

Social Criticism in The Novel Lebih Senyap Dari Bisikan by Andina Dwifatma*Kritik Sosial dalam Novel Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan Karya Andina Dwifatma*Muhammad Safar¹, Irianto Ibrahim², La Tike³, Nur Israfyan Sofian⁴^{1,2,3,4} Universitas Halu Oleo*Correspondence e-mail: muhsafar715@gmail.com**Article History**

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Abstract

Literary works provide not only aesthetic experience but also a medium for criticizing unequal social realities. This study aims to describe forms of social criticism in Andina Dwifatma's novel *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* [Quieter than a Whisper] and to explain their contribution to sociological literary studies and literature learning. The research employed a descriptive qualitative method using a sociology of literature approach. The primary data source was the 2021 Gramedia Pustaka Utama edition of *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan*, and the data consisted of narrative units, dialogues, and events representing social criticism. The data were collected through intensive reading, note-taking, coding, classification, and interpretive validation based on Soekanto's categories of social problems as adapted in literary sociology. The findings reveal 23 units of social criticism distributed into eight categories: family disorganization 7 units (30.43%), education 4 (17.39%), poverty 3 (13.04%), religion 3 (13.04%), youth in modern society 3 (13.04%), crime 1 (4.35%), bureaucracy 1 (4.35%), and environmental issues 1 (4.35%). The most dominant criticism concerns family vulnerability, particularly gendered inequality, reproductive pressure, domestic violence, and failed marital communication. The study concludes that the novel does not merely portray household problems but also reveals the interconnection among poverty, social institutions, religion, education, modern culture, and the female body. Its contribution lies in strengthening sociological readings of contemporary Indonesian prose and offering a socially responsive model for literature learning materials.

Abstrak

Karya sastra tidak hanya menghadirkan pengalaman estetis, tetapi juga dapat menjadi medium kritik terhadap realitas sosial yang timpang. Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan bentuk kritik sosial dalam novel *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* karya Andina Dwifatma dan menjelaskan kontribusinya bagi kajian sosiologi sastra serta pembelajaran sastra. Penelitian menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan sosiologi sastra. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan 23 unit data kritik sosial dalam delapan kategori: disorganisasi keluarga 7 data (30,43%), pendidikan 4 (17,39%), kemiskinan 3 (13,04%), agama 3 (13,04%), generasi muda dalam masyarakat modern 3 (13,04%), kejahatan 1 (4,35%), birokrasi 1 (4,35%), dan lingkungan hidup 1 (4,35%). Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa novel tersebut tidak sekadar merepresentasikan problem rumah tangga, tetapi juga membongkar hubungan antara kemiskinan, institusi sosial, agama, pendidikan, budaya modern, dan tubuh perempuan.

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INTRODUCTION

Literature is a symbolic space in which individual experience converges with social reality. Through language, an author does not only construct a story but also reorganizes the anxieties, conflicts, and inequalities present in society. Literary works can therefore be read both as social representation and as a critical response to structures of life considered problematic. This understanding aligns with Damono's (2002) view that literary works do not arise in a vacuum but are always connected to the author, society, and readers. Wellek and Warren (2016) also affirm that literary study can be directed at the relationship among text, author, reader, and the social environment that surrounds it.

The novel, as one form of prose fiction, possesses a strong capacity to present human problems in a complex manner. Through character, plot, setting, conflict, and point of view, a novel can show how individuals confront poverty, power, the institution of the family, religion, education, and modern culture. Kartikasari and Suprpto (2018) regard the structural elements of a novel as devices that make the story function not only aesthetically, but also as a bearer of meaning. In the social context, the novel serves as a medium for reading the tensions that are not always easy to discuss directly in society.

Social criticism in literary works emerges when a text presents a response, satirical comment, or challenge to social problems. Social criticism need not always appear in explicit statements; it can arise through character conflict, situational irony, institutional failure, or the collapse of human relationships. Anwar (2019) explains that social criticism can be directed at poverty, crime, education, bureaucracy, religion, family disorganization, youth, and the environment. This framework is important because it enables readers to identify social problems in a text systematically without abandoning the aesthetic character of the literary work.

In contemporary Indonesian prose, social criticism frequently appears through issues of family and the female body. Safitry and Tjahjono (2023) show that social criticism in novels can move from questions of gender to the problem of social class, while Yulianto (2021) affirms that novels can serve as a vehicle for articulating social inequality that is close to everyday life. Iman's (2017) study of the novel *O* by Eka Kurniawan also demonstrates that social criticism can be directed at violence, mistreatment, and social indifference. These findings collectively indicate that social criticism in novels does not always stand as a single theme; rather, it is interconnected with a broader social configuration.

