
CLASS AND HEGEMONY in KOYOHARU GOTOUGE'S MANGA *KIMETTSU NO YAIBA : A GRAMSCIAN READING*

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ABSTRAK: Manga sebagai produk budaya populer menyimpan muatan politis dan ideologis. Maka penelitian deskriptif kualitatif ini akan menyingkap muatan muatan tersymbolik itu pada salah satu manga terlaris di dunia saat ini yang berjudul *Kimetsu No Yaiba* karya Koyoharu Gotouge. Penelitian ini membaca teks manga dengan pendekatan *post-Marxisme* dengan mengaplikasikan pemikiran Marxist Italia bernama Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci memperkenalkan konsep hegemoni budaya yaitu kontrol sosial tanpa kekerasan yang dilakukan oleh kelas penguasa pada kelas tersubordinasi atau kelas bawah yang terjadi pada masyarakat kontemporer. Kontrol secara ideologis, budaya, dan politis telah menciptakan *common sense* di tengah masyarakat sehingga masyarakat tidak menyadari bahwa keseharian hidup mereka selalu terkontrol. Untuk mempertajam analisis, penelitian ini juga menggunakan konsep *interpellation* dari Louis Althusser, pemikir post Marxist lainnya yang melihat masyarakat kontemporer percaya mereka adalah subjek dan mempunyai kontrol terhadap diri mereka sendiri ternyata hidup di dalam sebuah ilusi yang diciptakan oleh kelas penguasa. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan karakter karismatik Kagaya Ubuyashiki sebagai pemimpin tertinggi Hashira merupakan simbolisasi dari kelas penguasa yang berhasil melakukan kontrol melalui proses hegemonisasi budaya untuk mentransmisikan nilai-nilai yang diperjuangkannya. Sementara itu Hashira, sembilan pendekar pedang terkuat pembasmi iblis di manga, merupakan simbolisasi dari kelas tersubordinasi yang menginternalisasi nilai-nilai dari Kagaya Ubuyashiki.

Kata kunci: hegemoni, interpelasi, kelas penguasa, kelas tersubordinasi

ABSTRACT: Manga as a popular cultural product contains political and ideological content. This qualitative descriptive research will reveal the content of the symbolic content in one of the best-selling manga in the world today entitled *Kimetsu No Yaiba* by Koyoharu Gotouge. This study reads manga texts with a post-Marxism approach by applying the thought of an Italian Marxist named Antonio Gramsci. He theorized the concept of cultural hegemony, a non-violent social control carried out by the ruling class toward subordinated class that occurs in contemporary capitalist society. Ideological, cultural, and political control have created *common sense* in society so that people do not realize that their daily lives are always under control. To sharpen the analysis, the study also uses the concept of *interpellation* by Louis Althusser, another post-Marxist thinker who sees contemporary society believing they are subjects and having control over themselves while in fact living in an illusion created by the ruling class. This study concludes that the charismatic character, Kagaya Ubuyashiki as the supreme leader of Hashira is a symbol of the ruling class that has succeeded in exercising control through the process of cultural hegemonization to transmit the values he fights for. Meanwhile, Hashira, the nine strongest swordsmen of the demon slayer in the manga, is a symbol of a subordinated class who have internalized the political and cultural values of Kagaya Ubuyashiki.

Kata kunci: *hegemony, interpellation, ruling class, subordinated class*

INTRODUCTION

Working or subordinated class often escape the rigors of life by spending time enjoying various types of popular cultural products. They believe that watching Netflix, listening to contemporary rock band, or reading comics will temporarily set them free from the demands of an increasingly crazy and exploitative capitalistic world nowadays. Popular culture products are seen only as entertainment to spend their leisure. For instance, their habit to watch Netflix just before bedtime. They believe certain ideologies are not influenced by what they enjoy in their leisure time. In subordinated class reality, social norms, and morality standards are constructed without having anything to do with the cultural products they consume.

According to the view of post-Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci, subordinated class as described above is not aware or accepts as a "common sense" that they are hegemonized culturally by ruling class which less majority in number. Their unconsciousness or voluntary acceptance of the ideological values of the ruling class is due to the ideology that is more in favour of the interests of the ruling class is culturally transformed through institutions, mass media and popular culture. This transformation process is carried out without any coercion or violence and they can even refuse if they feel unfair. Cultural hegemony is a control with the process of manipulation of the ruling class against toward subordinated class in such a way that the subordinated class feels that social reality is just merely natural event and in fact benefits them. (Fusaro, Xidias, & Fabry, 2017, p. 34).

One genre of popular culture that contains this hegemonic ideology is a popular manga titled *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba* by Koyoharu Gotouge. This paper analyses this manga by applying the concept of cultural and class hegemony from Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci. To strengthen the analysis and because of the relevance of the concept, this paper also includes the interpellation concept from Louis Althusser.

The significance of the choosing *Kimetsu No Yaiba* manga as the object of this analysis is mainly because of its popularity as one of the most widely consumed cultural products by subordinated class. To give a picture of its

popularity, the adaptation of this manga is only the second of the most watched through the Netflix online streaming. Meanwhile, the manga itself is included in the top 10 best-selling manga of all time (Nag, 2024).

This research initially hypothesizes that the *Kimetsu No Yaiba* manga as a worldwide popular fictional text contains hidden ideological content with tendency to perpetuate the efforts of the ruling class to maintain their domination over the subordinated class. As for Marxism all cultural products, especially those are consumed by subordinates' class in massive way, are perfect medium of conveying and perpetuating the dominance of the ruling class political and ideology values.

While in other hand *Kimetsu No Yaiba* has also the tendency of resistance from the subordinated class through the concept of counter hegemony. According to Gramsci, other characteristics of a hegemonic society besides social control are carried out without coercion or violence. This class system also creates opportunities for each class to fight each other ideologically, culturally and at the level of discourse.

