Social Conflict That Portrayed in *The House on Mango Street* Novel

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ABSTRAK

Konflik sosial dapat didefinisikan sebagai pertempuran atas nilai-nilai, dan klaim status, kekuasaan, dan sumber daya yang terbatas di mana tujuan lawan adalah untuk menetralkan, merugikan, atau menghilangkan saingan mereka. Konflik sosial juga mengacu pada ketidaksepakatan dan ketegangan yang muncul antara berbagai kelompok orang dalam masyarakat. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menjelaskan dua kategori konflik sosial yang ditampilkan pada novel *The House on Mango Street*, yaitu konflik realistis dan nonrealistis. Peneliti menganalisis novel menggunakan pendekatan sosiologis, dengan fokus pada konflik sosial oleh Lewis Coser sebagai tema sentral. Unsur-unsur seperti konflik realistis dan nonrealistis diperiksa dalam konteks perjuangan sosial yang dihadapi oleh karakter novel. Peneliti mengidentifikasi bahwa konflik sosial memiliki kekuatan untuk mengubah perilaku dan sikap manusia dalam masyarakat. Peneliti menggunakan metode kualitatif dan pendekatan sosiologi untuk memahami pengalaman dan realitas sosial yang dialami oleh para tokoh dalam novel. Data yang diperoleh berupa kata, frasa, klausa, kalimat, dan paragraf di sepanjang cerita yang berhubungan dengan konflik sosial dalam novel. Pada penelitian ini ditemukan penokohan secara tidak langsung melalui dialog dan tingkah para tokoh dari novel tersebut dan tidak ditemukan adanya penokohan secara langsung pada novel tersebut. Novel ini menggambarkan beberapa konflik sosial yang muncul antara Esperanza, yang merupakan seorang imigran dengan karakter lainnya. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa konflik realistis terjadi di mana Esperanza kecewa dengan teman-temannya atas apa yang mereka lakukan bahkan sampai mengalami pelecehan seksual. Konflik nonrealistis juga terjadi di mana Esperanza digambarkan mengalami ketegangan, seperti rasa tidak percaya dan candaan teman-temannya yang memicu konflik.

Kata kunci: konflik sosial, konflik realistis, konflik nonrealistis

ABSTRACT

Social conflict can be defined as a battle over values and claims to limited status, power, and resources in which the opponent's goal is to neutralize, harm, or eliminate their rival. Social conflict also refers to disagreements and tensions between different groups of people in society. This study aimed to explore two categories of social conflict presented in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*: realistic and nonrealistic conflict. The researcher analyzed the novel using a sociological approach, focusing on social conflict by Lewis Coser as a central theme. Elements such as realistic and nonrealistic conflict are examined in the context of the social struggles faced by the novel's characters. The researcher argues that social conflict can potentially influence and transform human behavior and attitudes within society. Utilizing qualitative methods, the study investigates the experiences and social realities of the characters. Data were collected from words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs related to social conflicts throughout the narrative. The analysis reveals that indirect characterization through dialogue and character behavior is a key feature of the novel, with no direct characterization being evident. The study identifies various social conflicts, particularly between Esperanza, an immigrant, and other characters. The findings indicate that realistic conflicts emerge when Esperanza faces disappointment and sexual harassment from her peers. Additionally, nonrealistic conflicts are portrayed through tension in some situations, such as distrust and jokes from her friends that trigger conflicts.

Keywords: social conflict, realistic conflict, nonrealistic conflict

1. INTRODUCTION

Conflict theory explains scientifically the general contours of conflict in society, including how conflict starts and varies. The primary role of conflict theory is the unequal distribution of scarce resources and power (Coser 216). These resources may differ for each theorist, but conflict theorists usually work with Weber's three stratification systems: class, status, and power. Theorists argue that conflict generally views power as a central feature of society, rather than thinking of communities held together by mutual agreement on a cohesive set of cultural standards, as functionalists do. Social conflict analyzes society on a large scale and emphasizes competition between groups (Stolley 24-25). Conflict theory sees society as consisting of social relations defined by inequality and change. This means a certain group will constantly compete for unequal resources, such as wealth and power, with other groups to seek benefits for their interests.

