

CONSTRUCTING AUTHORITARIANISM IN J.S. KHAIREN'S *BUNGKAM SUARA*: A GRAMSCIAN LITERARY STUDY

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Abstract This study examines the construction of authoritarianism in J.S. Khairen's *Bungkam Suara* through Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony. Positioned within contemporary literary criticism and political fiction studies, the research investigates how the novel represents ideological domination, surveillance culture, and democratic paradoxes through literary discourse and narrative strategies. Employing a qualitative literary discourse analysis, the study analyzes characterization, dialogue, narrative atmosphere, and symbolic representations to identify hegemonic mechanisms embedded in the text. The findings reveal that authoritarianism functions as the dominant ideology in the novel through surveillance systems, political propaganda, and the normalization of obedience. Capitalism, feudalism, socialism, and humanism also emerge as competing ideological formations that shape the narrative conflict. Drawing upon international scholarship in literary criticism, discourse studies, and postcolonial political fiction, this article argues that *Bungkam Suara* constructs authoritarianism not merely through political themes but through literary discourse that disciplines public consciousness and regulates social behavior. The study contributes to English literary scholarship by positioning contemporary Indonesian political fiction within broader discussions of dystopian narrative, ideological discourse, and authoritarian democracy in global literature.

Keywords: authoritarianism, Gramscian hegemony, literary discourse analysis, Indonesian political fiction, dystopian narrative

INTRODUCTION

Literature has long been recognized as a cultural medium that reflects, critiques, and reconstructs social realities. Literary texts not only entertain readers but also function as ideological spaces in which political tensions, social inequalities, and struggles for power are represented symbolically. Within the framework of the sociology of literature, literary works may reveal how power relations operate in society and how individuals negotiate dominant ideologies. Contemporary Indonesian literature increasingly portrays socio-political anxieties related to democracy, authoritarianism, corruption, and social injustice. One literary work that critically addresses these issues is *Bungkam Suara* by J.S. Khairen.

The novel portrays a society living under strict political control where surveillance, manipulation of public opinion, and ideological domination become normalized. Although democratic discourse appears to exist formally, freedom of speech and critical thought are systematically restricted. This condition reflects what may be described as "democracy," a paradoxical democratic system in which democratic institutions coexist with authoritarian practices. The term illustrates the contradiction between the ideals of democracy and the reality of hegemonic power structures that silence dissenting voices.

The issue of democratic decline has become increasingly relevant in contemporary global politics. Several scholars argue that modern democracies often experience authoritarian tendencies through media control, digital surveillance, and political propaganda (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). In Indonesia, democratic practices after the Reformasi era continue to face criticism due to elite domination, political oligarchy, and restrictions on public criticism. Literature, therefore, becomes an important site for examining how such socio-political tensions are culturally represented.

Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony provides an important analytical framework for understanding the ideological mechanisms represented in the novel. Gramsci (1999) argues that domination is maintained not merely through coercive force but through cultural and ideological consent. Hegemony operates when dominant groups successfully shape public

consciousness so that subordinate groups accept domination as natural and legitimate. Through institutions such as education, media, and political discourse, ruling classes construct social consent that stabilizes their power.

The relevance of Gramsci's theory in literary studies lies in its ability to explain how literary texts represent ideological struggle. Literature may function both as a tool of domination and as a form of resistance against hegemonic power. According to Eagleton (2002), literary works often reproduce ideological tensions existing in society while simultaneously providing spaces for counter-hegemonic discourse. Consequently, analyzing *Bungkam Suara* through a Gramscian perspective enables a deeper understanding of how the novel critiques authoritarian tendencies within democratic systems.

Several previous studies have examined hegemony in Indonesian literary works. Falah (2019) analyzed ideological hegemony in Adam Yudhistira's short story and found that dominant ideology was reproduced through cultural narratives. Pane and Winarti (2022) explored hegemonic relations in *Sang Keris* and demonstrated how power structures influence social hierarchy. Similarly, Sa'adah et al. (2021) investigated Gramscian hegemony in Indonesian fiction and highlighted the relationship between ideology and social control. However, studies specifically focusing on democratic paradoxes and ideological domination in *Bungkam Suara* remain limited.