The main plot of the *Kimetsu No Yaiba* manga centres on the efforts of a tragic young boy named Tanjiro Kamado. He is on a nearly impossible mission to eradicate all the demons in Japan. *Kimetsu No Yaiba* is set in the Taisho era, the audience will be taken to witness his heroic effort to kill Kibutsuji Muzan, the first and strongest demon. Previously, at the beginning of the manga, it was narrated that Demon Lord slaughtered all members of Tanjiro's family and turned his younger sister Nezuko Kamado into a demonic figure but magically can maintain her human side. It is informed in the manga once you are turned into a Demon you will lose your humanity since you will be always thirst of human blood and flesh.

Apart from the main premise of the story, the manga also features social issues that revolve around the impulses of post-Marxism, namely hegemony and class conflict. This phenomenon can be observed by focusing reading through Marxist critical perspective on the Hashira system and its interaction with one of the important major characters named Kagaya Ubuyashiki.

Hashira are nine paramount swordsmen endowed with extraordinary swordsmanship.

They are still very young, even one of them is already carrying the burden of saving humanity from the threat of demon at the age of 14. They are humanity's main weapon and shield in the fight against demons in the world of Gotouge. Hierarchically, their influence and power are at the highest position of the warriors in the demon slaying corps. In terms of strength and skill, they are placed at completely at different level from the swordsmen from the lower ranks. Gotouge provides a comprehensive narrative about the class system through the swordsman ranking system in this manga. Other swordsmen below the Hashira are not only afraid of them, they also respected the Hashira greatly, despite their young age.

Interestingly, the supreme leader of this elite corps is not a swordsman. Kagaya of the Ubuyashiki clan is a charismatic young leader who is cursed with a severe illness causing him and his previous generations have such a short lifespan. Ubuyashiki is so respected and loved by Hashira even though they are incidentally his subordinate in the hierarchy. The explicit moral values and characteristic of Kagaya Ubuyashiki are unquestionable very heroic in every aspect with almost zero chances to consider him as a villain. With his body gnawed by disease which caused in extremely short lifespan, he keeps his desire to exterminate all demons in Japan.

Ubuyashiki characteristics are described through his method in influencing Hashira to obey him obediently, follow his directions and rules. Ubuyashiki main characteristic is his deeply understanding the hardships experienced by each Hashira. To gain control over each prospective member of the Demon Slayer Corps, Ubuyashiki often visits the Hashira in person. He is narrated several times meeting directly with the character who will later fill Hashira's position. He realized that to be able to gain control over the Hashira prospective candidate, It should be started by gaining sympathy and trust at first place. This behaviour is not seen as insincere or malicious.

Ubuyashiki triumph in leading the Hashira in their battle against the demons from perspective Marxist can be seen as a symbolic class control over Hashira. Hashira believes and follows all directions from Ubuyashiki. including the preeminent and most difficult objective to put an end to Kibutsuji Muzan. The mission is told nearly impossible endeavor.

Ubuyashiki and his ancestors before him had spent thousands of years full of failures and deaths hunting down and trying to kill Muzan. This control is carried out without any element of violence and coercion at all. Control through power as it might have been predicted by many readers because it is a general formulation of a similar storyline. In fact, is totally impossible to carry because he is physically weak and sickly.

Kagaya's love and care for Hashira who is considered as his own children, with the lens of Marxism, especially by applying the concept of cultural hegemony by Gramsci will result in a more critical finding. One of them is that he uses his charismatic personality including the way he speaks to control Hashira to voluntarily and even passionately exterminating demons. Kagaya never intimidates his subordinates with force because with his dying condition it is impossible to do it. In other hand the Hashiras do not realize that their willingness to follow every Kagaya's order are arguably a form control and doctrine over themselves. In their believe and understanding they have been doing extraordinarily good deeds to save humanity from the threat of demons.

From Hashira's point of view, their obedience to Ubuyashiki is because they have internalized Kagaya's views and goals. They do not hesitate to sacrifice their lives to protect humanity which on the one hand can also be seen as the main mission that has been pursued for about 1000 years by Kagaya and the Ubuyashiki family. They have internalized Kagaya's views or in the sense of Marxists as political views and reconstructed reality so that almost all activities and actions as Hashira must go through Kagaya's consent. This event is a symbol of the ruling class that seeks to dominate the subordinated class, a hypothesis that this study wants to prove in the following chapters.

But at some moments, Hashiras are allowed to have different view from Ubuyashiki. When they found out Tanjiro Kamado has been teamed up with his demonic sister to eradicate demons, they immediately gathered at Ubuyashiki residence to demand an explanation. Most of them rejected the idea of cooperating with Nezuko. Some of them even want to kill Tanjiro without Ubuyashiki consent. Shanemi Shinazugawa is the Hashira who opposes this idea most frontally and outspokenly. He wanted to prove his hypothesis

that Nezuko can resist the temptation of human blood directly in front of Ubuyashiki, a figure he respected so much. Meanwhile, this moment can be seen as an initial effort of counter hegemony or the symbolization of the subordinated class to fight against the ruling class. At the same time, this can also be studied through the concept of interpellation from Louis Althusser. In the following chapters, these two hypotheses will be discussed in more depth.

The actions of Hashira in opposing Ubuyashiki especially one character amongst Hashira member named Sanemi Shinazugawa proves that the subordinated and hierarchically weaker classes still could negotiate or even fight the ruling class which is symbolized by Kagaya character. They have different attitudes and efforts to deal with demons. Kagaya as a symbol of a ruler with a higher power does not discourage this attitude of Hashira. He freed Hashira to have a different view from him. This action is reviewed from the perspective of Gramsci hegemonic theory reflecting the class conflict without violence and coercion but apparently essence will still side with the ruling class that is being symbolized by Kagaya himself.

