains important lessons for social changes. Consequently, it can be regarded as a propaganda expressed by the author for making changes in the society. A sociological theory, i.e. the theory of hegemony proposed by Antonio Gramsci, was used in the study. By using this theory, it is expected that the relationship between literature and the condition of the society at that time that triggers the birth of this work as well as the author's hopes and expectation could be understood. Through this approach, it is expected that the norms and educational values embodied in the play could be revealed and understood.

Keywords: hegemony, literature, *Man and Superman*, politics, social changes, social dynamics

INTRODUCTION

Every literary work has its own goals or intentions, both ideologically and politically. These ideological and political values are intended to criticize, support, and sometimes reflect the faith of society (Rachman, 2008; Berry, 1995). Drama is a special genre of literature that transfers ideas to the audience, provides moral lessons, and

allows reflection. Compared with other literary works, such as novels and poetry, drama has a unique characteristic as a medium of criticism, especially of government and society. Drama reflects ideological, political and social values, and is a platform for social criticism (Bocock, 1985).

This paper attempts to explore the social problems reflected in the play *Man and Superman*

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by George Bernard Shaw. It is based on the assumption that this literary work has social phenomena as its foundation (Wellek and Warren, 1995). De Bonald reiterates that literature is “an expression of society” (via Wellek and Warren, 1990:110); hence, the ideas put forth in literary works reflect society and the age when the work was created.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the political problems posed in literature, researchers need to use a theoretical approach. For this work, Antonio Gramsci’s concept of “hegemony” is a very appropriate tool to help researchers understand the social problems in Shaw’s work. The underlying context of *Man and Superman* is about gaining the position of power in the social dynamic, which is the basis of the hegemony concept.

Gramsci’s hegemony is the development of Marxist theory. According to Gramsci (via Gaus and Kukhatas, 2004), mass media and intellectuality play significant roles in forming the political ideas at every level of the social and cultural context. Therefore, we need to know the concept of Marxism to have a comprehensive understanding of Gramsci’s theory. In Marxism, material (capital) is the most important factor in gaining power in the social dynamic, whereas in Gramsci’s theory, power is mostly influenced by the mastery of ideas (intellectuality). Ideas are at its core and are the most important factors to gain a powerful position in society.

Hegemony is also defined as leadership or domination (Faruk, 1999:68). Domination of other communities, ideas, and intellectuality are the most important factors. In Gramscian theory, we still realize the importance of material or capital, but it is not the core of social bargaining. Gramsci says that the characteristic of domination can be economic and ethical-politics; in this case, material can be a factor of hegemony. According to Edward Said (1978), there are some kinds of power that deal with the hegemony concept. They are political power (in the form of colonialism and imperialism), the power of intellectuality (in

education, the processes of linguistics, science, and other knowledge), cultural power (the taste of canons, texts, and values), and moral power (the judgment of goodness).

Shaw’s play *Man and Superman* is a literary work that reflects aspects of hegemony. The drama describes the competition between the characters to obtain power using the medium of hegemony to influence others. Hegemony in this context are wealth (capital), gender (man is regarded more powerful than woman), and age (the older man is regarded as the most powerful, has more experience, and is the most intellectual).

The three hegemonic problems are regarded as the major themes of this play. The major themes are explored in four chapters or sessions. They are: 1) Ann’s guardian. Ann is the daughter, and is regarded as a weak person that must be guarded by an older man; 2) the dichotomy between the level of rights held by the older and the younger; and 3) the issues of unfairness done by the government to its citizens.

THE COMPETITION IN GAINING POWER AND HEGEMONY

The competition of power is a truth of society. Each person or group of people will try to have power over others. It is caused by the different interests of each person or community in the society. Each person will combat and compete in many ways to be the leader or simply to be known within the community. This competition will bring about the segmentation of society into separate social groups, with each person forming a group based on the same interests. The groups will compete with each other to gain power, which inevitably leads to conflicts for the individuals, as well as the community, as a result of different interests.