This study seeks to fill that gap by focusing on the representation of democratic paradoxes in J.S. Khairen's novel. Unlike previous studies that primarily discuss general forms of hegemony, this article emphasizes the relationship between authoritarianism and pseudo-democracy within contemporary Indonesian literary discourse. Furthermore, the study contributes to English literary scholarship by contextualizing Indonesian political fiction within broader discussions of postcolonial literature, ideology, and cultural resistance.

The objectives of this study are threefold: (1) to identify the ideological formations represented in *Bungkam Suara*; (2) to analyze the levels of hegemony portrayed in the narrative based on Gramsci's theory; and (3) to examine how the novel reflects contradictions within democratic practices in Indonesia. Through these objectives, this research demonstrates how literature functions as a critical discourse that questions social and political realities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sociology of Literature and Ideological Representation

The sociology of literature views literary texts as products of social, historical, and ideological conditions. According to Damono (2014), literature reflects social realities while simultaneously shaping public understanding of those realities. Literary works are influenced by the social structures, political conditions, and cultural values of society. Thus, literature cannot be separated from the ideological environment in which it is produced. Goldmann (1975) emphasizes that literary works represent collective consciousness and social worldview. Through characterization, plot, and narrative structure, authors express social tensions and ideological conflicts occurring within society. Literature, therefore, functions as both a representation and a critique of social systems.

In political fiction, literary texts frequently portray conflicts between dominant and subordinate groups. Postcolonial literary criticism further argues that literature may expose mechanisms of oppression, cultural domination, and resistance (Ashcroft et al., 2002). Consequently, the sociology of literature provides an appropriate framework for examining how *Bungkam Suara* represents ideological struggles within democratic discourse.

Gramsci's Theory of Hegemony

Antonio Gramsci developed the concept of hegemony to explain how ruling groups maintain dominance through ideological consent rather than direct coercion alone. According

to Gramsci (1999), hegemony refers to the cultural and moral leadership exercised by dominant classes over subordinate groups. This leadership operates through institutions such as schools, media, religion, and political systems. Gramsci divides social power into two interconnected domains: political society and civil society. Political society refers to coercive institutions such as the military, police, and legal system, while civil society includes cultural institutions that shape public consciousness. Hegemony becomes effective when the dominant ideology is internalized by society and accepted as common sense. Femia (1981) explains that hegemony creates “false consciousness,” in which oppressed groups unconsciously support systems that disadvantage them. In literary studies, this concept is useful for identifying how characters and societies within fictional narratives accept or resist ideological domination.

Several scholars classify hegemony into different levels, including total, declining, and minimal hegemony. Total hegemony occurs when the dominant ideology is fully accepted without significant resistance. Declining hegemony emerges when public trust toward the dominant power weakens, while minimal hegemony reflects fragmented ideological control accompanied by active resistance.

Democracy, Authoritarianism, and Literary Representation

Democracy is generally associated with freedom of speech, equality, public participation, and protection of civil rights. However, contemporary political studies suggest that democratic systems may contain authoritarian tendencies. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) argue that modern authoritarianism often emerges gradually through the manipulation of institutions, the suppression of criticism, and the control of information. In literature, authoritarianism is commonly represented through censorship, surveillance, and abuse of political power. Dystopian and political fiction frequently depicts societies in which democratic ideals are undermined by hegemonic control. Literary narratives expose how governments construct fear and obedience to maintain authority.

Indonesian literature has increasingly addressed issues of democracy and power after the Reformasi period. Writers use fiction to criticize corruption, political oligarchy, and social injustice. Through satire and allegory, contemporary novels reveal contradictions between democratic rhetoric and social realities. In *Bungkam Suara*, democratic discourse becomes a mask for authoritarian practices. The novel illustrates how surveillance technology, political propaganda, and institutional control create a society in which freedom exists only symbolically. This representation aligns with Gramsci's concept of ideological hegemony, where domination is normalized through consent and cultural discourse.