The practice of hegemony as described by Gramsci towards the young Hashira became clearer since he was also shown to really care about his subordinates' fate. He was devastated because one of his beloved subordinates of the fire Hashira Kyojuro Rengoku died after a confrontation with the upper 3rd level moon demon. As explained earlier, Ubuyashiki can make Hashira his subordinate obedient not by violence or coercion but by being empathetic and willing to listen, even if in the end it is still for his benefit.

In addition, what the general manga reader might have missed is probably the practice of hegemony in this manga which makes Kagaya is being trusted to lead the great human effort to defeat the demon. This descriptive qualitative research will try to describe hegemonic these practices critically and in detail, so that it is hoped that new and more significant readings and findings will emerge.

There are not many scientific related previous studies that analysed *Kimetsu No Yaiba*. One of it is a study written by Kolondam, Sumampouw, & Tengker (2022). Their research

discusses the meaning, causes and influence of the loyal attitude of characters in the manga. This study targeted the analysis of 18 characters. The factors that encourage the characters in the *Kimetsu No Yaiba* manga to be loyal are the presence of a sense of admiration, trust, love, hatred, optimism, terror, and happiness.

Meanwhile, the significance of this paper is to try to analyse more deeply that the loyalty of the characters, especially Hashira, does not only come from these characteristics but also the practice of hegemonization. This is a phenomenon that is more than just a personal emotional experience. Hashira is obedient and sometimes has a different view from Ubuyashiki can be seen as a counter of hegemonization practice in the lens of Marxism

Other research related to *Kimetsu No Yaiba* that discusses characterization has been previously conducted before, such as the article from Ikhtiari & Gandana (2020) which discusses the development of Tanjiro Kamado's character by applying the concept of Hero's Journey. There is no other research that critically examines the relationship between characters with Marxist approach that specifically applying concept of Hegemony Gramsci. This article is expected to be able to deliver a more critical reading that according to the author in the previous article that discussed *Kimetsu No Yaiba*, it still has not succeeded in doing so.

DISCUSSION

THEORITICAL DESCRIPTION

This paper applies the concept of cultural hegemony from a post-Marxist political activist, theorist from Italy named Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). He wrote his thoughts while he was imprisoned under the Italian fascist leader Benito Mussolini. With all the limitations and restrictions while in prison, Gramsci's ideas were written down and put together. He developed the thinking of Karl Marx known as Marxism. The word hegemony was not the original creation of Antonio Gramsci but he developed and made it a key terminology of his theory. Etymologically, the word hegemony comes from the ancient Greece "hegemon" which means leader, ruler, and commander. The terminology of hegemony is not only used by Marxist theorists, because its use refers to political domination and leadership in general.

Ideology is a key terminology in understanding Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Like other Marxist thinkers, starting from Karl Marx and his friend Friedrich Engels, Soviet Union Fascist leader Lenin, Georg Lukacs to contemporary Marxist theorist such as Terry Eagleton, all these Marxian thinkers have different perspective toward understanding ideology, no different from Antonio Gramsci himself (Eliott, 2010, p. 343).

Meanwhile, according to Marx, ideology is defined as follows "natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic, or philosophic" forms as "ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out".⁸ (Fuchs, 2019, p. 181). It can be concluded that for Marx, ideology is all social constructions created by humans in life. Man created it, believing in one or several of them, making the direction of life and even conflicting arounds it. Ideology is the realm and object of conflict between the ruling class and the subordinated class occurs, which distinguishes it and makes hegemony for Gramsci the struggle of the subordinated class against the dominant ideology (Childs and Fowler, 2006, p. 44).

In addition to ideology, Gramsci also adopted other key concepts of Marxism, namely base and superstructure. Bases and superstructures are the two most important concepts for understanding the thought of Karl Marx, the thinking that Gramsci used as a basis in developing his theory. These two concepts can be interpreted as follows: "... is that production and social matter are the content of the economic system and that the realm of politics, culture, ideas, legal matters, belief, religion, art, philosophy – what some call social consciousness – is located as a "superstructure" outside and on top of the economic system ("the base")." (Fuchs, 2019, p. 24). The basis of all human creation and social constructions such as politics, culture, belief, art, and philosophy are the economic system. All these things are consciousness, and ideology. As for Marx, the superstructure base must always be able to guarantee the continuity of the superstructure in a deterministic relationship.

The development he made of these two concepts was that he did not see that the factors of production as the basis were deterministic to determine the superstructure. Which means that

ideology is not a form of false consciousness but also has dimensions. Gramsci sees ideology differently from Karl Marx that ideology does not solely exercise social control not through a coercive or binding economic system, but rather ideology is disseminated with the consent of the class society itself. To achieve the state known as hegemony, ideology must contain cultural and intellectual aspects that can be internalized by society voluntarily while maintaining the dominance of the ruling class. In accordance with what Jones explained in one of his books that discusses in depth the actions of Antonio Gramsci entitled "Antonio Gramsci". "Instead of seeing the economy as determining culture and politics, Gramsci argues that culture, politics and the economy are organized in a relationship of mutual exchange with one another, a constantly circulating and shifting network of influence." (Jones, 2007, p. 5).

Louis Althusser, another Marxist thinker from France, also considers the terminology of ideology important, according to him, ideology provides some sort of labelled identity for the individual so that the individual feels that he is the subject of himself. Unfortunately, the individual does not realize that he or she is only part of the mode of production of capitalist society that serves to perpetuate and legitimize the interests of the ruling class. This process is specifically referred by Althusser as interpellation (Ferreter, 2007, p. 89).

