

**Kinds of Social Protests in Margaret Atwood's
*The Handmaid's Tale***

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Abstract

*Social protest is an expression or action that expresses a complaint, rebuttal, or rejection from the ordinary people against an individual or institution in power. Lofland defines social protest as an expression or complaint of ordinary people to the government because of a political, cultural, or economic social crisis. In this study, the researcher aims to analyze social protest in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* to understand the types of social protest in depth.*

*The research method used in this study is literary criticism. The researcher uses John Lofland's theory of social protest in analyzing and interpreting the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood to obtain an overview of the types of social protest.*

*Based on the findings and discussion, there are four types of social protest in Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*: symbolic social protest, anti-cooperation social protest, intervention social protest, and alternative institutional social protest. Symbolic social protests are linked to issues of sexual slavery, oppression of women, and loss of freedom. Anti-cooperation social protests are related to sexual slavery, oppression of women, and loss of freedom. Interventional social protests are linked to issues of sexual slavery, oppression of women, and loss of freedom. Alternative social institutions protest the loss of freedom.*

Keywords: *Kinds of Social Protests in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale**

Background of the Study

Social protest is a phenomenon that often occurs in society. Usually, social protests are carried out by individuals or groups against individuals or institutions in power. The cause is unfair treatment towards others. This treatment causes specific individuals or groups to confide in their hearts and reject others. Their protests can be in the form of economic, political, cultural, or other issues deemed inappropriate. Social protest is an expression or complaint of ordinary people to the government because of a social crisis, both politically, culturally, and economically (Lofland, 2015: 6).

Social protests can be carried out in various ways. It can be done by taking action to the streets, sit-in actions, speeches in front of government offices, and through the law, even the most extreme is to seal government offices and occupy them. Based on the way it is done, social protests can be grouped into two, namely, direct and indirect. Direct social protests are carried out by marching, speeches, demonstrations, sealing, and occupying government offices. Meanwhile, indirect protest is a protest carried out through art, including literary works. According to Saini (1994: 3), creative writers, through directing their awareness, will determine the challenges of reality to be answered, then seek and find answers (visions) and express that vision in their works. If the direction chooses the path of protest, works will be created that lead the reader to experience the realities that cause concern, rejection, denial, and condemnation. Conducting direct or indirect protests depends on the risks to be accepted and whether or not a social protest is achieved. When the risk is significant, and the goal is small, social protest is usually carried out indirectly. On the other hand, if the risk is small and the goal is significant, it will be done directly.

In the case of social protest, the choice of media or tools is significant. The media or tools used must be easy to accept, influence the mind, and attract the general public's sympathy. One of them is literature. Literary work becomes a medium that can convey feelings and criticism of a problem (Wahyuni, 2019: 156). In literary works, the themes discussed to play an essential role in delivering social protest indirectly. This means that the element of social protest in literary works has a position as a theme, as do elements of religiosity, patriotism, nationalism, and others. If the theme discussed is about events related to social protest, this literary work will undoubtedly become a medium or tool of social protest from certain parties against other parties.

Social protests through the media of literary works are not only judged by the themes discussed, but other elements are interrelated, namely characters, characterizations, plot, and settings, whether place, time, or atmosphere. From the aforementioned intrinsic elements, we can know the social protest of the author. Usually, literary works contain elements of social protest, which is also closely related to the author's life experience at the time the literary work was written or so-called extrinsic elements of literary works. Abrams (in

Siswantoro, 2013: 53) explains that the structure of literary works suggests the relationship between elements, both intrinsically and extrinsically. Structural analysis can take the form of events, plots, characters and characterizations, settings, points of view, and so on. (inWidia and Widowati, 2015: 47).

Literary works cannot be separated from real life. This is because every author who writes his work must have a background in social life which is the source of the creation of a work. It is from real life that literary works are built and produce their realities in literary works. The reality in literary works describes actual social reality. Even though the objective social reality is depicted in reality in the literary work, it does not mean that the reality in the literary work is the actual social reality. The reality in literature is only a reflection of social reality in life. Suhardi (in Wahyuni, 2019: 145) stated that the creation of literary works, when viewed from the background of their birth, has two main elements, first the element of entertainment and the second element of the author's social criticism of the reality that occurs around him. In other words, the author can turn his work into a forum to criticize social conditions which he thinks are in a bad state.