To understand how the social conflict applied in this research, the researcher used *The House on Mango Street* novel by Sandra Cisneros as an object of the research. This novel tells the story of a girl, Esperanza, who is a Mexican-American born and raised in a Hispanic society, in realizes the dream of having a decent home for the family. Esperanza faces various social problems that befell her from the white American society because they are considered foreigners who will attack them. Thus, the novel serves not only as a literary work but also as a socio-cultural document that reflects and critiques the realities of ethnic minorities in the United States. Its use in this research enables an interdisciplinary approach that combines literary criticism with cultural and social theory, making it a compelling and relevant object of study. The researchers analyzed this novel by using social conflict with the following elements, such as realistic conflict and nonrealistic conflict, as the topic, because the researcher found social conflicts experienced by the characters in the novel. The researchers believe that social conflict has the power to change human behavior and attitudes in society.

While previous studies have explored *The House on Mango Street* through various lenses such as feminist theory, identity formation, and cultural hybridity, there remains a notable gap in examining the novel specifically through the framework of **social conflict theory**, particularly by distinguishing between **realistic** and **nonrealistic** conflicts. Most existing literature tends to focus on Esperanza's personal development or the broader themes of marginalization, but fewer studies have systematically analyzed the specific types of social conflicts experienced by the characters and how these conflicts influence their behavior and societal roles. By applying the dichotomy of realistic and nonrealistic conflict, this study aims to offer a more structured understanding of the underlying tensions between the Hispanic community and the dominant white American society as portrayed in the novel. This approach not only provides a fresh analytical perspective but also highlights how social conflict serves as both a barrier and a catalyst for change within oppressed communities. Therefore, this research fills the gap by contributing a focused, sociologically grounded interpretation that has been largely underexplored in previous scholarship.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter contains several theories that support the content of this research. In this

chapter, the researcher will explain some theories that are related to the content of this research.

1. Sociology of Literature Theory

Sociology usually considers how people interact with their surroundings. In addition to studying human behavior, sociology students also examine topics including social structure, social stability, and social change. According to the book entitled The Sociology of Literature, sociology is basically a scientific and objective study of human beings in society, the study of social institutions and social processes (Diana, Laurenson, and Swingewood 11). By understanding sociology, we can know how society functions in an institution and the social relations between people.

Warren and Wellek, in their book entitled Theory of Literature, explain the relationship between literature and society. Stating that literature is representative of life and social reality, even though the natural world and the inner or subjective world of individuals have become objects of literary 'imitation' (89). Literary works can be reflected through community relations that share culture, traditions, values, and others. People can experience life from another person's perspective through literature. Through literature, readers can learn about a variety of life situations, from heartfelt happy stories to tragic ones.

2. Novel

A novel is a prose literary work that is slightly longer than prose in general, because its content is more detailed and involves more complex problems. Freye states that the novel is a work of realistic fiction, not only imaginary, but also can expand the experience of life and can bring the reader to a more colorful world (15).

3. Character and Characterization

Characters and characterizations are one of the most important parts of a novel or short story. An engaging plot is propelled by its characters. The plot will be developed and advanced by the characters. characters are the individuals portrayed in a dramatic or narrative work who are perceived by readers as having certain moral, intellectual, and emotional attributes based on their actions, words, and gestures (Griffith 32). Characterizations are how the author presents and develops character traits (Griffith 60). There are two ways to reveal the characters, direct and indirect. Directly, the narrator simply tells the reader what the character is. Indirectly, on the other hand, the narrator shows the characters through dialogues, looks, thoughts, speech, and deeds (Giffith 61-62).

4. Social Conflict

Social conflict can be defined as a battle over values and claims to limited status, power, and resources in which the opponent's goal is to neutralize, harm, or eliminate their rival (Coser 8). Social conflict also refers to disagreements and tensions that arise between different groups of people in society. These conflicts can occur due to various reasons, such as differences in interests, goals, or resources. According to Lewis Coser, social conflict is divided into two types, namely realistic conflict and nonrealistic conflict (49):

a) Realistic Conflict

Realistic conflict is a conflict that arises from specific and concrete complaints or demands and is also rooted in frustration when the needs, desires, or expectations experienced by people or their groups are blocked or not met. This conflict is aimed at resolving these demands. This conflict can involve deeper elements such as values, beliefs, and interests because these factors often underlie the specific demands or issues

at the core of the conflict.

b) Nonrealistic Conflict

Nonrealistic conflict is a conflict that involves two or more people and does not involve hostility between them, but involves the need to release the tension between them. Nonrealistic conflict focuses on solutions to prevent any future conflicts. In other words, in nonrealistic conflict, there is a substitute object in a conflict. Nonrealistic conflict does reduce the conflict between the protagonist and antagonist, but can open up opportunities for certain individuals or groups to give birth to new conflicts.