In the description in the play *Man and Superman*, George Bernard Shaw reflects how social clashes happen because of different interests. The characters in this play represent each interest and have their own political beliefs.

As a result, they fight each other using hegemony as described above. These different interests will influence not only their everyday problems, but also the political atmosphere.

John Tanner, the main character in this play, attracts a lot of competition because of his ideas. He represents the revolutionary youth, and possesses a great deal of potential. As the representation of youth, Tanner has very progressive ideas for developing his society to become independent. He is also very dynamic in transferring his ideas to motivate society to foster the movement. He believes that it is every person's right to have a free will and the freedom to express ideas, and tries to encourage every person to exercise these rights.

Tanner tries to break the youth away from the shackles of the *status quo* (the older). He fights against their ideology and regards their ideas as useless and out-of date. He struggles for the freedom to participate in social change, and realizes that this freedom is the key to encouraging every person to join him in his efforts. Tanner's mission is to eliminate discrimination in the social dynamic, a condition that will have a positive impact on the social and political atmosphere in the community.

Roebuck Ramsden represents the older man and is Tanner's opposition. As the olderman, he has had many experiences and also has more capital. Economically and socially, Ramsden is in a higher position than Tanner. Therefore, when Ramsden speaks, people obey and trust him. Tanner, as the young person, is regarded as unstable and lacking experience. Whatever he says is perceived as weak compared to the older man. Based on these assumptions, Ann's mother chooses Ramsden to be her guardian as she has no trust or faith in the younger Tanner.

Ramsden fears he will lose his power toward Ann's family because of the influence of Tanner's ideas. He maintains the societal belief that the older man is the most experienced in solving life's problems; therefore, Tanner cannot be Ann's guardian. Ramsden is afraid that Ann will make

mistakes in her life without the proper guidance. This different perception about the right guardian for Ann becomes an issue about the experienced person versus the inexperienced, with the former regarded as the intellectual capital.

To justify that the young are weak, Ramsden vilifies Tanner's book as dangerous, and regards Tanner's ideas as useless for life's lessons. Ramsden has not even read the book, deeming it a worthless effort, and tosses it in the trash (Shaw, 1903: 337). This conflict between Tanner and Ramsden is the beginning of the contradiction of the ideo-political interest in *Man and Superman*, and reflects the importance of ideas in social change. Ideas are essential to gain the support from other people or the community. They are the main tool for social dynamic; therefore, in the theory of hegemony, ideas are the prominent factors for social change.

The conflict between Tanner and Ramsden also represents their different perceptions of women. As the representation of youth, Tanner wants independence and the same rights for women. Whereas Ramsden still holds an old belief that the woman is weaker than the man, and wants Ann dependent on him. In the feudal system, the independency of woman is considered dangerous, because women are unstable and emotional.

From this discussion, we can see that this play has three types of hegemony: man **over** woman, the government **over** its citizen, and the older man **over** the young man.

THE HEGEMONY OF MAN OVER WOMAN

In English society as depicted in this play, the woman was placed in an unfortunate position, and was regarded as the weaker creature, physically and mentally. She had to rely on the man, obeying his instructions as he was her guardian. Women had to ask permission if they wanted to leave the house. They were not allowed to work outside of the home, nor were they permitted to make decisions, especially those dealing with the future, marriage, et cetera. These conditions placed

the woman in an inferior position within the community.

As a result of this unfair treatment, women were dependent on men and required to consult with them on every issue or problem. In *Man and Superman*, the women have no freedom of expression, even in regards to their personal feelings. It is because of this societal restriction that Ann's mother cannot help her choose her guardian, or more importantly, eventually marry. As a result, Mrs. Whitefield (Ann's mother) chooses Ramsden over Tanner because of his seniority.

