

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter elaborates the background of the study by explaining the underlying reasons and academic concerns that form the basis of the research. It also outlines the research purpose and contextual framework in which the study is conducted. Moreover, this chapter describes the object of the research, highlights its significance both theoretically and practically, and defines the scope and limitations that guide the direction of the study. These elements are presented to provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding the focus and relevance of the research.

1.1 Background of the Study

Human live in a society that is governed by certain norms and values that are considered as something natural or even absolute truth. However, in reality, these norms are largely formed and influenced by groups that have power. These dominant groups use various institutions such as the media, schools, laws, and culture to spread and maintain their values, so that what they consider right is also accepted by the wider community. This process is known as hegemony. Hegemony is a theory by Antonio Gramsci, where one group is more powerful than other. Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony state “The supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as ‘domination’ and as ‘intellectual and moral leadership” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 57). Antonio Gramsci explains that the domination of the ruling class occurs through culturally formed agreements, not simply violence or coercion. In this context, the education system is one of the state's ideological tools that produces hegemonic values. This is in accordance with Gramci's statement that “Every relationship of 'hegemony' is necessarily an educational relationship” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 350).

In the novel *Upside-Down Magic*, the education system clearly reflects the practice of cultural hegemony in the school environment (Mlynowski et al, 2015).

According to Gramsci, cultural hegemony refers to the process by which the dominant group's, values, beliefs, and norms become accepted as common sense and are perceived as natural by society (Gramsci, 1971, p. 9). Sage Academy and Dunwiddle, as an educational institution, functions as a space where dominant magical norms are constructed and maintained. Students are categorized based on their magical abilities, and those who do not conform to conventional standards are considered "abnormal" and also placed in separate classes and treated as inferior. Conventional standards in this context denotes magical practices that conform to institutional norms, characterized by stability, control, and the production of a single proper magical outcome. Some magical abilities that have become the conventional standard are; 1. Flare, a magic user who can create and control fire, 2. Fuzzy, a magic user who can communicate with and understand animal, 3. Fluxer, a magic user who can transform into animals, 4. Flyer, a magic user who can fly or levitate and can control it. The Sage Academy strictly refuses to admit students who do not meet these standards, as determined by tests administered prior to the admissions process. At Dunwiddle, students considered abnormal are still admitted, but their classes are separated from those of conventional magic users. This classification system reinforces the idea that certain forms of magic are more legitimate and valuable than others, thereby normalizing inequality through educational practices. From this perspective, schools function not only as places of learning, but also as tools for reproducing hegemonic values by shaping students' identities, behaviors, and self-perceptions in accordance with dominant norms.

However, domination through education is not always accepted. When individuals or groups begin to realize the inequality of the system, then the potential for resistance will emerge. This phenomenon is known as counter-hegemony (Gramsci, 1971). The concept of counter-hegemony can be analyzed through the combined perspectives of Antonio Gramsci and Raymond Williams, who both emphasize the role of culture and education in maintaining and resisting ideological control. Gramsci (1971) explains that hegemony is maintained not only through force but also through "spontaneous consent" created by institutions such as schools, which shape the worldview of the subordinate classes (p. 12). However,

this consent can be challenged when marginalized groups begin to form critical awareness and develop a “new collective will” that questions dominant ideologies (p. 333). Williams (1977) further supports this view by arguing that culture is not static, and within every dominant system, there are always “residual” and “emergent” cultural elements that challenge the prevailing norms (p. 121–122). These theoretical perspectives offer insight into how the character Nory, in *Upside-Down Magic*, resists the institutional boundaries that define her magical abilities as abnormal. Her resistance reflects an emergent cultural form that redefines what is accepted as valid within the dominant educational system.

Upside-Down Magic is a fantasy novel series by Sarah Mlynowski, Lauren Miracle, and Emily Jenkins, which explores themes of conformity and resistance through children's experiences with magic (Mlynowski et al, 2015). Set in a world where magic is commonplace, children are expected to possess and develop certain magical abilities that fit into established categories such as Flare, Flyer, and Fluxer. However, the main character, Nory, does not fit into these patterns, possessing a form of magic that goes against the expectations of the system. The magic education system at the Sage Academy considers Nory's magic to be flawed. Nory as the main character, symbolizes the struggle against the hegemony of conventional magic in this novel. Her magic is unpredictable, often appearing as strange and uncontrollable combinations of animals. This “upside-down” magic is seen as a weakness by the magical education system. Nory's inability to conform to these standards gets her expelled from the main school of magic, where her uniqueness is not appreciated. However, Nory's resistance to this system becomes the narrative core of the novel, as she learns to accept her abilities and find strength in difference, symbolizing a broader resistance to social pressures that suppress individuality (Mlynowski et al, 2015).