From the difference in theoretical concepts of how ideology is transformed by the ruling class into the subordinated class, The hegemony concept of Gramsci can be formulated as follows: "that a social class achieves a predominant influence and power, not by direct and overt means, but by succeeding in making its ideological views so pervasive that the subordinate classes unwittingly accept and participate in their own oppression" (Abrams & Harpham, 2012, p. 207). The most fundamental difference is that there is no violence, and the willingness of the subordinate class. They have no choice but to accept and participate in the oppression of themselves. Both Karl Marx and Gramsci saw ideology as an important factor. The fundamental difference between Gramsci's concept and the ideology described by Marx is that it allows for negotiation and exchange and even ideological conflicts between classes (ibid.).

Hegemony as explained earlier is a form of social reality phenomenon that applies in society and accepted as a natural common sense, it cannot be avoided, or the social system that applies globally during society is the only applicable social system. With this logic and paying attention to the current dominant social reality, it can be concluded that global capitalism, or in George Mendel's term known as late capitalism, is a consensus or common sense that has been successfully conditioned as the most acceptable system (Ferretter, 2007, p. 138).

The ruling class attempts to perpetuate their dominance in class society without coercion and is offered as a representation of normal values. It is hoped that the working class can be hegemonized and accept ideological transformation as a matter of course. This process of acceptance and justification is important because hegemony works without elements of coercion and violence. (Nayar, 2009, p. 165). Rather, the hegemonization process works through the process of transactions, negotiations, and compromises (Jones, 2007, p. 10).

In line with Nayar, Jones explained that the ruling class pays attention to what the subordinated class feels. At first glance, this is not an absolute authoritarian form of power. It is hoped that in this way the subordinated class will accept the practice of hegemonization as normal. The working class will certainly see hidden ideologies that are translated through popular national ideas, reasonable values, and community groups.

The ruling or dominant class in the hegemonic system gains their power not through coercion and violence. They use ideology as a control tool so that the class below them can be subordinated without them realizing it. This subordinated class also unconsciously participates in the practical act of them of oppression. The next idea is that, because there is no direct pressure, the conflicts that may occur between the people of this class are also filled with negotiations. Gramsci also emphasizes the role of intellectuals to perpetuate this. (Gramsci in Abrams, and Harpham, 2012, p. 207). Power is transformed through ideology. So that ideology is an important concept that for Gramsci is more than just a false consciousness.

Antonio Gramsci, Cultural Hegemony and Counter Ideology.

One of the peculiarities of Gramsci's hegemonic theory is its nature that rejects the deterministic relationship between economics, culture, and politics. Gramsci sees a more dynamic relationship between the three aspects that opens opportunities for negotiation between those classes. (Jones, 2007, p. 5)

Not only the negotiation, the subordinated class are also allowed to carry out rejection and resistance or in other words narrating a counter-ideology to compete with the established ideology of the ruling class. But resistance is also carried out ideologically because the domination that is opposed is translated through ideologies, values, and norms that are considered normal to live the daily life.

Hegemony is a natural and acceptable thing besides without coercion because it is channelled through state institutions that are ideologically loaded such as schools and religion. As also explained above, there is an internalization of the practice of domination by the class people. A society that is hegemonized by the state or rulers internalizes the values given by the rulers so that ideological resistance will ultimately still be more on the side of the ruling class so that power and control can be maintained. (Gramsci in Bertens, 2008, pp. 68-69).

Nayar explained in his book *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory from Structuralism*. The concept of cultural hegemony is effectively carried out through mass media. In addition, popular cultural products such as manga and animation are an important medium to carry out hegemony. This is because popular culture is an aspect that is close to the daily life of the working class. It does not look forceful, it is subtly delivered, but it is full of it. Ideology can be conveyed better if it is embedded in all cultural products of the time that are consumed on a massive and continuous scale. The main message that must be conveyed, according to Nayar, is the dominant class or here the owners of capital are a group of generous individuals because they move the wheels of the economy and even build civilization. Furthermore, the acceptance of reality is properly constructed.

Gramsci's thinking about power has similarities with Michel Foucault's view. Power

exists as mere coercive control or even violence as done by law enforcement, or dictators. Furthermore, hegemonic power where the structure of society creates it. Fry's abstract explanation is simply differentiated between coercion and violence (Fry, 2012, p. 291).

Why Gramsci's hegemonic theory is suitable as an analysis of popular culture is because, as mentioned above, if the approval and acceptance of the subordinated class society cannot be achieved through violence, then this can be obtained through what they consume: "to analyses popular culture, neither as culturalist expression nor imposed structure, but rather as a form of settlement negotiated to the advantage of the ruling bloc; understood as hegemony, popular culture is therefore both structurally imposed and an oppositional expression". Interestingly, not only the ruling class can narrate ideologies that are favourable to them, but also various forms of popular culture can also be used by the subordinated class to create counter-ideologies (Easthope, 1991, p. 71).

Gramsci's cultural hegemony emphasizes the importance and crucial of culture as the main axis of power that influences social change. Hegemony sees the dominant class and the subordinate class always "at war" in spreading the ideology they carry. In contemporary life, culture is also transitioning into popular or contemporary culture or pop culture. Pop culture products consumed by many people such as social texts, literary works, movies, tv and the internet became the most effective medium of the dominant class to acquire or maintain power. The uniqueness and peculiarity of hegemony through this culture, the subordinate classes also use it as a medium of resistance and even revolution. It can be concluded that the "battle" between classes occurs in these cultural products. The two classes compete for influence so that later the ideology they offer can become the dominant ideology (Child and Fowlers, 2006, p. 103). They assess how such factors as ethnicity, race, gender, class, age, region, and sexuality are shaped by and reshaped in popular culture (Guerin, et. al., 2005, p. 302).