Previous Studies

Previous studies on Gramscian hegemony in Indonesian literature demonstrate the relevance of ideological analysis in understanding literary representation. Falah (2019) found that hegemonic ideology in literary texts often appears through symbolic domination and cultural narratives. Nurhidayah (2019) revealed that power relations in Indonesian novels are maintained through social structures that shape public obedience. Pane and Winarti (2022) analyzed hegemonic practices in *Sang Keris* and concluded that literary narratives reproduce social hierarchy and ideological dominance. Sakaria et al. (2021) also identified how hegemonic discourse influences social relations in Indonesian short stories.

Despite these studies, limited research specifically discusses democratic paradoxes and pseudo-democratic systems in Indonesian fiction. Moreover, few studies connect Indonesian literary works to broader English literary discussions concerning postcolonial democracy, authoritarianism, and ideological control. Therefore, this study contributes to the development of comparative literary discourse by positioning *Bungkam Suara* within global debates on democracy and hegemony.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach using literary discourse analysis within the framework of the sociology of literature. Qualitative literary research is appropriate for examining ideological representation, narrative construction, and discourse patterns embedded in literary texts. The study combines Gramscian literary criticism with critical discourse analysis to investigate how authoritarianism is constructed through characterization, dialogue, narrative atmosphere, and symbolic representation in J.S. Khairen's *Bungkam Suara*.

The research particularly focuses on the relationship between literary discourse and ideological hegemony. Gramsci's theory of hegemony is used to identify dominant ideological formations and counter-hegemonic resistance, while discourse perspectives proposed by Fairclough (2022) and Foucault (1977) are employed to examine surveillance discourse, ideological language, and mechanisms of social control represented in the narrative.

Data and Source of Data

The primary data source in this study is the novel *Bungkam Suara*, written by J.S. Khairen and published by PT Gramedia Widiasarana Indonesia in 2023. The data consist of narrative descriptions, dialogues, monologues, and expressions related to authoritarianism, surveillance, obedience, ideological domination, and resistance. The secondary data were obtained from recent international journal articles, books, and scholarly publications concerning Gramscian hegemony, literary discourse analysis, dystopian fiction, critical discourse analysis, and political literature. These references were used to support the theoretical framework and interpretation of the findings.

Data Collection

The data were collected through intensive reading and note-taking techniques. The researcher conducted multiple close readings of the novel to identify passages representing ideological domination, authoritarian discourse, and hegemonic practices. Important excerpts were systematically highlighted, classified, and documented. The data collection process involved several stages. First, the researcher read the novel thoroughly to understand its narrative structure and sociopolitical context. Second, excerpts containing ideological expressions, surveillance discourse, political control, and resistance were identified and selected. Third, the selected excerpts were translated into English to facilitate analysis within international academic discourse. Finally, the data were categorized according to ideological formations and levels of hegemony.

Data Analysis

The data analysis employed qualitative literary discourse analysis. The analysis was conducted through four stages. First, the researcher identified linguistic and narrative elements related to authoritarian discourse, including imperative expressions, surveillance diction, symbolic imagery, and descriptions of obedience. Second, the identified data were classified into ideological categories, including authoritarianism, capitalism, socialism, feudalism, and humanism. Third, the data were interpreted using Gramsci's theory of hegemony, Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, and Foucault's concept of disciplinary power. The analysis focused on how discourse, narrative structure, and characterization construct hegemonic domination within the novel. Finally, conclusions were drawn concerning the literary construction of authoritarianism and the representation of ideological struggle in *Bungkam Suara*.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study applied theoretical triangulation by integrating literary criticism, discourse analysis, and sociopolitical interpretation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

The findings reveal that authoritarianism functions as the dominant ideological formation in *Bungkam Suara*. The ideological representations identified in the novel are categorized into five major ideological forms: authoritarianism, capitalism, socialism, feudalism, and humanism. These ideologies operate at three levels of hegemony: total hegemony, declining hegemony, and minimal hegemony. To clarify the distribution of ideological representations, the findings are summarized in the following table.

