

## THE POWER OF DEATH-CAST IN *THEY BOTH DIE AT THE END* BY ADAM SILVERA: A HEGEMONY ANALYSIS

*Kekuasaan Death-Cast dalam novel They Both Die at the End*

*karya Adam Silvera: analisis hegemoni*

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### **Abstract**

*This study discusses the issue of power in the novel They Both Die at the End by Adam Silvera analyzed using the hegemony theory by Antonio Gramsci. The focus of this study is Death-Cast power over other groups that have a lower position in the novel. This study aimed to find out the dominant and the subordinate group in the novel. This study used a qualitative design with a close-reading method. Data collection was done by reading the novel repeatedly, marking the parts in the novel that were in accordance with the research objectives using Antonio Gramsci's theory, and taking notes. Data analysis was carried out in three steps, such as data reduction, data display, and conclusion. The result of this study showed that power inequality in the novel can cause the presence of the dominant group and the subordinate group. The dominant group in the novel is Death-Cast which is a part of civil society. The subordinate group in the novel is Decker, President, and the herald.*

**Keywords:** *dominant; hegemony; power; subordinate*

Penelitian ini membahas persoalan kekuasaan dalam novel *They Both Die at the End* karya Adam Silvera yang dianalisis menggunakan teori hegemoni Antonio Gramsci. Fokus penelitian ini adalah kekuatan Death-Cast atas kelompok lain yang memiliki posisi lebih rendah dalam novel. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengetahui kelompok dominan dan kelompok bawah dalam novel. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kualitatif dengan metode *close-reading*. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan membaca novel secara berulang-ulang, menandai bagian-bagian dalam novel yang sesuai dengan tujuan penelitian menggunakan teori Gramsci, dan mencatat. Analisis data dilakukan dalam tiga tahap, yaitu reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan simpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ketimpangan kekuasaan dapat menyebabkan hadirnya kelompok dominan dan kelompok subordinat. Kelompok dominan dalam novel tersebut adalah Death-Cast yang merupakan bagian dari “masyarakat sipil”. Kelompok bawahan dalam novel tersebut adalah Decker, President, dan *herald*.

**Kata kunci:** *hegemoni; kelompok bawah; kelompok dominan; kekuasaan*

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## INTRODUCTION

Power can create relationships between groups of people because the existence of power can determine the dominant and the subordinate group (Dahl, 2017). Moreover, the existence of power can make both the dominant and the subordinate groups related to each other because the dominant group needs the subordinate group to support their power and the subordinate group needs the dominant group to complete their needs. According to Gaventa (2003), power not only discusses powerlessness but is broader than that. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere (Foucault, 1978). Referring to Max Weber, Lukes (2005) states that power cannot be separated from the opposition of others. The opposition exists because some people are not in line with the goals of individuals or groups of people who have power. Power exists because people have exercised it as an action and not just a term (Savitri, 2016). The idea of power inspires the author or novelist to express it in his literary works.

Literature is the expression of society (Wellek & Warren, 1954). It means that literature can represent the life of the author in society. The reader might be influenced by the work of the author, such as the way people act, speak, and dress after reading the author's work. In relation to that, Habiburrahman (2017) stated that literature can be viewed as a social phenomenon by displaying a picture of life including human relationships. Thus, the literary works created by authors can represent the conflict that happened in society such as gender inequality and power inequality. Oprescu (2018) stated that literature in general and the novel in particular is a type of narrative representation of the world. It means that one of the literary works is a novel.

In this study, the novel used is a fiction novel related to the power inequality of one group over another entitled *They Both Die at the End* by Adam Silvera (Silvera, 2017). This novel is nominated for Young Adult (Speculative Fiction) in Cybils Awards 2017

and Young Adult Fiction in Goodreads Choice Award 2017.