Pop culture became an important arena for two classes. Discourse on current issues can be debated through the medium of pop culture. As explained by Guerin, these issues include important contemporary issues such as

ethnicity, race, gender, class, and sexuality. (Guerin, et. al., 2005, p. 302). Issues that of course must be discussed with understanding and cross-disciplinary perspectives. By applying Gramsci's idea of hegemony practices which can be carried out without violence, it can be concluded that pop culture as mentioned above has a crucial role in controlling the dominant ideology circulating in society.

The function of hegemony in relation to ideological warfare is further explained by Siswati as follows. Hegemony also includes the role of the capital class and its members, both in seizing state power and in maintaining the power it already has. Gramsci states that a class cannot achieve national leadership and become hegemonic, if the class is only concerned with its own interests, therefore they must also pay attention to the demands and struggles of the people who do not have a pure class character, that is, interests that do not arise directly from the relations of production. Thus, hegemony has a class dimension and a national dimension of populism. From the explanation above, it can be seen how a dominant class takes to remain the dominant class Siswati, E. (2017).

Like what Rachman, et al. said in their paper (2022), for dominant class to achieve hegemonic power, at least several elements that interact with each other are needed, namely culture, hegemony, ideology, popular belief, intellectuals, and the state. This means that the owner of capital and its factors of production cannot become the dominant class without paying attention to other aspects and classes of society.

Siswati in her article Anatomy Antonio Gramsci Theory of hegemony (2017) elaborates some key points of Gramsci idea. In her analysis on Gramsci idea, she concludes that exploitative capitalistic social formation and political repression of Mussolini's fascist regime did not automatically give birth to a social revolution, and even gave rise to the symptoms of strengthening 'de-ploletarization', in which the workers were willing to accept the suffering, even supporting the existence of Mussolini's regime. It makes the novelties of Gramsci's concept of hegemony compared to previous Marxism is the willingness of the subordinated class or the working class over their exploitation. Gramsci's hegemony rejected Marx's prediction that a social revolution would

erupt among the working class because of capitalist exploitative practices.

Hegemony in the Gramsci sense is a consensus organization in which submission is obtained through the ideological mastery of the hegemonic class. Consensus according to Gramsci is a consensus that is created because there is a basis for agreement. For Gramsci, a consensus that the working class receives is essentially passive, meaning.

How exactly hegemony works and controls is explained by Barry in his book *Beginning Theory* as follows: "Hegemony is like an internalized form of social control which makes certain views seem 'natural' or invisible so that they hardly seem like views at all, just 'the way things are'." Some social and cultural realities in Gramsci's Hegemony perspective are so normal and natural that the idea of resisting arises as a useless thing.

This unconsciousness or acceptance of the hegemonic society is conceptually like the concept of interpellation put forward by Louis Althusser, one of the other post-Marxist thinkers. Interpellation for Althusser is a condition in which an individual feels and believes to have free will over himself or herself but basically all these things are nothing more than an illusion created by the ruling class to control the oppressed class. The 'trick' whereby we are made to feel that we are choosing when really, we have no choice is called by Althusser interpellation.

Interpellation is Althusser's term for the way the individual is encouraged to see herself or himself as an entity free and independent of social forces. Althusser argues that subjects of experience are ideologically produced and thereby equipped to perform the roles to which they are allocated in the social division of labour. According to Althusser, everyone is organized ideologically so that their existence can be used in the division of roles and functions that have been designed by the ruling class. Usually, this functions in the allocation of jobs in capitalist society.

ANALYSIS AND FINDING

Hashira are submissive, obedient, and respectful to Ubuyashiki. This is not the impact of repressive actions from Ubuyashiki. They are clearly stronger and more talented than their leader. In terms of age and experience,

Ubuyashiki is also not much different from Hashira who he considers as her own child. There are even two older Hashiras than Him.

1) Kagaya Ubuyashiki, and Hegemony through the Hashira system

Most of the Hashira experienced such as horrible and broken hearted past due to demonic attacks. Ubuyashiki uses this traumatic experience to attract the successor of prodigy swordsmen's willingness to fight under his command and save the world from the demons. In this manga, none of the main swordsmen joined without any bad experience from the demons before. This effort is proven successful to be applied on Hashira because of Ubuyashiki's characteristic aligned for this purpose. As explained by the following quote as "genuinely inspiring, motivating, and empowering leadership style that has kept the Hashira and demon slayer corps together all this time" (Kemner, 2023). In addition, another common reading of him is a wise and insightful young leader. He can lead, inspire, and influence the Hashira through his words. Kagaya is very proud of the Hashiras in general.

Despite of this weak and common understanding of certain characters Ubuyashiki is an ideal figure to show the hegemonization process. In contrast to the main antagonist, Kibutsuji Muzan who uses violence to control his subordinates. Twelve strongest demon or also known as the twelve moon demons were so obedient and afraid of him, even Muzan would not think twice about killing his subordinates if they were considered too weak way too useless in eliminating the demon slayer corps. Readers do not deny the fact that Kagaya managed to make these teenagers voluntarily fighting all the demons and even risk of their lives during their dangerous mission. Kagaya Ubuyashiki himself understands the Hashiras or in many occasions considered as his own children would most likely be killed while carrying out their duties.



Figure 1. Hashira assembles

Figure 1 or first panel above shows Hashira's appearance together for the first time in the manga. The context of the introduction in this panel is a regular meeting between Hashira and their supreme leader Kagaya Ubuyashiki. Mangaka explained each of the Hashiras at this moment. Hashira who gathered above were named Obanai Oguro, Giyu Tomioka, Shinobu Kocho, Muichiro Tokito, Kyojuro Rengoku, and Mitsuri Kanroji, Uzui Tengen, the figure behind the silhouette was Sanemi Shinazugawa. One Hashira member who is not featured in the above panel is Gyomei Himejima, the strongest member. Each Hashira has a unique sword style that is different from each other. In the manga, this technique is called the breathing system.