Table 1. Distribution of Ideological Formations and Levels of Hegemony in *Bungkam Suara*

No.	Ideological Formation	Total Hegemony	Declining Hegemony	Minimal Hegemony	Total Data
1	Authoritarianism	11	2	2	15
2	Capitalism	3	2	–	5
3	Feudalism	–	1	1	2
4	Socialism	1	–	–	1
5	Humanism	1	–	–	1
	Total	16	5	3	24

The table demonstrates that authoritarianism is the dominant ideology in the novel, particularly within the category of total hegemony. This finding indicates that the narrative strongly emphasizes surveillance, obedience, political control, and ideological domination. Capitalism also emerges significantly through transactional politics and economic influence over political power. Meanwhile, socialism and humanism appear minimally and function primarily as counter-hegemonic elements within the narrative.

Authoritarianism and Democratic Decline

Authoritarianism is represented through surveillance systems, restrictions on freedom of expression, and the normalization of obedience. The narrative depicts a society constantly monitored by institutional power, creating fear and social conformity.

“Jangankan menyapa burung jelek itu, manusia menyapa manusia lainnya saja tak ada. Orang-orang takut karena gerak-gerik mereka terekam CCTV. Langsung terpantau di Istana Kerajaan. Berangkat, kerja atau sekolah, pulang, diam. Itu saja aktivitas orang-orang di distrik ini. Harus patuh, menurut, jalani hidup. Tak boleh ada aneh-aneh.” (BS:1)

“Not to mention greeting that ugly bird, people do not even greet one another. People are afraid because all their movements are recorded by CCTV cameras. Everything is directly monitored by the Royal Palace. Go to work or school, return home, remain silent. Those are the only activities of people in this district. They must obey, comply, and simply live their lives. No unusual behavior is allowed.”

The quotation demonstrates the presence of total political control and surveillance over society. Linguistically, the repetitive imperative expressions such as *harus patuh* (“must obey”) and *tak boleh ada aneh-aneh* (“no unusual behavior is allowed”) construct an atmosphere of fear and ideological discipline. The diction of silence, obedience, and monitoring reinforces authoritarian discourse within the narrative.

Capitalism and Political Commodification

Capitalist ideology appears through transactional political practices and the commodification of political loyalty. The quotation below reveals that political loyalty is closely connected to economic interests and transactional politics. The phrase *siapa yang bayar*

("whoever pays") reflects the commodification of political allegiance, indicating how capitalist ideology shapes political discourse within the narrative.

"Kita membela siapa yang mau, siapa yang sanggup, siapa yang bayar." (BS:95)

"We support whoever wants, whoever is capable, and whoever pays."

The capitalist ideology represented in the novel demonstrates how economic power shapes political narratives. Media, political campaigns, and public opinion become commodities controlled by elites. Gramsci explains that capitalist hegemony operates through cultural leadership, shaping public consciousness. In the novel, political truth becomes dependent on economic interests, indicating that democracy is vulnerable to oligarchic control. This representation reflects broader critiques of pseudo-democracy in which financial elites dominate political participation. Democracy formally exists, but political influence is unequally distributed.

Socialism as Ideological Legitimization

Socialist ideology is represented through narratives emphasizing equality before the law and social justice. The quotation below reflects socialist ideals concerning equality and justice. State authority is portrayed as responsible for regulating fairness and ensuring equal treatment for citizens regardless of social status.

"Di NKAL, jika ada pejabat mau dari level tertinggi, menengah hingga level bawah sekalipun, mereka akan dapat hukuman sepadan jika melakukan kriminal." (BS:23)

"In NKAL, if officials from the highest to the lowest levels commit crimes, they will receive punishment proportional to their actions."

Socialist discourse in the novel functions ambiguously. On the one hand, it promotes equality and justice. On the other hand, it becomes a rhetorical strategy that authorities use to legitimize their power. From a Gramscian perspective, dominant groups often appropriate popular values to maintain public consent. By presenting themselves as protectors of justice, rulers strengthen ideological legitimacy despite maintaining authoritarian control.