*They Both Die at the End* by Adam Silvera tells about a company named Death-Cast that gives people warning or alerts about when they will die. The ringtone alert of Death-Cast, already known by all the people in the story, makes them terrified. Decker is the person who got called and alerted by Death-Cast's company. Herald is the person who works under Death-Cast's company as an operator and Decker's advisor. In *They Both Die at the End*, the characters who got called by Death-Cast and turned into Decker are Mateo and Rufus. At the beginning of the novel, Mateo and Rufus do not know each other. Each of them has their own life. After using an application called *CountDowners*, they met and spent their last time together. Mateo and Rufus's struggle can be seen in the story when they both tried to enjoy and live their life happily before they died (Silvera, 2017).

There is only one study concerning Adam Silvera's *They Both Die at the End*. Masitha analyzed identity formation stages stated by Vivianne Cass: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis (2020). The main focus of this study is Mateo's homosexual identity development as the main character in the novel. This present study is different from the previous one. Although this study uses the same data source, the theory is different. No one has ever analyzed the issue of hegemony in the novel entitled *They Both Die at the End* by Adam Silvera. This present study applies the hegemony theory stated by Antonio Gramsci.

Lasiana and Wedawati (2021) analyzed five stages of hegemonic operations. This study used the hegemony theory by Antonio Gramsci as the main theory and the power theory by Max Weber as a supporting theory. The results of this study claimed that hegemony is carried out through ideological indoctrination, which is needed when the power of hegemony weakens. In addition, this study found that hegemony has a negative impact on subordinate groups.

Efendi et al., analyzed sarcasm or criticism in the novel *Atas Nama Cinta* by Agus R. Sarjono. The result showed that there is a group of people that hegemonize others. Moreover, the unequal ideology of education made them have different ways to resolve their problems (Efendi et al., 2022). Naufina analyzed patriarchal hegemony portrayed in a dystopian world where young girls are hegemonized to fulfill patriarchal interests written by Louise O' Neill, *Only Ever Yours*. The result showed that there are three patriarchal structures portrayed in the novel which are patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal state, and patriarchal culture. On the other hand, patriarchal hegemony is portrayed through the medium of television (Naufina, 2021). Agnibaya and Waluyo (2018) analyzed the interaction happened among characters, especially those which resulted in the existence of social inequality. The result showed that there is unequal relationship or hegemonic relationship in the novel.

This study examines the novel *They Both Die at the End* by Adam Silvera by looking at the dominant and the subordinate group. Therefore, to analyze *They Both Die at the End* this study used the theory of hegemony by Antonio Gramsci.

Gramsci (1971) states that hegemony is spontaneous approval of society and the used of items in social life, such as values, aspirations, ideas, beliefs, viewpoints, knowledge claims, and many more which gives benefit to the dominant group. Ives (2017) states that hegemony is the term used by the dominant group, working class, communist to gain power. Hegemony is the phenomenon of an attempt to maintain power by the authorities and not only the rulers of the State and the government alone (Ali, 2017). Hegemony is not a relationship of domination by using violence, but a relationship of agreement using political and ideological leadership (Siswati, 2018). Hegemony is actually a cultural process by which one class dominates the other. Thus the dominators keep on practicing power and the ruled obey them (Al-Amin & Masum Sikdar, 2016). Violence and hegemony are two

different things. Violence is strengthening the power of the dominant class by involving the state apparatus. Hegemony is strengthening the power of the dominant class with the agreement of the controlled group (Burawoy, 2012). Thus, power is the core and essential thing when discussing hegemony (Flynn, 2021).