Hashira is the main weapon of humanity to defeat demons and their creator Kibutsuji Muzan. They are led by the one and only Kagaya Ubuyashiki. They are awarded with some privileges compared to the lower ranks' swordsmen in the demon slayer corps hierarchy. This ranking itself is a representation of the main issue in the dialectic of Marxist studies, namely a society divided by class, they voluntarily and consciously sacrifice their lives for humanity.



Figure 2. Kagaya Ubuyashiki First Appearance

Figure 2 shows Kagaya Ubuyashiki first appearance in manga along with his twin daughters to meet Hashira, Tanjiro, and her sister Nezuko for the first time. He is the supreme leader of the Hashira. Kagaya Ubuyashiki and the Hashiras, meet every 6 months and at the special moment above they will discuss the condition of Tanjirou Kamado who hunts demons together with his sister. This Tanjiro unusual method of hunting demon is a very serious matter, Tanjiro and his sister can be executed by Hashira for this act.

His presence is not intimidating at all. His face covered in scars turned out to be the result of a mysterious disease that made his lifespan very short. He is having trouble just to walk normally and need to be helped by his daughters as seen above. Ubuyashiki does not have any

swordsmanship skills like the Hashiras, . In addition to being shown physically weak. All the initial utterances that emerged from the supreme leader of mankind in fighting demons are not possessed threat at all. Even so, it does not reduce the respect and obedience of the Hashiras. Early representations of Ubuyashiki show that influence and control can be obtained without any element of violence. The practice of hegemony described by Gramsci has already begun here and will continue to be shown more clearly in the following panels.



Figure 3. Kagaya is well respected by Hashira

With his helpless appearance and weak body due to the disease that gnawed over his young body, the exceptionally powerful Hashiras still show their greatest respect to him. Ubuyashiki has something in him to make the Hashiras respect him deeply. A respect that leads to the willingness of risking their life. This form of respect can be seen from the position of those who are bowing and not looking directly into the eyes of their superiors. As shown in panel 3 above, Wind Hashira, Sanemi Shinazugawa who is known to be very temperamental, harsh, and stubborn even bows his head to give respect toward Ubuyashiki. This is a symbolic of cultural hegemonic practice in which the hegemonized party does not realize that they are consciously and voluntarily accepting control and domination over him. Without any coercive violence at all, Ubuyashiki as a symbol of the ruling class ensures his dominance over the oppressed class symbolized by Sanemi which in this panel by creating a constructed social reality. This reality can be achieved by instilling moral values, beliefs, and dominant ideologies. This has also been accepted by Hashira as common sense that is created naturally.



Figure 4. Sanemi is confronting Ubuyashiki decision

The context of the panel above is Ubuyashiki willingness to spare Tanjiro and his daughter life and let them to continue hunting demons even though Nezuko is partly if not completely a demon. Most of the Hashiras disagree with this decision. They are all aware that every demon in Japan must be completely eradicated.

Ubuyashiki as a symbol of the ruling class wants to listen to the anxiety felt by Sanemi's as well as another Hashira. To get submission from Sanemi, Ubuyashiki is also apologizing over his decision.

In hegemony society system as explained earlier, subordinated class can challenge the ruling class political and cultural decision. Sanemi as one of the most vocal Hashira questioned the decisions of his leaders, instead of immediately accepting all the decisions made by Ubuyashiki, he showed his reluctance to the decisions made by Ubuyashiki. The two main points questioned by Sanemi are, as a Hashira whose main job is to eradicate demons but instead cooperate with the demons themselves is completely absurd. For him and the others who had been suffering by the demons created by Muzan Kibutsuji, these demons are all the same. There was no way any of them could resist their thirst for human flesh and blood. Or even later in the future they can get their identity as a normal human being again. As a demon hunter, he had to throw away his sentimental feelings because they often had to finish off their own family members who had turned into demons.

As explained earlier, Hegemony for Gramsci has made the possibilities for the oppressed class to put up a resistance. This resistance by Gramsci is called as counter hegemony. Ideological resistance by those who are suppressed without any violence at all. Subordinated class must create a counter-common sense by creating counter-cultural and political institutions, therefore this counter-movement will only be ideal if it is driven by educated people or in Gramsci terms is known as organic intelligent. Because this resistance movement must be structured and require formal political institutions, strong cultural influence,

and strong alliance groups.

What Sanemi has been done cannot be categorized into counter hegemony or counter cultural. However, it is possible that his

disagreement will become a more well-structured resistance movement if Ubuyashiki does not open the opportunity for the Hashiras to express what they think an believe. So, what the author can convey through this article is. Ubuyashiki physical weakness is his main weapon to ensure that he is always in a better ideological position compared to the Hashiras.



Figure 5. Ubuyashiki Calms Hashira

In picture 5 above, Hashira is so shocked and enthusiastic to learn that the Tanjiro the demon hunter that they previously wanted to execute, unexpectedly have encountered their main enemy. None of the Hashira of this generation have ever met Muzan in person. In simple terms, the reader will see that Ubuyashiki has an extraordinary charisma and aura that makes Hashira respect him. Only with a finger gesture, Ubuyashiki can gain the control over the Hashiras. A more in-depth reading by applying Gramsci's Hegemony will result in a reading that Ubuyashiki is a symbol of the ruling class to maintain its dominance over the Hashiras. There was no threat, or show of strength shown by Ubuyashiki. This is a symbolization of the hegemonization practice carried out by various state institutions in transmitting dominant ideologies. For example, school institutions will ensure that the curriculum used to teach social norms, values, history or whatever is always on the side and legitimizes the interests of the authorities. The same thing is also commonly found in news in the mass media, the narrative used in delivering news can be used to maintain the power and relations of the ruling class. It will not be surprising that this phenomenon can be seen through religious institutions. No matter what the religion is, through the teachings that are spread or fatwahed, it may contain elements to ask their followers or people that leadership is something that must be maintained. Whatever the institution, it always harbors an invisible or deliberately created impulse of class struggle so subtle that repressive actions are almost undetectable. So that legal institutions, cultural

institutions, and organizations and political parties become institutions that function to always strive to maintain the dominance of the ruling class. All the examples above have something in common, namely carrying out their agenda without any element of violence and coercion. All these institutions are machines that produce social reality that is used to control the oppressed class.