The perception that women have no ability to handle their own problems does not only come from men, but also from the women themselves. The characteristics projected on women by men, such as shyness and instability, often make women feel insecure about making their own decisions. This is exactly the position with Mrs. Whitefield who feels incapable of protecting Ann. Mrs. Whitefield cannot handle the agreement given to her by her husband, which is considered sacred, and of great importance. As result, she must find the appropriate person who can handle the agreement. Based on heredity, only Tanner and Ramsden can do this. Unfortunately, Tanner is not qualified because of his age, and regarded as too inexperienced to take on such a big responsibility (Shaw, 1903:348).

This assumption makes the woman subordinate, and is regarded by society as a second-class citizen. In the work place, home, and social sphere women always depend on men. In the family, the women must care for the children and do the housework. However, these responsibilities give the women no rights to participate in social discourse, leaving them feeling segregated from society.

Besides the problem of the family, the women also become polemic in religion. The meeting of Don Juan with The Old Woman represents the religious stigma of woman. In religion, women are regarded as the weak creature, psychologically, physically, and biologically. Therefore, she has to depend on the man's power.

Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest holds true in this case. The one who has the power will be the winner in social discourse. In addition, the fittest will also invade the other because of the power. John Tanner becomes a challenge for Ramsden because he has the potential of intellectuality. As a young smart man, he will attract followers from within the community. It is difficult to invade or overpower Tanner because he will refuse to allow it. The rich will invade the poor, the government toward the citizen, and the man toward the woman. The weaker will always become the victims in society. Mastery of knowledge and emotional stability are the best ways to avoid invasion from others. Tanner is always struggling for freedom and writes the book, *The Revolutionist's Handbook and Pocket Companion*. The book is highly influential, and Ramsden fears its impact. In the book, Tanner writes about the importance of independence and individual emotional stability. He encourages each person to participate in social transformation through their daily lives. Using the power of ideas, they can join the social dynamic, and Tanner enforces the point that it is every individual's responsibility to do so.

Even Tanner, who has been rejected and prevented from seeing Ann, can still influence her. In some cases, Ann uses Tanner's ideas to make better choices in her life. This awareness of accepting Tanner's ideas shows the development of Ann's intellect. The communication between Ann and Tanner is very important in transforming each other's ideology. This is why John Tanner begins to argue against each instruction from Ramsden and even from her mother.

The changes occurring in Ann's thinking is a long process. This is because ideology influences one in the process of transformation and acculturation. The person will process each idea and select how it will be applied in their life. Therefore, the transformation happens gradually. The development of Ann's ideological changes is the result of the communication process.

HEGEMONY OF THE RULER OVER THE CITIZEN

The hegemony of the government over its citizens is reflected in the employers to their employees. In this context, the rulers commonly treat their employees as they please. Although subordinates or workers benefit, they have limited rights. If the subordinates do not meet the wishes of the authorities, employers will easily substitute them or they will be treated inhumanely.

The relationship between the employer and the employee is not the same as the relationship between people of the same social status. There is separation that makes the employer inaccessible to the employee. The employee cannot read or study while he/she has to work in the family household. This image can be seen in the lives of workers among the very poor. Their energy and thoughts are drained for the benefit of the employer, even though their economic condition is very difficult. As a result, workers cannot think of the welfare of themselves or his family. These conditions prevailed in the era of industrialization in British society at that time.

The great discrepancy between the employer and employee creates bad conditions. John Tanner tries to solve this problem. He treats his driver as he treats his friend, with no discrepancy between Tanner and his employee. The driver can access all facilities in his home as long as he does not disturb Tanner's job. The driver also reads and learns many things from Tanner. Tanner and his driver share problems and exchange ideas, improving their understanding of each other's lives (Shaw, 1903:408).

Tanner's principle is that rewarding subordinates is a form of humanizing a person. This motivates subordinates because they feel valued as a person and a professional. Employees will take pride in their positions because they have received recognition. People are not embarrassed or feel inferior because of disadvantages. Shaw conveys this message in his drama, which is that the meaning of life must be understood by the public.