To answer the research questions in this study, the writer used hegemony theory stated by Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci divides two types of the dominant group, namely political society and civil society (Bates, 2018; Gramsci, 1971). Gramsci (1971) stated that civil society is a group of people that is creating a private organisations to maintain their ideology using their power. In relation to that, Simon (2001) states that civil society is the hegemony obtained by an organization in which the dominant group in society—not the political aspect—organizes the hegemony. This statement means that the dominant group not only comes from the political community but also from groups outside the political community, such as groups that run a system that makes other groups obey the system. Chakraborty (2016) observes that the theorists of the 17th century brought the idea of civil society in the center of the debate because for them rights of the individual were more important than everything else. Civil society has two meanings. Civil society collaborates with state to hegemony the people and control the class struggle, but in on the other hand, civil society with a position that is independent from the state is also capable create the class struggle itself by doing the movement counter-hegemony (Pribadi, 2008).

Gramsci (1971) mentioned that political society is the dominant group which works under the state and use the combination of ideological method and coercion to gain the obedience of the public. In relation to that, Gramsci, as quoted by Simon states that political society is an individual or group of people from certain institutions that lead or regulate a country. The state, also known as political society, is all public institutions that hold power to carry out orders or coercive relationships that are

manifested in various state institutions such as the armed forces, police, legal institutions and prisons, along with all administrative departments that are take care of taxes, finance, trade, industry, social security, and so on (Simon, 2001).

For the subordinate group, Gramsci defined that the dominant groups need the existence of subordinate groups to support their ideas and rules. Gramsci observes that the interest of the dominant group can also become the interest of the dominant group. Thus, the subordinate group becomes objects of the practice of hegemony ruled by the dominant group. The existence of subordinate groups also has an important role in determining whether the dominant groups succeed in maintaining their hegemony (Simon, 2001). Thus, the dominant group gathers others to help them convince the subordinate group. The dominant group avoid using force and prefer persuade the subordinate group. The dominant groups want to have one value with the subordinate group and to prevent the rebellion that might happen if the subordinate group has different values with the dominant group.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses qualitative research with the close reading method. Qualitative method is relied on text and image data. This study used descriptive qualitative method because in this study the data collected are in the form of text (Creswell, 2018). The source of data is a novel entitled *They Both Die at the End* by Adam Silvera. The data are in the form of the utterances of characters and the author's narration. The data were collected using three steps. First, the writer read the novel repeatedly. Second, the writer collected and categorized the data based on the issue. Third, the data that have been categorized were marked to answer the research problems. After the data were collected, the next step is analyzed the data. in analyzing the data, this study used three steps from Miles et al., (2014). The first step is data reduction. Data reduction activities were carried out by re-checking the data that has

been collected, classified data based on issue and research questions, and sorting out which data is not needed. The second step is data display. In qualitative research, the writer made narrative display by retrieved the data from novel *They Both Die at the End* by Adam Silvera which has correlation to answer the research questions. The last step is drawing conclusion. The writer concluded the result of analysis and the answer the formulation of problem in the form of descriptive data.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### The Dominant Group

Death-Cast recruited a Herald to deliver the information to Decker, give Decker facilities, and give Decker access to transportation. The Death-Cast domination can be seen when Mateo, one of the main characters in the novel, feels very scared when the Herald calls him.

I don't want to pick up the phone. I'd rather run into Dad's bedroom and curse into a pillow because he chose the wrong time to land himself in intensive care or punch a wall because my mom marked me for an early death when she died giving birth to me (p. 10).

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Mateo is scared of Death-Cast alert and afraid of the fact that he might die in twenty-four hours. Mateo prefers to do anything except answer the call. It shows that Mateo knows for sure the information delivered by the Herald is true even though the Herald initially misspelled his name.

"Hello, I'm calling from Death-Cast. I'm Andrea. You there, Timothy?" Timothy. My name isn't Timothy.  
"You've got the wrong person," I tell Andrea. My heart settles down, even though I feel for this Timothy person. I truly do (p. 11).

Mateo felt calmer when the Herald didn't call his name. But after the Herald told him that

Mateo is the right name he intended to call, Mateo feels like the world stopped. He even didn't care what the Herald said next. Mateo can no longer deny the truth of the information provided by the Herald because many Deckers have posted their End day on social media platforms made specifically for the Decker. There are already a lot of posts in *CountDowners* about the End day of Decker. Decker's stories and photos show that the Death-Cast domination and information are unavoidable.