The explanation of literary works and life mentioned is also the opinion that literary works are expressions of real life through language. Ismail defines literature as an expression of life with language media (2003: 13). Sapardi Djoko Damono also discussed issues related to literature and life. He argues that literature is a social institution that uses language as a medium; language itself is a social creation. The literature presents a picture of life, and life itself is a social reality (1978: 1). In this study, the researcher focused on the analysis of social protest written by the author of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*.

In literature, many aspects of life can be used as themes for discussion, including social protest. The phenomenon of social protest is an interesting one. It is one of the social realities that is often discussed in various forms of literary works. The social protest has a position like other elements such as religiosity, nationalism, patriotism, and eroticism as a theme. Literary works that contain elements of social protest are usually motivated by the author's experience regarding the political conditions of a society that is raging so that it causes people to express their disappointment and rejection of individuals or government institutions in power. Such backgrounds usually produce literary works of social protest. The author tries to pour what is in his mind and taste into literary works to describe the conditions of an existing reality through themes, characters, plot, setting, and characterizations.

The author expresses his protest through literary works of various forms. Because the forms of literary works are very diverse, they can be in the form of short stories, novels, poetry, or other forms of literary works. However, in essence, literary works with the theme of social protest cannot be separated from actual historical facts. Such literary works are called historical literary

works. In Indonesia, there are many authors whose work has become a medium for social protests, such as the poems of Soe Hok Gie, Widji Tukul, and W.S. Rendra. Their poetry was closely related to the political conditions in Indonesia at that time. Such poetry is composed based on historical facts of Indonesia at the time of writing by the author.

One form of literary work that often discusses the theme of social protest is a novel. A novel is a literary work that has a long section. The definition of the novel itself is a story with a plot, long enough to fill a book or more, which works on the imaginative lives of men and women (Tarigan, 2000: 114 in Sari, 2017: 43). With their long-form, novels are very effective at conveying social protests. Meanwhile, the social protest itself is part of what is conveyed by the community. Experience, thoughts, and what the community feels will usually be conveyed through protests.

Novels with the theme of social protest are usually used to fight against unfair life situations. This situation is depicted through a fictional character in the novel. Through these characters, the author reflects on the contradiction between consciousness and reality to produce works, namely novels. One of them is Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The problems in the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* are closely related to people's lives. The researcher found the problems of sexual slavery by the authorities against women in Gilead, religion as a tool of oppression, depriving laws, lack of freedom, and loss of humanity in the theocratic Gilead country. The problems mentioned by the researcher make Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* enjoyable to discuss. These problems are part of the social problems that have caused much rejection from the people in the republic of Gilead, which were conveyed in the form of protests. Therefore, the researcher made the novel as the object of study in this thesis. Then, based on this problem, the researcher uses a sociology of literature approach with John Lofland's social protest theory to examine social protest in this thesis. The reason the researcher makes the theory of social protest as a topic of discussion cannot be separated from the content of the discussion in the novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. The content of the discussion of the novel includes social problems, namely the problem of women's oppression, such as sexual slavery and deprivation of women's rights (right to work, right to own property, travel freely, read and write). Then, because of sexual slavery and the deprivation of women's rights, various types of social protests emerged from several characters in the novel. Based on this, social protest theory is very relevant to study of the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood.

Research Method

The research method is a procedure, technique, and principles used by researcher in conducting research. Raco stated that the research method is a scientific activity starting from determining the topic, collecting data, then

analyzing the data (2010: 2- 3). The research method in this section covers research design, data and data source, data collection, and data analysis.

Sociology of Literature

Literary works embody human imagination and creativity, so literary works are always related to human social life. Many realities of human social life are contained in literary works. Wellek, Rene, and Austin Warren (2014,p. 110) use literature as a social document as an approach to studying the relationship between literature and society.

Literary criticism related to social life has been carried out with various approaches. Some examples of criticism of social life in literary works written in Rahayu and Aurita (2020) state that in the novel *Cantik Luka* by Eka Kurniawan, a new image is depicted for women who have feminist awareness which is shown through their characters who have rebellious, independent, tough, brave, and brave souls. and spirit of leadership. This shows good developments in literary studies that will bring new perspectives in understanding the realities of people's social life, especially in the field of gender. Literary works that intersect with women's lives are also studied in Rahayu and Aisyah (2014) that there is a power relation over women's bodies in the novel memoir of *geisha* and the dancer. Women's bodies are used as commodities and tools to satisfy men. Both the memoirs of *geisha* novels and the dancers both have a tradition of selling women's virginity for profit. However, what distinguishes the two novels is the resistance from traditional *ronggeng* dancers against selling virginity, while in *geisha* novels there is no resistance and they tend to accept the *geisha* tradition as it is.