Humanism and Counter-Hegemonic Consciousness

Humanistic ideology emerges through moral solidarity and respect for individual dignity. The quotation below demonstrates a humanistic perspective that values individual dignity rather than collective stigma. Humanism in the novel functions as a counter-hegemonic discourse opposing authoritarian judgment and social discrimination.

"Aku takkan memberhentikanmu karena kau anak seorang penjahat." (BS:24)

"I will not dismiss you because you are the child of a criminal."

Humanism represents a counter-hegemonic force within the narrative. Through empathy, solidarity, and moral awareness, characters resist systems that dehumanize individuals. Gramsci argues that resistance emerges when subordinate groups develop an alternative consciousness that challenges dominant ideology. The humanistic values represented in the novel symbolize the possibility of social transformation through ethical awareness.

Democratic Paradox in the Contemporary Indonesian Context

One of the most significant aspects of the novel is its portrayal of democratic paradoxes. Democracy formally exists through institutions and political discourse, yet substantive freedoms remain restricted. This condition reflects contemporary concerns about democracy in Indonesia, particularly oligarchic politics, media control, and restrictions on public criticism. Through satire and dystopian narrative, *Bungkam Suara* critiques how democratic rhetoric may conceal authoritarian tendencies.

From the perspective of English literary studies, the novel may be categorized as postcolonial political fiction addressing ideological domination and cultural resistance. Similar to dystopian literature in global contexts, the narrative portrays how hegemonic power shapes everyday life. Therefore, the study demonstrates that Indonesian literature contributes significantly to broader discussions of authoritarianism, democracy, ideology, and resistance in contemporary literary studies.

Discussions

Authoritarianism as Literary Discourse

The findings demonstrate that authoritarianism functions as the dominant ideological formation in *Bungkam Suara*. However, the novel does not merely present authoritarianism as a political system; rather, it constructs authoritarian ideology through literary discourse, narrative atmosphere, and symbolic representation. Through surveillance imagery, restrictive dialogue, and repetitive commands, the narrative normalizes obedience while simultaneously exposing the psychological effects of ideological control.

The quotation describing citizens constantly monitored by CCTV cameras illustrates how surveillance becomes an instrument of hegemonic discipline. Expressions such as *harus patuh* (“must obey”) and *tak boleh ada aneh-aneh* (“no unusual behavior is allowed”) indicate the operation of authoritarian discourse through imperative language. From a critical discourse perspective, these linguistic patterns shape collective consciousness by naturalizing submission and limiting individual agency. Fairclough (2022) argues that ideological discourse often functions subtly through repeated linguistic structures that appear normal within everyday communication.

The representation of surveillance in the novel also reflects Foucault’s concept of disciplinary power, where control operates through continuous observation (Foucault, 1977). However, from a Gramscian perspective, surveillance becomes hegemonic because citizens internalize obedience and regulate themselves without direct physical force. Citizens regulate their own behavior because they internalize the possibility of constant observation. The narrative atmosphere of silence, fear, and social conformity demonstrates how authoritarianism operates not solely through physical violence but through psychological control. This literary construction resembles the surveillance mechanisms portrayed in “Nineteen Eighty-Four”, George Orwell’s dystopian novel, where obedience is maintained through continuous monitoring and ideological manipulation.

The novel also reflects contemporary concerns regarding democratic decline. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) argue that modern authoritarianism frequently emerges through democratic institutions rather than military coups. The state weakens civil liberties gradually while maintaining the appearance of democracy.

Capitalism and Political Transactionalism

The findings further reveal that capitalist ideology strengthens authoritarian power through transactional political practices. The dialogue “*Kita membela siapa yang mau, siapa yang sanggup, siapa yang bayar*” (“We support whoever wants, whoever can, whoever pays”) represents the commodification of political loyalty within the narrative. Political allegiance is no longer associated with moral principles but with economic interests and financial capability.

From a Gramscian perspective, capitalism supports hegemonic domination by controlling both economic and ideological structures. The ruling groups in the novel maintain authority not only through coercion but also through economic influence and media manipulation. Such representation reflects contemporary concerns regarding democratic erosion in which capitalist interests shape political discourse and public opinion.