On CountDowners, Decker post entries about everything from their phone call to how they're spending their End day. It's basically Twitter for Decker (p. 12).

Furthermore, Death-Cast domination can defeat the president's power, which is the highest position in a country. Even when the president wants to avoid death, there is a traitor in his environment, so he remains dead even though he runs away.

... Not even former President Reynolds, who tried to hide from Death in an underground bunker four years ago and was assassinated by one of his own secret service agents (p. 12).

The quotation above proves that Death-Cast's information and power were invincible. Even if a person fled to the end of the world, death could not be avoided when Herald called them under Death-Cast's company. It also shows that Death-Cast has a higher position in the novel than the president.

Deirdre works at Make-A-Moment, where she's charging Decker for thrills and fake experiences, fake memories. She doesn't understand why these Decker aren't home with loved ones, particularly those two teen boys today, who, as they were leaving, talked about how underwhelming the virtual reality experience was. It's wasted time (p. 166).

The quotation above shows that one of the special facilities from Death-Cast frees Decker to access virtual reality inside. As an

employee in Make-A-Moment, Deirdre is wondering about the Decker who came to spend their time in virtual reality. Decker did not have much time to come to the place, such as skydiving or even swimming with a shark. Moreover, they are afraid that they will die before their time is over because they want to have an unforgettable moment.

Death-Cast as the dominant group used its power to make the subordinate group to obey them. They used power to maintained their ideology. One of the ideology maintained by Death-Cast company is World Travel Arena.

I can visit the World Travel Arena downtown, where Decker and guests can experience the cultures and environments of different countries and cities (p. 36).

The facilities allowed decker to travel around the world using virtual reality (VR). The data above shows that the ideological form is facilities to convince decker to continuously believed Death-Cast power as the dominant group. Another ideological form maintained by Death-Cast company is the information about people's death.

"... The first afterlife kicks off when Death-Cast tells us to live out our day knowing it's our last; that way we'll take full advantage of it, thinking we're still alive..." (p. 144).

As the dominant group, Death-Cast company has power to know the exact day and time of people's death that will turn into decker. This ideological power makes decker obey them because after receiving the information, they have chance to make a beautiful moment.

The evidence above shows that Death-Cast hegemony was gained without using violence or coercion. Death-Cast gained the subordinate group's beliefs through the system, such as application for Decker, access to spend their time in Make-a-Moment, and persuasion through the Herald. It is proven when Decker, specifically Rufus and Mateo, feels entertained while spending their time skydiving using virtual reality.



Death-Cast intends to create a positive image in society can be seen when they provide facilities only for deckers. Moreover, the position of death-cast here is higher than president while president itself is the highest position in a country and government.

### The Subordinate Group

In *They Both Die at the End*, the image of the subordinate group can be seen through Rufus, Mateo, and other Deckers. The quotation below shows that Victor, as the Herald offers some activities that can be done if Rufus is interested in them. Rufus, who has already turned into a Decker, can ignore Victor's offer. Rufus is still young and confused on his End day about what kind of activities he would do and who would spend time with him.

Victor tells me the forecast for the day (supposed to rain before noon and later on as well if I make it that long), special festivals I have zero interest in attending (especially not a yoga class on the High Line, rain or no rain), formal funeral arrangements, and restaurants with the best Decker discounts if I use today's code. I zone out on everything else 'cause I'm anxious on how the rest of my End day is gonna play out (p. 19).

As a Decker, Rufus must accept the truth that he will die in twenty-three hours. In this case, as the subordinate group, Rufus is an object of Victor's hegemony. If Rufus did not believe Victor, Victor failed to Death-Cast' power and as its worker. However, Victor managed to convince Rufus of the truth of the information given by Death-Cast, where they got the information and tried to change the subject with a sad thing so that Rufus' focus was shifted.