This ability can be analyzed through the characteristics of Ubuyashiki who remained calm when Hashira voiced their disapproval to forgive Tanjiro and Nezuko. As can be seen from the picture 6 above Sanemi, one of the harshest Hashira refuses, hurts her own hand to prove that Nezuko is still a bloodthirsty demon. Sanemi wants to prove to her leader that Nezuko is not a special demon. Ubuyashiki lets Sanemi do this. Ubuyashiki gives his subordinate Sanemi a chance just to prove his logic and calculations wrong on this occasion. Ubuyashiki negotiations to accept Sanemi's quite brutal behavior itself even made him more recognizable and more well respected as a leader. Ubuyashiki did not try to contain the anger that Sanemi tried to vent. This is another form of symbolism that appears in the manga. The control of the oppressed class without violence, what Ubuyashiki did was only to let the party he wanted to control without doing anything.

In contemporary society, class society is often allowed to resist, and show their dislike and disapproval of a policy of a state institution. For example, a group of people who protested the labor law. They took to the streets and tried to voice their wishes and concerns to the honorable representatives of the people. What they are fighting for is an increase in the minimum wage of workers, the nominal of which may be for a few percent, but what they do not realize is that they are still workers and must work hard for the company, doing the same, boring, and repetitive things every day. All activities and social norms that are considered normal without them realizing that all these things are constructed and formed to be considered and accepted as normal. This phenomenon according to Althusser's theorization is called interpellation.

With the logic of Althusser's interpellation, the Hashira according to their consciousness are not under the ideological

control of Ubuyashiki, but nevertheless they know that they have internalized the ideological values of Ubuyashiki regarding the ideal world without the existence of demons. They agree and realize from the bottom of their hearts that they were born as the savior of mankind. Their existence was to eradicate the demons even if it meant sacrificing their lives. So that the main hypothesis of this study can also be proven that the Hashira are a symbol of a hegemonic class society.



Figure 6
Sanemi wants to prove his point to Ubuyashiki



Figure 7
Ubuyashiki is hegemonizing Tanjiro Kamado

After succeeding in hegemonizing Hashira to follow all his ideal views, Ubuyashiki is also shown trying to hegemonize Tanjiro, right after their two first meetings. In panel 7 above, Tanjiro who was battered because he had just fought all out to defeat one of the upper moon demons suddenly felt very weird calming sensation after he listen to Ubuyashiki. The panel above occurred after Sanemi failed to force Nezuko to attack her bloody hands which fail to prove his point that Nezuko is a threat to humanity like other demons.

Ubuyashiki's unique characteristics of being gentle, full of wisdom, and willing to listen to his subordinates' feel are the key factors that made Tanjiro Kamado and the rest of Hashira follows his order obediently. As mentioned, several times before, this is an extraordinarily difficult path to eradicate all demons and their creator Kibutsuji Muzan. Ubuyashiki is a symbol of the ruling class to convince his talented subordinates to defeat Kibutsuji Muzan. He convinces the Hashira defeating Kibutsuji Muzan without a doubt is the utopic achievable condition.

The interpellation process of Althusser's concept can also be seen from panel 7 above. A gently but deadly request from Ubuyashiki to Tanjiro to finish off the leader of the demons Kibutsuji Muzan. Tanjiro feels called and feels

that it is indeed fate for him to risk his life for the sake of humanity, without even realizing that there is also a process of control from Ubuyashiki over him.



Figure 8. Ubuyashiki shows his respect to his children, The Hashira

Ubuyashiki can control and hegemonize people who are physically stronger and capable of fighting far more superior than himself. Ubuyashiki was able to convince Hashira to train so hard up to the point they vomit blood and almost died. To maintain the loyalty of Hashira, Ubuyashiki created or maintained a class system among the swordsmen in the demon-slaying corps. As shown in the panel 8 above, Ubuyashiki ensured that Hashira was treated favorably and was always respected by the weaker swordsmen below their rank.

The system created by the ancestors of Ubuyashiki is what makes the Hashira feel that they are being treated differently. And this special treatment also plays a significant role in legitimating their importance part in society. As well as the people around them, who are hierarchically below them, feel that they must respect these, Hashiras. This is the embodiment of the social class system which is the main aspect criticized by Marxist thinkers. With this hegemonization process, important characters in *Kimetsu No Yaiba* story will realize and then internalize that their social reality must indeed be manifested in the form of classes and social rankings from the strongest to the weakest. Once again it needs to be clarified that the process of acceptance of other characters to the existence and superiority of Hashira.



Figure 9. An Explicit and simple description of Ubuyashiki Characteristic

Another evidence of the manga that shows the existence of non-violent control and coercion is the author narration in panel 9 above

which explains Ubuyashiki unique characteristics through the tone of her voice and the rhythm of her action's. He has a charismatic personality that can influence people around him and act according to what he wants. The gentleness of himself was his main weapon, in stark contrast to the terror, strength and power possessed by Kibutsuji Muzan.