The two studies above are examples of literary criticism related to social problems experienced by women. In other studies, there are also literary criticisms related to human life on the date of covid-19. Rahayu (2021) argues that pandemic literature provides a lot of topic space for researchers to study. pandemic literature in Indonesia and the world is also developing as a result of the global pandemic, it allows the public to produce and consume pandemic literature to gain more pandemic knowledge. From the three studies above, it can be concluded that literary works always intersect with the real life of social society.

In the world of literature, there are various approaches to studying a literary work. The various approaches used are based on their respective fields of science. In the field of psychology, which relates it to literature, it is known as literary psychology. While in the field of sociology associated with literature is known as the sociology of literature. The sociology of literature is the focus of discussion in this research.

Sociology of literature is an approach in the literature that tries to understand, analyze and evaluate literary works by considering social or societal aspects (Damono in Wiyatmi, 2013, p. 5). The combination of literature and

sociology attempts to understand literary works through a sociological approach to literature. Literature is a social phenomenon studied with the eyes of literature and remains related to sociology.

The sociology of literature is an interdisciplinary approach to reading and understanding literature. Therefore, before explaining the nature of the sociology of literature according to Swingwood (in Wiyatmi, 2013, p. 6), we must first be able to know the boundaries of sociology as a science and describe the differences and similarities between sociology and literature.

Swingwood (in Wiyatmi, p. 6) reveals that sociology is a scientific and objective study of humans in society and the study of social institutions and processes. Sociology seeks to answer questions about how society is possible, how it works, and why it survives. Both sociology and literature have the same object of study, namely humans in society. Both seek to understand the relationships between people and the processes that arise from these relationships in society.

Meanwhile, Santosa and Wahyuningtyas (2011, p. 24) state that literary works are a combination of the author's imagination and complex social life. Literary works are also often considered as a mirror of the social life of society because the problems described in literary works are problems that exist in the life of the author. This is where the two meet and implies that there must be interdisciplinary interaction in studying a literary work.

Literary critics can use several methods in reviewing texts, one of which is called the sociological method. In this way, critics can study literature in cultural, economic, and political contexts. The sociological method can also go beyond everyday knowledge, because everyone thinks that they understand the world and events that occur as social phenomena.

Sociology describes how society develops and survives by studying all economic, religious and political problems in social institutions and social structures. (Giddens, Duneier and Applebaum, 2007, p.5)

According to Laurenson and Swingwood (1972), literature cannot be distinguished from real life. In a certain period of time, the process of creating literary works will be influenced by sociological conditions. In this study, the author believes that the selected research object is a reflection of social and political conditions. The researcher uses a literary sociology approach to examine the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood so that later literary works become the main data source.

The sociological approach shows us the relationship between sociology and literature. Literature and sociology influence each other. A sociological approach that focuses on human problems. The sociological approach has a great contribution to our understanding of aspects of social life that exist in the life of the author. This is where the two meet and implies that there must be interdisciplinary interaction in studying a literary work.

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At the same time, literature presents a picture of life, and life itself is strongly influenced by social reality. In this sense, it includes the relationship between society and humans. Between events that occur in a person's mind. Therefore, viewing literary works as a picture of the world and human life is the main criterion imposed on these literary works.

Sociology of literature as an approach to literature, it tries to understand, study, analyze and assess literary works by considering societal (social) aspects, so in the sociology of literature perspective, literary works are no longer seen as something autonomous, as is the view of structuralism (Wiyatmi, 2013: 9). With the sociology of literature approach, judging literary works cannot be separated from the social aspects. Matters related to the definition of literary works, authors, and readers must be considered.

Sociology of literature can be interpreted as an approach to literature by relating it to social phenomena that exist in society. This approach tries to explain the social elements that exist in literature. The roots of the sociological approach to literature come from Plato's mimesis theory (Damono, 1979 via Wiyatmi, 2013: 12).

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This sociological approach to literature is used by researchers to analyze the elements of social protest in literary works. The sociology of literature approach is the right method to be used in this research. The reason is that there is a relationship between social protest and social elements in literary works. Social protest is one of the social phenomena that often occurs in society and in literary works. Therefore, it is very relevant to use a sociological approach to analyze the elements of social protest in Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Kinds of Sociology of Literature

As an approach, the sociology of literature has three divisions that have their respective focuses. These three things are the sociology of the author, the sociology of literary works, and the sociology of the reader.