"You want me to be a person, Rufus? You want me to get off my throne and get real with you? Okay. An hour ago I got off the phone with a woman who cried over how she won't be a mother anymore after her four-year-old daughter dies today. She begged me to tell her how she can save her daughter's life, but no one has that

power...Can you do me a solid and cooperate?" (p. 20).

The quotation above shows that Rufus feels pitied by the story because Victor changes the topic of their conversation. It can be seen when Rufus stays shut after Victor tells a sad story. He also forgot who hung up the phone call first because he still thinks the topic of conversation that Victor said.

I cooperate for the rest of the call, even though this dude has no business telling me anyone else's, but all I can think about is the mother whose daughter will never attend the school right behind me. At the end of the call Victor gives me that company line I've grown used to hearing from all the new TV shows and movies incorporating Death-Cast into the characters' day-to-days: "On behalf of Death-Cast, we are sorry to lose you. Live this day to the fullest."

I can't tell you who hangs up first, but it doesn't matter (pp. 20-21).

The following statement shows that people who turn into Decker can be dangerous for their environment or their beloved people. Thus, Rufus tries to go alone without his friend. He was afraid that they might get hurt just because they wanted to get along with Rufus on his End day.

"You guys can't follow me," I say, picking my bike up. "You get that, right?" "Nah, we're with you, just—" "Not happening," I interrupt. "I'm a ticking time bomb, and even if you're not blowing up when I do, you might get burned—maybe literally" (p. 22).

Rufus asked Victor about the correctness of the information delivered by the Herald. But Victor, as Herald, answered flatly and acted like he knew nothing. The following statement shows that the Herald is looking down on Rufus as Decker.

"I'm afraid that information isn't available to Herald either," Victor claims. "We're equally curious, but it's not knowledge we need to perform our job." Another flat answer. I bet you anything he

knows and can't say if he wants to keep his job (p. 20).

The quote above also shows that Victor as herald or the worker of Death-Cast company only want to do his job properly. He just wants to do his own work without interfering with things outside his control as a worker because he is afraid of being punished, fired, or worse, being included in the list as a Decker.

Another evidence that shows the Herald is looking down on Deckers can be seen when Andrea, one of the Heralds, says, "*Rule number one of one: Decker are no longer people*". From this statement, it can be seen that Herald can treat Decker as they want because the rule of being a Herald is to instill in the thought that Decker is not mere people. Thus, they speak flatly when calling Decker even though their words long-witted. They want to do their job properly and avoid being fired. So that they act like they are a robot who can speak to a lot of people with the same line,

"She's bored reciting these lines that have been burned into memory from telling hundreds, maybe thousands, about how they'll soon be dead" (p. 12).

Rufus, the teenager who become Decker, is a typical person who will never give up in his live. The utterances below indicate that Rufus is not giving up because that day is his End day. He intends to spend his time well and have an unforgettable moment. The representation of the subordinate group can be seen when Rufus has already gotten called by the Herald. He indeed feels scared at first. But, after being separated from his friends, he changes his mind about living his life better. He tries anything he hasn't done

"It's going to take me some time to get where you are with this. I don't become fearless just because I know my options are do something and die versus do nothing and still die." (p. 68).

Rufus intention is different from Mateo's. When he steps out of his house, Mateo is

scared that something bad will happen, and he might die because of the smallest thing. After receiving the information that he will die in 24 hours, Mateo feel paranoid of his surroundings and act like a scaredy cat.

"*This isn't going to work. It's going to backfire on us. Hanging out together is a bad idea because it'll only double our chances of dying sooner. Like a Decker hot zone. What if we're walking down the block and I trip and bang my head against a fire hydrant and—*"

"... Some truck might run us down when we're crossing the street?"

"And if someone pulls out a gun?"

"And if a train kills us?" (pp. 67-68).