The novel therefore portrays democracy as performative rather than substantive. Although democratic institutions formally exist, public participation is controlled through propaganda, economic power, and ideological conditioning. This supports Levitsky and Ziblatt's (2018) argument that authoritarianism in modern societies often develops gradually within democratic systems.

Humanism and Counter-Hegemonic Resistance

Despite the dominance of authoritarian ideology, the novel also presents moments of resistance through humanistic values and moral solidarity. The orchard owner's refusal to discriminate against Timmy on the basis of his family background reflects an alternative ethical discourse that opposes authoritarian judgment. The statement "*Aku takkan memberhentikanmu karena kau anak seorang penjahat*" ("I will not dismiss you because you are the child of a criminal") emphasizes individual dignity rather than collective stigma.

This finding demonstrates the presence of counter-hegemonic discourse within the narrative. According to Gramsci, hegemonic systems are never entirely stable because resistance may emerge through alternative moral and cultural values. Humanistic interactions within the novel challenge the dehumanizing tendencies of authoritarian ideology and create symbolic spaces for empathy and social justice. Furthermore, the coexistence of authoritarianism and humanism indicates ideological contestation within the narrative structure. The novel does not depict society as entirely submissive; instead, it reveals tensions between obedience and resistance, domination and humanity, silence and critical awareness.

***Bungkam Suara* and Contemporary Political Fiction**

From a literary studies perspective, *Bungkam Suara* contributes to contemporary Indonesian political fiction by depicting democratic paradoxes and authoritarian tendencies in modern society. The novel combines dystopian atmosphere, political satire, and ideological critique to construct a narrative that reflects contemporary anxieties concerning surveillance, media control, and democratic decline. Thematically, the novel aligns with global dystopian narratives that criticize institutional domination and ideological manipulation. Similar to dystopian political fiction in international literary traditions, the narrative employs surveillance, fear, and social conformity as mechanisms for exploring authoritarian power.

However, *Bungkam Suara* also reflects specific Indonesian sociopolitical realities, particularly issues of bureaucratic control, political loyalty, and democratic instability in post-Reformasi society. Consequently, the novel contributes not only to Indonesian literary discourse but also to broader discussions concerning authoritarianism and democracy in global political fiction.

The integration of Gramscian literary criticism and discourse analysis in this study demonstrates that authoritarianism in literature is constructed through both ideological representation and linguistic strategies. Narrative discourse, characterization, and symbolic imagery collectively function to normalize, critique, and destabilize hegemonic power. Therefore, *Bungkam Suara* should be understood not merely as a political narrative but as a literary discourse that interrogates the relationship between ideology, power, and public consciousness.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that *Bungkam Suara* by J.S. Khairen represents complex ideological struggles within a pseudo-democratic society. Using Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, the research identifies five ideological formations in the novel: authoritarianism, capitalism, feudalism, socialism, and humanism. Among these ideologies, authoritarianism emerges as the dominant force shaping political and social relations. The findings demonstrate that hegemonic

power in the novel operates through surveillance, media manipulation, institutional control, and cultural obedience. The study also identifies three levels of hegemony: total hegemony, declining hegemony, and minimal hegemony. Total hegemony is reflected in the normalization of authoritarian control, while declining and minimal hegemony reveal the emergence of ideological instability and resistance.

Furthermore, the novel portrays democracy as paradoxical. Although democratic discourse formally exists, freedom of speech and critical participation are restricted through hegemonic mechanisms. This representation reflects contemporary concerns regarding democratic decline and authoritarian tendencies within modern political systems. From the perspective of English literary studies, this research contributes to discussions of postcolonial political fiction, ideology, and cultural resistance. The study confirms that Indonesian literary works can provide valuable insights into global debates on democracy and power.

Future research may compare *Bungkam Suara* with other Southeast Asian political novels or examine how digital authoritarianism is represented in contemporary literature. Comparative studies involving dystopian fiction and postcolonial political narratives may further enrich discussions of hegemony and democracy in literary studies.

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