1. The Sociology of The Author

Sociology of the author is a part of the sociological approach to literature, which examines the author (writer) of a literary work. According to Wellek and Warren (in Wiyatmi, 2013: 26) the sociology of the author is concerned with social status, social ideology, and others concerning the author as a producer of literary works.

In the case of the creation of a literary work, the intervention of the author (writer) is very decisive. The reality in a literary work is constructed by how the thoughts exist in the author. In addition, social status, ideology, social background, social position, the target audience of readers, the author's livelihood, and professionalism are very influential on the created literary works.

2. The Sociology of Literary Work

Another part of the sociology of literature is the sociology of literary

works. The sociology of literary works tries to study literary works without examining things outside of literary works, such as authors and readers of literary works.

The sociology of literary works can only focus on the literary work itself. The sociology of literary works is the sociology of literature that examines literary works concerning social problems that exist in society (Wiyatmi, 2013: 45). Whereas Wellek and Warren (1994 in Wiyatmi, 2013: 45) define the sociology of literary works focuses on the content of literary works, objectives, and other things that are implied in the literary work itself and which are related to social problems. Furthermore, for researchers themselves, it is the sociology of literature that will be the focus of this research. Matters related to content and other things related to social were analyzed in this study.

3. The Sociology of The Reader

One of the existing models in the sociology of literature approach is the sociology of readers. The sociology of readers focuses on the readership of literary works. Readers will give various reactions to a literary work. From this, the relationship between literary works and readers of these literary works can be seen.

Sociology of readers can be defined as a model of sociology of literature that focuses attention on the relationship between literary works and readers (Wiyatmi, 2013: 60). According to Wellek and Warren (1994 via Wiyatmi, 2013: 60) the study area of the sociology of readers includes reader problems, the social impact of literary works, and the extent to which literary works are determined or dependent on social backgrounds, changes, and social developments.

The reader is a part of outside literature that is very influential. This is the intended audience for the author of a literary work. In some types of literature, the reader's position becomes the basis for how the author constructs the literary work. Often writers creating literary works follow the tastes of readers, for example, popular literary works that follow the tastes of the majority of readers, literary works that adapt to the social conditions of readers, and literary works that can provide much new knowledge for readers. Rahayu (2009) argues that literature also has the value of increasing self-understanding and others. By reading literary works, readers will perceive themselves by reflecting on the experiences of others through books. Also, understanding culture makes readers learn about the bonds that unite people everywhere. People who understand and value different cultures are more likely to realize that people worldwide share the same emotions, experiences, and problems.

Social Protest

Protest is very synonymous with the history of human civilization. Usually, protests are carried out by one person against another person or against a powerful institution to fight for rights and fight oppression. Rahayu, Mediyansyah, and Zuhro (2020) argue that resistance is a symbolic act that must be carried out by oppressed people. Many things cause a person to take action to protest, one of which is because of social, political, and economic problems, and others. Protest is a social phenomenon that resonates in society. Therefore, protests that occur in society are called social protests. To examine social protest in greater depth, we will discuss what social protest is itself. A clear and comprehensive understanding of social protest will assist researchers in analyzing the research object chosen by the researcher.

Definition of Social Protest

Social protest can be interpreted as the assumption or rejection of ordinary people against individuals or institutions in power. Lofland defines social protest as an expression or complaint of ordinary people to the government because of a social crisis, either politically, culturally, or economically (2015: 6).

Usually, social protests that occur in society take various forms. There are social protests carried out through demonstrations, speeches, and taking to the streets. In addition, social protests are carried out indirectly, namely through works of art or literature. From this explanation, we can understand that social protest can be direct and indirect. It can be seen how the social protest was carried out to find out whether the social protest was directly or indirectly. Direct social protest is a social protest carried out through social movements that take to the streets directly. Meanwhile, indirect social protest is a social protest carried out using symbols, such as cultural movements, works of art, or literary works (Lofland, 2003: 29 in Widia and Widowati, 2015: 2015: 36). Saini (1990: 2) defines literary works as part of works of art.