With the awareness of the position of each person in society, optimism will manifest itself in life. Optimism is a condition of development within a community. The community consists of individuals, and individual positive thinking will greatly affect their future. This situation makes a person capable of independence; it provides an opportunity to achieve the ideals and hopes of a better life.

According to Shaw, independent thinking is the need of every individual. Within dependence and freedom, one can better develop—a free man is an autonomous human being. Therefore, every individual should be independent-minded, and not fear other people or groups. Tanner suggested that, as human beings, we must dare to break all the shackles of society that harbour freedom (Shaw, 1903:148).

This is ideological conflict behind capitalism, where the relationship between the employers (the bourgeoisie) and the subordinates (workers/proletariat) is one of economics. An employer will make contact with the workers for production purposes and economic interests. Conditions such as these are often used to manipulate the rulers of the workers to achieve maximum profits. The workers who are economically dependent on their employers are inhumanely exploited.

Civilian resistance against the ruling class is described by Tanner in his meeting with Mendoza. The meeting is a vivid depiction of the author's intent regarding the differences between these two groups (Act III). The anarchists are viewed by the authorities as a common enemy. However, anarchy in this play is actually portrayed as the opposite. Tanner supports anarchists because they are more respectable than the rulers who oppress the weak. Anarchists are considered normal; even though they may do harm, their aim is to liberate themselves from the restraints and dominance of the ruling class. What they do is generally used for the common good, not for a particular group.

The meeting between Mendoza and Tanner describes various problems, mainly related to power and economic problems. The core issue

is the injustice of the rulers that brings about the anarchism. Tanner believes that anarchism will never happen as long as there is justice from the authorities. Inequality and discrimination committed by the rulers causes those who feel discriminated against to form a group to fight for their rights, leading to anarchy. The expression of the actions of the group robbery led by Mendoza against the rich is satire. Even if they commit a crime, their aim is to give to the weak (Shaw, 1903: 409). The expression of both Tanner and Mendoza opposite a joke as well as the insinuation that all people commit crimes, a resident of the low to the highest of their domicile. Each class is scrambling in effect to dominate the other. In this story, Mendoza is the chief executive of a group of criminals who fight to receive recognition from the community. This group is called "the group excluded" because they do not have an honorable profession, such as the nobles, rulers, or other educated. As a result, they committed crimes of robbing the rich, and called themselves socialists. They have high solidarity with one another; mutual respect, mutual trust, and sharing are hallmarks of socialist society. Socialist society is not merely thinking about oneself; they fight for the common good. Mendoza does not consider the action of robbing the rich a crime, but rather an attempt to spread the wealth to the public. Mendoza maintains that wealth should not be enjoyed only by a handful of people.

Sudden changes in political and social conditions affected the socio-economic and socio-cultural context in British society. Therefore, the pattern of social order has changed. Due to the birth of a new social class, the strata of society become more complex. With the changes to the system of capitalistic feudalism, the people who previously did not have a controlling position became social. This happened because of the progress achieved in the economic middle class now consisting of experts, civil servants, and traders.

In feudal times, people who held respectable positions were determined by the royal line, whereas in the era of capitalism, one's position is

determined by wealth. This condition makes the relationship between individuals very limited by certain factions. The poor person cannot perform communications (personal relations) independently with the rich. In contrast, the nobles and rich people can communicate well. Relationships between the rich and the poor are generally limited to economic relations (employer-worker), and there is no social value to equalize them.

The difficulty of the interaction between the different classes is depicted in the relationship between Mendoza, Louisa and Straker. Mendoza loves Louisa, but a union will never happen because Louisa is a descendant of the poor, while Mendoza comes from the rich. However, the socialist Mendoza remains in contact with marginalized people, and is determined to marry Louisa. In British society, breaking class rank is considered an infringement of human rights. Mendoza did not think lineage was an issue, and urged Louisa to marry him.