The novel *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* by Andina Dwifatma is relevant for study because it presents social problems through domestic experience that appears personal but is in fact connected to larger social structures. The story of Amara and Baron shows that household life cannot be separated from economic pressure, religious norms, reproductive expectations, patriarchal culture, financial bureaucracy, education, youth socializing, and environmental crisis. Accordingly, family conflict in this novel is insufficient to read as a private matter; it needs to be interpreted as a nexus of various social tensions.

Previous research on social criticism in literary works has been conducted extensively. Dewi and Balawa (2017) examined social criticism in the novel *Surat Cinta untuk Kisha* [Love Letters for Kisha]; Nisak and Anggraini (2020) studied social criticism in *Anak-Anak Tukang* [The Craftsmen's Children]; Roisah, Sinaga, and Zulhafizh (2024) discussed social criticism in *Si Anak Savana* [The Savannah Child]; while Nugraha, Ma'ruf, and Sartika (2025) connected social criticism in novels to literature learning in senior high school. However, studies of *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* still require sharpening, particularly in mapping the dominance of social criticism and linking it to the pattern of family disorganization, gender inequality, and contemporary social pressure.

This research gap forms an important basis for this article. The thesis that served as the initial source identified eight forms of social criticism in the novel, but as a journal article it is necessary to achieve greater condensation, strengthened academic reasoning, separation of findings from

discussion, and data presentation in table and chart form so that the findings are more legible. Accordingly, this article is focused on one primary question: what are the forms and tendencies of social criticism in the novel *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* by Andina Dwifatma? The objectives of this study are to describe those forms of social criticism, to interpret the dominance of the findings through a sociology of literature approach, and to demonstrate the study's contribution to Indonesian literature learning.

METHODS

This research employs a descriptive qualitative design of the library research type. This design was chosen because the research object is a literary text and the data analyzed consist of narrative units, dialogues, and events in the novel. The approach used is sociology of literature, specifically the sociology of the literary work, because the analysis is directed at the content of the text, the social relations it represents, and the function of criticism built through character conflict. The conceptual framework draws on the idea that literary works can reflect, interpret, and critique social reality (Damono, 2002; Wellek & Warren, 2016).

The primary data source is the novel *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* by Andina Dwifatma, published by Gramedia Pustaka Utama in 2021, comprising 155 pages. The research data consist of textual sections displaying social criticism, whether in the form of narration, dialogue, or the depiction of events. The unit of analysis is established at data containing issues of poverty, crime, education, religion, bureaucracy, family disorganization, youth in modern society, and environmental concerns. These categories follow the forms of social problems within Soekanto's framework as applied to social criticism research by Anwar (2019) and developed in several contemporary literary studies.

The primary research instrument is the researcher as reader and text interpreter, while the secondary instruments are data cards, a classification table, and a category validation sheet. The data collection procedure was conducted through intensive reading of the novel, marking relevant text sections, noting page numbers, coding the data, and grouping the data according to social criticism categories. Data that are excessively long are not reproduced in full in the article; instead, they are paraphrased and cited by page number to maintain article density and avoid unnecessary domination by narrative quotations.

Data analysis was conducted through four stages. First, data reduction by selecting text units that genuinely represent social criticism. Second, classification of the data into eight social criticism categories. Third, presentation of the data in the form of a distribution table, chart, and representative findings matrix. Fourth, interpretation of the data by connecting the findings to sociology of literature theory, comparing them with prior studies, and drawing implications for literary study and Indonesian language learning. Data validity was maintained through repeated reading, categorical consistency, and the correspondence between data, the story's context, and the concept of social criticism.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The identification results show that the novel *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* contains 23 units of social criticism data distributed across eight categories. Family disorganization was the most frequently found category, while crime, bureaucracy, and environmental issues were the least frequent. The data distribution is presented in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Social Criticism Data in the Novel

No.	Social Criticism Category	Number of Data Units
1	Poverty	3
2	Crime	1
3	Education	4
4	Religion	3
5	Bureaucracy	1
6	Family disorganization	7
7	Youth in modern society	3
8	Environmental issues	1

Source: research data processed from the novel Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan.