C. METHOD

The researcher used qualitative methods in understanding the experiences and social realities experienced by the characters in the novel *The House on Mango Street.* According to Mohajan, qualitative research is "a form of social action that emphasizes the way people interpret and understand their experiences to understand individual social realities" (2). Coser's sociological approach would be used in discussing social conflicts analyzed from the novel *The House on Mango Street*. According to Coser, conflict is a normal and functional part of human life (215). Conflict can address its variations in ways that others overlook, such as levels of violence and functional consequences. Coser also argued that a common source of conflict stems from Marx's concern about the sense of group deprivation caused by class. There is a sense of deprivation that leads a group to class consciousness and results in conflict and social change (200). It also described the structural changes or processes that bring the working class to this realization.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this sub-chapter, the researcher presents the findings of the research question. After analyzing the novel, the researcher found several social conflicts that were portrayed in *The House on Mango Street* novel. Hence, the findings are presented below.

1. Findings

The researcher answered the problem formulation stated in chapter one, how social conflict is depicted in the novel *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros. In the novel, it described several social conflicts are described that have occurred between Esperanza, who is an immigrant, and other characters. In this research, the focus is on the social theory classification of conflict proposed by Lewis Coser, namely realistic conflict and nonrealistic conflict.

a. Realistic Conflict

Realistic conflict is conflict that arises because of conflict that arises because of a feeling of disappointment and frustration with a particular demand on a relationship. For example of one piece of data can be noticed in the dialogue between the bum man met Esperanza, Lucy, and Rachel while they were walking around the street. This conflict is shown through the dialogue of the characters in the incident. This conflict occurred when the mother of the Little Foot Family gave Esperanza, Lucy, and Rachel pairs of lovely shoes. A bum man approached them as they walked down the street and offered Rachel a dollar if she would kiss him. Lucy, wanting to defend Rachel's value as a woman,

grabbed her and fled from him to escape additional harassment. This can be noticed in the dialogue between the bum man and those four of them:

> **If I give you a dollar, will you kiss me? How about a dollar**? I give you a dollar. and he looks in his pocket for wrinkled money. **We have to go right now, Lucy says, taking Rachel's hand because she looks like she's thinking about that dollar**. Bum man is yelling something to the air, but by now we are running fast and far away, our high heel shoes taking us all the way down the avenue and around the block, past the ugly cousins, past Mr. Benny's, up Mango Street, the back way, just in case. (Cisneros 42)

The text above shows the bum man's inappropriate and harassing demand to Rachel. Lucy, who realized that Rachel was about to receive inappropriate treatment from the bum man, immediately pulled Rachel away. The girls considered their safety and dignity, which were threatened by the bum man's sexual harassment. Lucy's reaction to the bum man's behavior reflected a moral attitude towards sexual harassment and a protective instinct.

Another data example can be found in this novel. This conflict is classified as a realistic conflict. This conflict occurred because of a clash of interests between Esperanza, who wanted to try the food in her school cafeteria, and the nun who guards the cafeteria. The characters involved in this conflict are described through the actions of the nun who prevented Esperanza from eating in the school cafeteria. She did not believe that Esperanza was one of the students at the school. This can be seen in the following quote:

> **Everything is fine until the nun who knows all the canteen kids by heart looks at me and says: You, who sent you here**? And since I am shy, I don't say anything, just hold out my hand with the letter. **This is no good, she says**. (Cisneros 44)

This conflict can be classified as a realistic conflict. This is due to a conflict of interest between Esperanza, an immigrant student who wanted to experience the atmosphere of having lunch in the school cafeteria and is accompanied by a letter of request from her mother, and a nun who wanted to protect the school environment from outsiders. The nun was suspicious of Esperanza and did not believe Esperanza that she was also a student at the school because of her appearance.