The utterances above are uttered by Mateo. It indicates his paranoia of everything around him. Mateo thinks that he and Rufus might die because of trivial things, and their deaths can be shortened.

The result shows that the novel contains power issue. Power inequality exists in the novel between the dominant group and the subordinate group, between Death-Cast, a company that runs a system to call someone who will die in 24 hours and Decker, who will die in 24 hours. As a company, Death-Cast has a strong power to maintain its hegemony and impose a rule so that other groups obey their system. Moreover, Death-Cast's hegemony can defeat the power of the president.

In this study, Death-Cast gained the subordinate group's beliefs through the system, such as application for Decker, access to spending their time in Make-A-Moment, and persuasion through Herald. It is proven when Decker, specifically Rufus and Mateo, feels entertained while spending their time skydiving using virtual reality. Death-Cast intends to create a positive image in society can be seen when they provide facilities only for Decker. Moreover, the position of Death-Cast here is higher than the president, while the president itself is the highest position in a country and government.

It shows that Death-Cast as the dominant group is categorized as “civil society” because Death-Cast is not a part of government and is an organization that runs a system. It is aligned with the definition of civil society stated by Antonio Gramsci, civil society is a group of people that is creating a private organisations to maintain their ideology using their power (Gramsci, 1971).

In hegemony, if there is a dominant group, there must be a subordinate group as an object for the dominant group to carry out hegemony. In the novel, the subordinate group is Decker, specifically Mateo and Rufus as main characters. It can be seen when Decker is being looked down on by Herald. Herald speaks flatly to Decker in a call without showing respect and sympathy. Because they want to show Decker that they have a higher position than Decker, they will not be fired from becoming a worker in Death-Cast’s company even though they speak slowly. Aligned with the term subordinate group, stated by Gramsci (1971), the dominant groups need the existence of subordinate groups to support their ideas and rules. It means that the dominant groups need the existence of subordinate groups to support their ideas and rules. The existence of a subordinate group also has an important role in emphasizing the difference in social position between the dominant and subordinate, where the dominant group has more power than the subordinate group.

Moreover, in the discussion of the dominant group and subordinate group can also be analyzed based on socio-cultural. Mateo's mindset as an ordinary people, before becoming a Decker, is affected by the social environment and the culture, where there is a stereotype that the information given by Death-Cast is true and absolute. Because it has been ingrained since childhood that Death-Cast announce the time of someone's death, where death is the most sensitive thing for humans. So when there is a call from the herald, Mateo immediately trembles and gets frustrated. The existence of Death-Cast as a giver of information about someone's death further makes it clear that this is the main feature of this novel. This is

very contrary to real life, because a person's death is only known by God.

In conclusion, this study supported the theory of hegemony theory from Antonio Gramsci, which focused on the Death-Cast power exist in Adam Silvera’s Novel *They Both Die at the End*. In addition, this study is in lined with previous studies that used the theory of hegemony to analyzed research. Even though there is one previous study that used same source of data but used different issue and theory.

## CONCLUSION

*They Both Die at the End* by Adam Silvera, shows that Death-Cast maintained its hegemony by using the power as a company. It is clearly shown that Death-Cast’ company is more dominant than President, Herald, and Decker. Thus, three of them are automatically classified into subordinate group. Death-Cast power can made Rufus and Mateo as the main character must obey its system and did not have right to deliver their opinion and live their life as they want. Moreover, Death-Cast, as the dominant group is categorized as civil society because Death-Cast is not a part of political aspects and is maintaining the private organization.

It can be concluded that Death-Cast power can hegemonize three subordinate groups. First, Death-Cast is more dominant than president because Death-Cast can defeat president’s power and find him wherever he runaway. Second, Death-Cast is more dominant than herald because herald work under Death-Cast company. Third, Death-Cast is more dominant than decker because decker is a civil who must obey Death-Cast rules.

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