When it is viewed from the perspective of hegemony of Gramsci it eventually represents more than just a figure like a charismatic father who protects his children. Behind its softness is the hidden symbolization of the dominant class in maintaining his power, domination, and influence, which can be translated in the form of capital owners or the ruling class. Meanwhile, the hegemonic Hashira is a class that symbolizes the working class who are under control without their awareness.

One of the characteristics of Gramsci's hegemonic practice is the existence of a consensus between the dominant class and the subordinated class. This consensus was seen in the meeting between Kagaya and Hashira. To hegemonize these swordsmen to move according to his will, Kagaya listened to what his subordinates proposed and felt. As seen in the following figure 10.



Figure 10. Ubuyashiki shows his domination and control



Figure 11. Hashira bow to show respect to Ubuyashiki

The Hashira, the main protagonist of the story, is a group of the most elite warriors, who have a lot of respect for the sickly Kagaya Ubuyashiki. The panel in data 11 above shows that 9 members of Hashira pay the deepest respect to their leader by bowing their bodies. This moment occurred shortly after most of them disagreed with Ubuyashiki decision to spare the lives of Tanjiro and his sister Nezuko. Sanemi Hashira, who was the most frontal against Ubuyashiki, even injured his hand to prove his theory. One thing to note is that the rude Sanemi still tries to respect Ubuyashiki and shows that his argument for killing Nezuko is logical and acceptable. After he could not prove that Nezuko was a threat to humans, Ubuyashiki

hoped that all these polemics would end soon. Of course, in a distinctive and hegemonic way of delivery. And in the end, as shown in the panel above, all Hashiras bow down and respect their young leaders and their illnesses. This proves that there is no strong counter hegemony from Hashira. And Ubuyashiki power to hegemonize his subordinates were much stronger.

Kimetsu No Yaiba manga wants to create the reader's perception that a classroom system is needed so that human civilization can continue to run and survive. It is an instinctive nature of human beings to live under the command of others. A society without classes is a utopia that may not be achievable. The absence of social class and control of the dominant class is a condition that is not ideal for humanity itself, or at least that is what the Manga wants to convey because it relies only on the quality of its animation adaptation. *Kimetsu No Yaiba* is considered not to offer a strong storyline and seems too general.

The relationship between Hashira cannot be said to be harmonious. Often, they have different opinions. Sanemi and Giyu Tomioka are even shown several times to be openly conflicted and must get involved in a fight because of the difference in principles between them. However, in the end they agreed and agreed to still respect the same individual.



Figure 12. Two oldest Hashira express their disagreement

One form of hegemonic practice is that the subordinated class can convey their political ideas, as a counter-ideology. Their voices were not completely silenced by the ruling class. Hashira as a symbol of the subordinated class is given the freedom to explain what they feel is wrong, especially if it is contrary to their main effort to eliminate the demon. As in panel 12 above, most of the Hashira showed their disapproval to spare the lives of Tanjiro and his sister. They convey their fears frontally and openly in front of Ubuyashiki.

Through panel 12 above, the reader of the manga learns that two Hashiras who are the same age as the 2 oldest Hashiras explain their disapproval to Ubuyashiki. They are both Uzui

Tengen and Gyomei Himejima. Gyomei is even 4 years older than Ubuyashiki. But in the end, they both remained obedient to orders or rather unbelievably polite invitations from their leader. This symbolizes that the counter hegemony that most Hashira is trying to do which Sanemi, Uzui, and Gyomei are by far the most frontal attempt eventually is still not effective enough to create counter-ideological value against Ubuyashiki political values. It can be concluded that they are physically the strongest characters, but ideologically, they are subordinates of the weakest character who is also in dying state of himself.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the popular manga *Kimetsu No Yaiba* by Koyoharu Gotouge with a post-Marxist perspective from Antonio Gramsci with the concept of Cultural Hegemony, and Counter Hegemony, it can be concluded that the protagonist character named Kagaya Ubuyashiki has succeeded in hegemonizing the Nine swordsmen known as Hashira. As theorized by Gramsci, the practice of hegemonization ideologically, politically, and culturally can be carried out without any violent elements and does not seem to be forced. Ubuyashiki succeeded in making the young Hashiras to obediently internalize the ideological values that he and his ancestors believed in, namely that there is no place for demons and humans to coexist. So, the only way out is to kill all the demons that exist. If it is further deepened in the context of contemporary society in the period of advanced capitalism. Kagaya Ubuyashiki is a symbol of the ruling class that seeks to maintain its dominance over the subordinated class, namely the Hashiras.

Meanwhile, when viewed from Hashira's point of view, they were detected to have countered hegemony. This is proven in several moments when they show their disapproval of Hashira. They are not only obedient and agree to all decisions made by Kagaya Ubuyashiki. One of the most obvious moments to show this aspect is when the majority of Hashira agreed One of the most obvious moments to show this aspect is when the majority of Hashira agreed not to want to spare the lives of Tanjiro Kamado and his demon sister Nezuko Kamado.

Two important findings show that the ruling class symbolized by Kagaya Ubuyashiki

is still more dominant in maintaining and ensuring that its ideological and political values are stronger than the subordinated class symbolized by Hashira. The resistance carried out by Hashira only entered the early stages and did not enter the realm to offer a stronger counter-ideology to shake the dominance of Kagaya Ubuyashiki.

The Hashiras felt that the treatment they received from Ubuyashiki was a gift like a love and affection given by a father to their children. Their desperate efforts to eradicate demons were their own consciousness. They believe that by becoming a Hashira has determined their own destiny, without them realizing that it is a function and task created by the ruling class for them. Through this event, the reading will find that the phenomenon of interpellation of Althusser's ideas was found in the *Kimetsu No Yaiba* Manga.

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