Previous studies have examined Gramsci's hegemony in various literary works. Umary (2020) examined counter hegemony in *The Devils Wears Prada* by focusing on the forms of resistance such as hard resistance, humanistic resistance, and passive resistance. Istifadah & Rohmana (2022) analysed patriarchal hegemony includes of political and economic marginalization and cultural dominance, with a

particular focus on gender and patriarchy within an Islamic context in the novel *Women at Point Zero*. Musa et al (2022) focuses on social structure and class conflict in rural society in the novel *Di Kaki Bukit Cibalak*. Habiburrrahman (2017) discussed about cultural hegemony that focus on local culture, nobility, and resistance in the novel *Cultural Hegemony at Novel Merpati Kembar di Lombok*. Hendarsyah et al (2021) examined the hegemony in disney's *The Lion King* by focusing on ideological power and legitimacy in animated fiction. Zega et al (2023) analyxed the film adaptasion of *Upside-Down Magic* by focusing on moral education and positive character traits via film. These previous studies indicate that cultural hegemony and counter-hegemony have been widely examined in various literary works and contexts. They demonstrate that hegemony operates through different mechanisms, such as marginalization, gender and patriarchy, political, economic, and moral education. However, limited attention has been given to examining how cultural hegemony operates through the education system and how it is challenged through acts of resistance, especially in the novel *Upside-Down Magic*.

In analyzing Nory's representation of resistance to the hegemony of conventional magic, this research will use the theory of cultural hegemony proposed by Antonio Gramsci. According to Gramsci (1971), powerful groups not only maintain power through violence or coercion, but by shaping social rules and customs that make them seem natural and inviolable. Nory's resistance to the magic system that devalues her “upside-down” ability reflects this dynamic. Nory's journey can be seen as a critique of society's tendency to downplay the role of people who do not fit into existing rules or categories. The purpose of this analysis is to see how Nory's resistance aligns with Gramsci's thinking, while also providing a deeper understanding of the novel's message of accepting difference and resisting oppressive systems. This approach enriches the previous analysis by linking Nory's personal struggle with broader social critique.

1.2 Research Question

Based on this background, the following are some of the problem formulations that will be discussed in this study:

1. What are the cultural hegemony through the education system portrayed in *Upside-Down Magic*?
2. How does Nory's struggle represent resistance against the hegemonic regime of conventional magic in *Upside-Down Magic*?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Related to the research problem above, the purpose of this study is divided into two, those are:

1. To analyze how the practices of cultural hegemony through the education system construct the dominant and subordinate groups in *Upside-Down Magic*.
2. To identify and interpret Nory's actions, as they signify resistance to hegemonic values, using Antonio Gramsci's concept of counter-hegemony.

1.4 Significance of the Study

In research, the significance of research is needed to support results of research, including:

1. Theoretically, this research makes an important contribution especially in the context of the representation of resistance to hegemony toward theoretical studies in the fields of literature and novel. Using Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, this research provides a new perspective in terms of how literary texts can reveal dominant ideologies within institutional structures such as education and how these ideologies marginalize unequal people or groups. Furthermore, it also explores how people can interpret their resistance as a form of counter-hegemony that challenges dominant norms.
2. Practically, This research can provide insight for writers and readers regarding the importance of courage to fight the system in popular media such as the novel *Upside-Down Magic*. It also shows how narratives that reject uniqueness and challenge dominant norms can influence worldviews and support social change.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

The scope of this study is limited to discussing the theories of cultural hegemony and counter-hegemony proposed by Antonio Gramsci. This study focuses on identifying dominant and subordinate groups as reflected in the magic

education system in the *Upside-Down Magic* series. Furthermore, this analysis emphasizes the operationalization of hegemony through educational institutions, specifically how the dominant values of conventional magic are constructed, maintained, and legitimized within the school system. This study also explores forms of counter-hegemonic resistance reflected through the actions of the main characters, particularly in relation to the marginalization of alternative magical abilities.

Furthermore, this study is limited to an analysis of the first three books of the *Upside-Down Magic* series, namely *Upside-Down Magic*, *Sticks & Stones*, and *Showing Off*. The scope of this study is limited to the characters' utterances, actions, and the author's narrative that supports the issue of cultural hegemony and resistance in the context of education. This study does not discuss institutional changes or conflict resolutions in subsequent books. Instead, the analysis focuses on the formation and early development of counter-hegemonic resistance, specifically how resistance emerges and is expressed by Nory against the hegemonic ideology of conventional magic.