Kinds of Social Protest

Suppose we want to understand the concept of social protest. In that case, we must know that social protest is an intolerable rejection or objection to something opposite that is already intolerable and directed at a person or institution in power and is based on a feeling of injustice over the existing social reality. There are several forms of social protest carried out either directly or indirectly. John Lofland proposed four types of protest whose definitions can be sorted. From the following: lowest to highest (2015: 289). The following are forms of social protest, namely:

a) Symbolic Social Protest

The first form of social protest is symbolic social protest. Symbolic social protest is a complaint that is made in an orderly, non-destructive and less attractive manner and is carried out collectively to raise a complaint. (Lofland, 2015:290). Symbolic social protests can be carried out individually or collectively to protest against the authorities or

criticize social conditions. It is called a symbolic social protest because the authorities or the wider community are ready for the action to take place without any resistance or obstacles. Rahayu, Mediyansyah, and Zuhro (2020) argue that symbolic action is a close resistance because it shows symbolic action in dealing with many parties that they have to fight. This symbolic social protest can be categorized as an anti-violent protest and a persuasive action. Forms of symbolic social protest include symbolic public acts, theatrical, artistic works, literary works, gatherings or rallies, or expressions of the heart expressing an attitude of protest or disagreement with the authorities or government. Rahayu, Mediyansyah, and Zuhro (2020) also argue that singing a song is also a form of symbolic action because it communicates something and has a specific purpose.

b) Anti-Cooperation Social Protest

The second social protest is anti-cooperation social protest. Anti-cooperation social protest is a refusal to continue the existing social order (Lofland, 2015: 290-291). The forms of resistance carried out by individuals or collectives who are carrying out anti-cooperation social protests are strikes, demolitions, boycotts, and others. Anti-cooperation social protest can also be interpreted when an individual or community does not want to obey the regulations made by the government or authorities.

c) Intervention Social Protest

The third type of social protest is intervention social protest. Intervention social protest is a type of social protest that destroys patterns, policies, behavioral relations, and institutions considered obstacles (sharp, 1973: 357). These actions usually tend to involve violence.

d) Alternative Institutional Social Protest

The last type of social protest is alternative institutional social protest. Alternative institutional social protest can also be called positive intervention social protest. This type of social protest attempts to create desired patterns, policies, behavioral relationships, or institutions. This social protest includes communication, transportation, economic system, government, and dual sovereignty as alternatives (Lofland, 2015: 291). This alternative institutional social protest is an action when the community forms a large organization that fights against the government or authorities for the social conditions that occur. Organizations or institutions that are formed have alternative solutions to solve existing social problems. If the alternative institution of protest action replaces people's loyalty, then action has reached the most serious and important type of protest. This action is capable of triggering significant changes and even revolutions that cannot be triggered by the other three types of

protest(Lofland, 2015: 291).

The Position of Social Protest in Literary Work

Literary work is the result of an author's creativity. It is this process of creativity that determines how the literary work is. This process is also what determines the social protest that exists in literary works. Through the process of creativity, it can be seen how the position of social protest in literary works.

Literary work cannot possibly be created without two elements, namely, human consciousness and reality. Human consciousness is sensitivity, thoughts, feelings, and desires. At the same time, reality is stimuli, touches, and problems outside human consciousness (Saini, 1994: 1-2).

In the contentious relationship between human consciousness and reality, human consciousness can accept or reject this reality. The awareness that rejects reality produces a literary work containing social protest. Meanwhile, the awareness that accepts the reality that stimulates it will produce harmonious literary works (Saini, 1994: 2). According to Saini (1994: 2-3) that if human consciousness leads to rejection or protest, it will produce literary works that make readers appreciate the realities that cause concern, rejection, refutation, and condemnation. Therefore, the conclusion is that protest is part of the author's consciousness.

Social protest has a position as a theme in literary works. The theme itself has been explained in the previous discussion, namely the subject matter in literary works. Saini (1994: 5) argues that the position of social protest is the same as the position of other themes in literary works such as erotica, patriotism, religiosity, and so on. Therefore, social protest in the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* is a theme like any other that deserves to be studied.

Conclusion

After the analysis in the discussion section, the researchers arrived at the closing section, namely conclusions and suggestions. Based on the analysis done, the researchers found an element of social protest in the novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. The conclusion of the analysis related to social protest is as follows.

In the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, there are social protests consisting of symbolic, anti-cooperation, intervention, and alternative institutional social protests. The symbolic social protest consisted of two protestors, Offred and Ofglen, with issues concerning the loss of freedom, sexual slavery, and oppression. The anti-cooperation social protest consisted of 3 protestors, namely Offred, Moira, and Offred's mother, with issues concerning the loss of freedom, sexual slavery, and oppression of women. The intervention social protest consisted of three protestors, namely Offred, Moira, and Ofglen, with issues concerning sexual slavery, loss of freedom, and discrimination against women. And the alternative social protest organization includes one protester, the Underground Femaleroad Group, with the problem of loss of freedom.

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