Table 2. Representative Data Matrix of Social Criticism

Data Code	Category	Page	Summary of Finding
D1–D3	Poverty	pp. 87, 89, 91	Investment losses, emergency loans, and withdrawing family savings illustrate the family's economic pressure.
D4	Crime	p. 24	The buying and selling of adulterated alcohol on the campus grounds shows an illegal practice that has been normalized.
D5	Education	p. 43	The experience of failing to pass and limited choice of university demonstrates the tension among education, family, and access.
D6–D7	Education	pp. 23, 26	Restrictions on student expression and recreational space on campus show an educational institution with a controlling tendency.
D8	Education	p. 29	A case involving dreadlock hair shows the conflict between institutional discipline and student freedom of expression.
D9–D11	Religion	pp. 32, 33, 42	An interfaith marriage and family rejection show religion as a source of both identity and social conflict.
D12	Bureaucracy	p. 91	A power of attorney for mortgaging a house shows an administrative document used without full transparency.
D13	Family disorganization	p. 8	Domestic tension arises from differences in lifestyle and a weakening of communication between partners.
D14	Family disorganization	p. 15	Pressure to have a child quickly shows social expectations placed on women's bodies and roles.
D15–D16	Family disorganization	pp. 105, 120	Economic conflict, rejection of assistance, and the burden of childcare show inequality in family responsibility.
D17	Family disorganization	p. 3	Family questions about pregnancy show reproductive pressure within the immediate social environment.
D18	Family disorganization	p. 71	Unpreparedness in discussing the children's religion reveals a weak foundation of values within the family.

D19	Family disorganization	p. 105	Physical violence within the household shows the collapse of the family's function as a safe space.
D20–D22	Youth in modern society	pp. 23, 29, 81–82	Hairstyles, body trends, and transactional relationships show the collision of youth identity with modern norms.
D23	Environmental issues	p. 5	Research on waste, water crisis, nuclear threats, and urban pollution shows ecological anxiety in modern society.

Source: re-coded data from thesis appendix and novel excerpt citations.

Factually, the data demonstrate that social criticism in the novel is present not only through economic or institutional problems, but primarily through the domestic conflict of Amara and Baron. The data also reveal inter-category linkages. For example, poverty is connected to family disorganization; religion is connected to marital decisions and child-rearing; education is connected to the restriction of youth expression; while environmental issues appear as the character's anxiety about the future of the modern world.

DISCUSSION

The dominance of family disorganization in the research findings demonstrates that *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* constructs social criticism from the seemingly most private of spaces: the household. However, the domestic space in this novel is not insulated from social structure. The pressure to have children, the burden of childcare, domestic violence, religious conflict, and economic crisis collectively show that the family is the meeting point between social norms and personal experience. From a sociology of literature perspective, this finding reinforces Damono's (2002) view that literature can be read both as a mirror and as an interpretation of society. The novel does not merely record the conflicts of a couple; it also shows how society shapes, pressures, and sometimes destroys individuals through inherited norms.

Criticism of family disorganization is most apparent in the inequality of gender roles. Amara bears the burden of childcare, reproductive pressure, and economic responsibility when Baron fails to function as an equal partner. This situation aligns with Soekanto's understanding of family disorganization as the condition in which family members fail to fulfil their social roles. In the novel, this failure occurs not only because of personal conflict, but also because of patriarchal structures that treat women as automatically capable of childcare, housekeeping, and enduring pressure. The novel's social criticism therefore does not stop at a portrait of a broken household, but points toward a critique of a culture that normalizes the double burden on women.

This finding bears resemblance to Safitry and Tjahjono's (2023) research, which shows that social criticism in novels can expose exploitation and injustice toward women. However, *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* carries a particular distinctiveness because its gender criticism is not conveyed through slogans, but through emotional exhaustion, a body that has changed after giving birth, and a mother's guilt. In this way, the novel presents a criticism that is more subtle yet powerful. Criticism concerning women is not only about social position in public space, but also about the body, reproduction, pregnancy, breastfeeding, and the demands of being the ideal mother.

The criticism of poverty in the novel is closely connected to the economic instability of a young family. Data concerning investment losses, asset mortgaging, overdrawn accounts, and loan offers from family show that poverty does not always appear as total destitution; it can also emerge as sudden financial vulnerability. In modern society, even the middle class can fall into crisis when financial literacy is low, employment is unstable, and family economic decisions are not grounded in healthy communication. This broadens the reading of poverty as social criticism, as discussed by Yanti, Hariyanto, and Pribadi (2024), who link poverty to structural anxiety and limited access to security.

Criticism of education is present through the relationship between students and the campus institution. The case of Baron being pressured over his hairstyle shows that educational institutions can still operate in an authoritarian manner. Education, which should be a space for developing critical reasoning, can sometimes become a space for the disciplining of bodies and expression. This finding can be compared with Nugraha, Ma'ruf, and Sartika (2025), who position social criticism in novels as reflective material for literature learning. In the context of this article, the criticism of education does not only concern access, but also freedom of expression, power relations, and the way institutions understand youth identity.