THE HEGEMONY OF THE OLD OVER THE YOUNG

The hegemony of the old over the young can be seen in the relationship between Ramsden and John Tanner, and also between Ramsden and Ann. Ramsden is old and in good financial health. He is also very respected; he is regarded as the king in his society, and everyone listens to what he says. He is seen as the preacher who will save Ann's life. Therefore, many people come to him seeking his advice. Tanner and Ann are considered common people. They are still young and lack life experience; therefore, no one respects or listens to them.

Based on Ramsden's social position, respect for someone is greatly influenced by heredity, wealth, and age. The rich person will always be acceptable in society, and have a good position in the social dynamic. It drives people throughout the world to struggle to obtain wealth. Many people work hard to

earn as much money as possible. Besides money, heredity is also important to reach a special position in society. Noblemen will always be honored. Age is the last factor that influences the social relationship. Older people will usually have a higher position than the young.

Ramsden's family represents the feudal structure. In the feudal system, attitude or manner is the most important aspect in the social relationship. The feudal family has specific and strict rules for all people who come to this family area. No one can break the rule, or they will be rejected from the community. Consequently, not all people can come to this feudal house. Each person will act differently based on social status and age. The younger must respect the older, and also obey all of the instructions.

When Octavius visits Ramsden's house, he cannot enter. Even if he is Ramsden's relative, he still needs to obey the feudal rules. This can be seen when the servant asks Ramsden's permission to allow Octavius to come in. After obtaining permission, Octavius enters the house to meet Ramsden. This illustrates that even in the small family the rules are very strict and apply to everybody. The rules also separate each person in a social context and make life more difficult because of the restrictions.

This situation is far from common people who use a system of equality. The understanding and acceptance of equal rights promotes fairness in society. Because of this, the rules applied by Ramsden are disrupted by Tanner, who does not want to use the rules. He thinks that the rules will become big problems in social interactions. Hence, Tanner fights to change the system by reducing the feudal system in Ann's family. Tanner shows his rejection of Ramsden's instruction by refusing to follow the rules (Shaw, 1903:390).

Because of Tanner's rejection of these rules, Ramsden keeps Ann from him. This is a representation of the ideological fighting. The old and the young become the symbols of the different missions and perspectives. The feudal and the modern are illustrated by the contradictions of

Ramsden and Tanner. Ramsden regards Tanner's ideas as dangerous to Ann, whereas Tanner thinks the opposite. Tanner believes that freedom is the capital to empower all people to develop and achieve a better quality of life (Shaw, 1903:337).

The contradiction between the old and the young also happens in Chapter Four. Hector Malone, Sr. and Hector Malone, Jr. illustrate the different missions of the old and the young. The younger Hector realizes that every person has individual rights. That is why he becomes angry with his father for opening his letter without permission. Hector knows that the letter contains a personal secret that cannot be opened without his permission. Everyone who disrupts this will be punished because he has disrupted someone's personal right (Shaw, 1903:484).

Hector's anger toward his father is not only about privacy, but also about human rights. As the father, Malone feels he has the right to always know about his son's problems, but this perception is very different from Hector's. The younger realizes that the rights reside with the owner. The different perception is also indicated in their disagreement about the family structure. Hector wants the freedom to live on his own, whereas his father wants him to remain at home to maintain control over Hector's life. (Shaw, 1903:481).

CONCLUSION

The conflicts that occur in society because of different interests cannot be denied. The presence of these differences motivates humanity to struggle for better lives and achieve domination. Therefore, mastery of the intellect through ideas is extremely important for a safe position in social competition. In order not to be the victim in the social war, every person has to equip him/herself with intellectuality. In addition, every person has to actively participate in the exploration of his/her ideas in effecting the social change. Ideas applied to social dynamics are important for the development of the community or the country.

This drama illustrates that every person must be given the freedom to participate in

social dynamics. Freedom is the most important component in raising the potential of a person to participate in community development. No one can segregate or limit another from developing themselves. Therefore, this drama gives us the solution that discrimination based on capital, gender, and age must be abolished in society. Intellectuality is not determined by heredity or wealth, but is right of all people for the potency of ideas.

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