Another example of realistic conflict can be found in this novel. This conflict involves Esperanza, who trusts Sally when they are at the carnival, but ends up betraying her and making Esperanza very angry with Sally. Esperanza's character is explained through her thoughts. The next conflict arises when Esperanza and Sally go to the carnival. Sally tells Esperanza to wait a while if she wants to see the clown. Because Esperanza trusts Sally, she ends up waiting for the clown. However, it turns out that the clown did not come, but a group of men came and disturbed her. This can be seen in the following quote:

Why did you leave me all alone? I waited my whole life. **You're a liar**. **They all lied. All the books and magazines, everything that told it wrong**. Only his dirty fingernails against my skin, only his sour smell again. The moon that watched. The tilt-a-whirl. The red clowns laughing their thick-tongue laugh. (Cisneros 100)

This conflict is classified as a realistic conflict due to the destruction of Esperanza's sense of trust due to Sally's actions in leaving Esperanza at the carnival. Sally tells Esperanza to wait for the red clown while Sally goes with the other boys. Esperanza kept waiting for the clown to come, but what happened was that Esperanza was approached by a group of men who sexually harassed Esperanza. The betrayal of Esperanza's trust in her friend's reliability and the resulting assault makes this conflict realistic, highlighting the clash between Esperanza's expectations and the harsh reality of being left alone and vulnerable. This scenario emphasizes the importance of faith and trust in friendship and the devastating consequences if this is violated. She is enraged towards all the women who have not informed her about the true nature of sex, and she holds Sally responsible for her defection and for not coming to help.

b. **Nonrealistic Conflict**

Then, nonrealistic conflict, Coser said that nonrealistic conflict is a conflict that involves two or more people and does not involve conflict between them, but involves the need to release the tension that exists between them. Coser also added that nonrealistic social conflict focuses on solutions to prevent any future conflicts. As in the novel, nonrealistic also occurred where Esperanza is depicted as being in a state of tension in a situation, so she needs someone to resolve this condition or to avoid further conflict with others. For example, this conflict is classified as a nonrealistic conflict because it involves the release of tension between Esperanza and Cathy. The depiction of Esperanza's character in this conflict is shown through her actions towards Cathy, who wants to end her friendship with Esperanza. This conflict arose when Esperanza and Cathy met Lucy and Rachel. Esperanza wants to make new friends, while Cathy wants nothing to do with them and will even threaten to end her friendship with Esperanza. This can be seen in the following quote:

Don't talk to them, says Cathy. Can't you see they smell like a broom? Cathy is tugging my arm and I know whatever I do next will make her mad forever. Wait a minute, I say, and run inside to get the five dollars. I have three dollars saved and I take two of Nenny's. She's not home, but I'm sure she'll he glad when she finds out we own a bike. **When I get back, Cathy is gone like I knew she would be, but I don't care** (Cisneros 14-15)

The dialogue between the two illustrates that it is a nonrealistic conflict. Esperanza wanted to have a friendly relationship with Lucy and Rachel. Meanwhile, on the other hand, Cathy also has a desire that is contrary to Esperanza's. Esperanza feels that there is something in common with Lucy and Rachel, and Esperanza also feels more comfortable with them than with Cathy. However, after Cathy finally decided to leave Esperanza and end their friendship. Esperanza showed a relaxed attitude without expression as if she did not care if the friendship between them breaks up. Cathy seemed

to want to corner Esperanza so that she would not befriend Lucy and Rachel without caring about what Esperanza feels. Esperanza's relaxed reaction to Cathy's leaving is just what is required to release the tension.

Another example can be found in the novel when Esperanza, Lucy, and Rachel are hanging out. conflict is classified as a nonrealistic conflict between Esperanza, Lucy, and Rachel because of the tension between them that started from a trivial topic. The conflict begins with a seemingly trivial discussion about the shape of clouds. Tensions escalate when Lucy and Rachel see an ugly cloud and symbolize that the cloud is Esperanza and her mother, leading to conflict. Esperanza's character is shown through characterization through dialogue, in which Esperanza tells them to leave. This can be seen in the following quote:

> **Who you calling ugly, ugly?**
> Richie, Yolanda, Hector, Stevie, Vincent ...
> **Not you. Your mama, that's who**.
> My mama? You better not be saying that, Lucy Guerrero. You better not be talking like that... else you can say goodbye to being my friend forever.
> I'm saying your mama's ugly like ... ummm ...
> ... like bare feet in September!
> **That does it! Both of you better get out of my yard before I call my brothers**.
> Oh, we're only playing. (Cisneros 37)

The conflict occurred when Esperanza, Lucy, and Rachel were relaxing in a field. Tensions rise when Lucy and Rachel say that the ugly and oddly shaped cloud resembles Esperanza and her mother, which causes conflict. It hurt Esperanza's feelings about herself or her family, and became a way for the other girls to tease Esperanza, which results in an argument. Esperanza then tells Lucy and Rachel to leave before she calls her brother to come. Esperanza's action of telling them to leave is an action that is intended to ease the tension and avoid further conflict in the dialogue.