The criticism of religion in the novel is not directed at belief as a spiritual value, but at the way society and family regard religion as a rigid social boundary. The relationship between Amara and Baron, who belong to different faiths, shows that love, marriage, and child-rearing are always negotiated under the pressure of social norms. The family's rejection of the interfaith marriage demonstrates that religion can be a source of solidarity, but simultaneously a source of identity conflict. Within a sociology of literature reading, this section is important because it reveals the connection between the literary text and Indonesian social reality, which remains sensitive toward interfaith unions.

The criticism of bureaucracy is evident through the use of a power of attorney in the mortgaging of a house. Although it appears in only one data unit, this category is important because it shows how administrative legality can be employed in unequal relationships. A formal document that should protect the rights of the authorizing party instead becomes a tool of disadvantage when it is not accompanied by full transparency. This finding bears similarity to the discussion by Aryanti, Firdaus, and Suparman (2025) on bureaucracy as a system that can worsen social injustice when it operates formalistically and is unresponsive to the position of the weaker party.

Criticism of youth in modern society appears through hairstyle, identity searching, and transactional relationships. The novel shows that younger generations do not only confront old rules, but are also tempted by consumerist culture. The phenomenon of the sugar baby, body trends, and visual expression indicate a modern society that has commodified identity. In this sense, the novel's social criticism resonates with Muslim, Ridwan, and Nurlaila's (2024) view that social criticism can serve as a mechanism of control against a rapidly changing social system. Andina Dwifatma depicts the younger generation not merely as a deviant party, but as subjects shaped by economic pressure, media, and consumer culture.

The criticism of the environment appears in only one data unit, but its position remains significant. The character's anxiety about waste, water crisis, nuclear threats, and effluent pollution shows that the novel extends the scope of social criticism from domestic space to ecological space. This section marks the fact that modern human problems lie not only in the family or institutions, but also in humanity's relationship with the earth. Accordingly, the novel does not position the environment as a passive backdrop, but as part of the same social crisis that equally determines humanity's future.

Compared with the research of Iman (2017), Dewi and Balawa (2017), Nisak and Anggraini (2020), and Roisah, Sinaga, and Zulhafizh (2024), the findings of this article show that social criticism in contemporary Indonesian novels tends to move from large social themes toward micro-experiences that are close to the body and the family. Social criticism does not always arrive through demonstrations, political violence, or extreme poverty; it also appears in family questions about pregnancy, the burden of breastfeeding, conflict over children's religion, house mortgage documents, and a husband's decisions that burden a wife. This is the primary contribution of the reading of *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan*: the novel demonstrates that what is personal is social.

The implications of this research for Indonesian Language and Literature learning are substantial. Teachers can use this novel as a literature appreciation learning material that trains students to read the relationship between text and social reality. The social criticism category findings can be developed into activities such as critical reading, group discussion, argumentative essay writing, or debates on issues of family, gender, education, and the environment. Literature learning

can thus be oriented not only toward intrinsic elements, but also toward building students' empathy, critical reasoning, and social awareness.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that the novel *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* by Andina Dwifatma contains social criticism that is complex and interconnected. Of the 23 data units identified, the most dominant criticism is family disorganization, followed by education, poverty, religion, youth in modern society, crime, bureaucracy, and environmental issues. The dominance of family disorganization indicates that the novel makes domestic space the centre of the exposition of broader social problems. Family conflict in the novel does not stand as a personal matter; it is connected to poverty, patriarchal culture, reproductive pressure, religious norms, financial bureaucracy, and modern culture.

Substantively, the research findings affirm that social criticism in literature does not always appear as a direct challenge to the state or large institutions. Criticism can emerge through quiet everyday experiences — a woman's body being assessed, a burdened mother, partners who fail to communicate, and a family that collapses under economic pressure. Accordingly, *Lebih Senyap dari Bisikan* makes an important contribution to sociology of literature research by demonstrating that private problems can serve as an entry point for understanding broader social inequality.

The results of this research also have developmental prospects. Future studies can deepen the reading through feminist approaches, literary psychology, ecocriticism, or maternity studies to examine more specifically women's experience, trauma, and body relations in the novel. In the context of learning, these findings can be developed into social-issue-based literary teaching materials so that students do not only understand textual structure, but also become capable of reading literary works as a space of human reflection.

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