Another nonrealistic conflict was also found when the moment of Esperanza attended the baptism party of her family. This conflict can be classified as a nonrealistic conflict because there is tension in Esperanza, and she needs someone to relieve the tension. Esperanza's character is shown through her characterization through her thoughts, where she only sits alone at a party. This conflict occurred when Esperanza went to church to attend her cousin's baptism. Esperanza feels uncomfortable at the party because of the clothes she is wearing. Esperanza wears beautiful clothes but with ugly and old shoes. So, Esperanza chose to just sit still during the party, even when a boy came to ask her to dance, Esperanza refused. This can be seen in the following quote:

> Everybody laughing except me, because **I'm wearing the new dress, pink and white with stripes, and new underclothes and new socks and the old saddle shoes I wear to school**, brown and white, the kind I get every September because they last long and they do. **My feet scuffed and round, and the heels all crooked that look dumb with this dress, so I just sit**. (Cisneros 47)

The narrative showed that this is a nonrealistic conflict because Esperanza's desire to avoid embarrassment because the beautiful dress she was wearing contrasted with her ugly and old shoes made her choose to sit still. This ended when Uncle Nacho approached Esperanza to dance, but Esperanza still refused. Uncle Nacho finally forced Esperanza by pulling her hand and saying that she was still beautiful, no matter what clothes she wore. From there, Esperanza believed that Uncle Nacho started dancing at the party. Uncle Nacho's action was needed to release the tension in Esperanza.

2. Discussion

In this subchapter, the researcher explained how social conflict is depicted in the novel *House on the Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros. As previously explained in chapter two, social conflict can be defined as a form of maintaining social status values from others who want to destroy social values. It referred to disputes and tensions that arise from various groups in society. In the novel, it described several social conflicts are described that have occurred between Esperanza, who is an immigrant, and other characters.

This research focuses on the social theory classification of conflict proposed by Lewis Coser, namely, realistic conflict and nonrealistic conflict. As explained by Coser regarding realistic conflict, realistic conflict is conflict that arises because of conflict that arises because of a feeling of disappointment and frustration with a particular demand on a relationship. In the novel *House on the Mango Street*, it is described that there is a social conflict where Esperanza was disappointed with her friends for what they did to experience sexual harassment. Then, nonrealistic conflict, Coser said that nonrealistic conflict is a conflict that involves two or more people and does not involve conflict between them, but involves the need to release the tension that exists between them. Coser also added that nonrealistic social conflict focuses on solutions to prevent any future conflicts. As in the novel, nonrealistic also occurred where Esperanza is depicted as being in a state of tension in a situation, so she needs someone to resolve this condition or to avoid further conflict with others. For example, the moment Esperanza was at a family party where she felt embarrassed about the clothes she was wearing. Finally, her uncle persuaded him to join the party. In this research, it was also found that there was an indirect characterization through the dialogue and behavior of the characters from the novel, and no direct characterization was found in the novel.

F. CONCLUSION

The researcher concluded from this research. According to the analysis of social conflict data in the novel *The House on Mango Street* by Cisneros, the researcher concluded that there are four realistic conflicts. Realistic conflict is depicted through things that happen to Esperanza and her friends in the form of frustration, disappointment, and fear of other people. Apart from that, the researcher also found five nonrealistic conflicts, which were depicted by the tension experienced by Esperanza and which needed to be released by the people around her to avoid further conflict. The result of the research showed that realistic conflicts occurred where Esperanza is disappointed with his friends for what they did, even to the point of being sexually harassed. Nonrealistic conflicts also occurred where Esperanza is described as experiencing tension in a situation that triggers conflict.

There are several experts that you can use as references, such as in this research, which uses the theoretical understanding of Lewis Coser. In understanding social conflict theory, researchers also suggest studying sociological theory because social conflict is one of the main theories of sociology. By deepening your knowledge of sociology, you can understand the social theory of conflict more deeply from certain experts. Another suggestion that can be given to researchers who will use the same object of study in this research is that this novel can be studied using various theories, such as feminist theory, moral values, and sociology.

E. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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