

Unquestioned Traditions and Social Compliance in The Lottery: A Sociological Perspective

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the representation of tradition, social compliance, and collective violence in *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson using a sociological approach to literature. This research employs a qualitative method through textual analysis, where data in the form of words, phrases, and sentences related to the research themes are identified and analyzed thematically. The primary theoretical framework used is sociology of literature to examine social structures within the text, while social conformity theory serves as a supporting framework to explain individual behavior within a group. The findings reveal that tradition in the story functions as a social structure that persists despite the loss of its original meaning. This tradition is internalized by the community, resulting in strong social compliance in which individuals follow norms without questioning their moral implications. Such compliance contributes to the normalization of violence, which is collectively carried out by the community. Therefore, violence in the narrative is not an individual act but a product of an established social system. In conclusion, the study highlights that the interaction between tradition and social conformity can lead to the acceptance of harmful practices within society. Thus, critical awareness is necessary to evaluate existing norms and prevent the continuation of unjust social practices.

Keywords: *Collective violence, social compliance, sociology of literature, tradition.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis representasi tradisi, kepatuhan sosial, dan kekerasan kolektif dalam cerpen *The Lottery* karya Shirley Jackson melalui pendekatan sosiologi sastra. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan teknik analisis teks, di mana data berupa kata, frasa, dan kalimat yang relevan dengan tema penelitian diidentifikasi dan dianalisis secara tematik. Kerangka teori utama yang digunakan adalah sosiologi sastra untuk memahami struktur sosial dalam teks, serta teori konformitas sosial sebagai pendukung untuk menjelaskan perilaku individu dalam kelompok. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tradisi dalam cerita berfungsi sebagai struktur sosial yang bertahan meskipun makna awalnya telah hilang. Tradisi tersebut diinternalisasi oleh

masyarakat sehingga membentuk kepatuhan sosial yang kuat, di mana individu mengikuti norma tanpa mempertanyakan nilai moralnya. Kepatuhan ini kemudian berkontribusi terhadap normalisasi kekerasan yang dilakukan secara kolektif oleh masyarakat. Dengan demikian, kekerasan dalam cerita bukan merupakan tindakan individu, melainkan hasil dari sistem sosial yang telah mengakar. Kesimpulan penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa hubungan antara tradisi dan konformitas sosial dapat menghasilkan praktik kekerasan yang dianggap wajar dalam suatu masyarakat. Oleh karena itu, penting bagi individu untuk memiliki kesadaran kritis terhadap norma dan tradisi yang berlaku agar tidak terjebak dalam praktik yang merugikan.

Kata kunci: *kekerasan kolektif, kepatuhan sosial, sosiologi sastra, tradisi.*

1. Introduction

Unquestioned traditions remain a significant social phenomenon in many societies, where certain practices continue to be preserved despite losing their original purpose or relevance. Traditions are often perceived as symbols of collective identity and cultural continuity, causing individuals to accept them as necessary parts of communal life without critical reflection (Khalmetski, 2021)

Traditions are frequently maintained because they are inherited across generations and embedded within social expectations. Individuals tend to follow long-standing customs not because they fully understand them, but because these practices are viewed as obligatory social norms (Khalmetski, 2021)

This phenomenon is closely related to social compliance, which refers to the tendency of individuals to conform to group norms, values, and expectations in order to gain acceptance or avoid social sanctions. Compliance is often driven by collective influence rather than personal belief (Wijenayake, 2021)

In strongly collectivist communities, conformity functions as a mechanism for preserving social stability and group cohesion. Individuals may suppress their own opinions or ethical considerations in order to align with communal standards and avoid exclusion (Wölfer, 2021)

The repeated acceptance of collective norms can gradually weaken individual critical awareness. Over time, behaviors that were once questioned may become normalized simply because they are repeatedly practiced and socially reinforced (Wölfer, 2021)

As a result, unquestioned traditions may contribute to the normalization of harmful practices, including forms of symbolic or physical violence. Violence can become socially tolerated when it is framed as part of a legitimate cultural or communal process (Neville, 2021)

Literature frequently explores these tensions between individuals and society by representing how social systems influence behavior and moral judgment. Literary texts often function as reflections of broader social realities and mechanisms of cultural critique (Wellek, 1949)

One literary work that strongly illustrates this issue is *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson, first published in 1948. The story presents a small village that annually conducts a lottery ritual in which one member of the community is randomly selected to be sacrificed (Jackson, 1948)

At the beginning of the story, the ritual appears to be an ordinary communal activity. However, as the narrative progresses, the seemingly harmless tradition is revealed as a mechanism of collective violence, demonstrating how destructive practices may be concealed beneath social normality (Khalmetski, 2021)

The villagers in *The Lottery* comply with the ritual without openly questioning its moral implications. Their participation is shaped by routine, communal expectations, and the desire to maintain social order, reflecting the operation of conformity within group settings (Wijenayake, 2021)

The story is particularly relevant because it reflects broader patterns of human behavior beyond fictional contexts. In many societies, traditions continue to be practiced despite ethical concerns, largely because individuals fear disrupting collective harmony or challenging established norms (Neville, 2021)

Previous discussions of *The Lottery* have often focused on themes such as symbolism, irony, and violence. However, fewer studies specifically examine the relationship between unquestioned tradition, social compliance, and

collective violence as interconnected social phenomena (Bodemar, 2022)

This gap suggests the need for a more focused sociological analysis of how tradition operates as a social structure and how conformity contributes to the persistence of harmful communal practices (Khalmetski, 2021)

This study employs the sociological approach to literature as the primary analytical framework. Sociology of literature examines literary works as products and reflections of social structures, ideological systems, and cultural values within society (Wellek, 1949)

In addition, this study applies social conformity perspectives to analyze how individuals in *The Lottery* internalize group norms and participate in collective violence. Therefore, this research aims to analyze the representation of tradition, social compliance, and collective violence in Shirley Jackson's *The Lottery*.

2. Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design to analyze how tradition, social compliance, and collective violence are represented in Shirley Jackson's *The Lottery*. Qualitative research is well-suited for literary studies because it prioritizes the interpretation of meanings, themes, and social phenomena embedded within texts over numerical data (Creswell, 2014). Using this approach, the study investigates how literary elements reflect social realities and how

collective behavior is constructed within a specific social context.

This research is grounded in the sociological approach to literature as its primary theoretical framework. This approach conceptualizes literary works as reflections of social structures, cultural norms, and collective consciousness within a society (Swingewood, 1972; Wellek & Warren, 1949). In this study, the sociological perspective serves to analyze how tradition functions as a social structure, how it is maintained within the community, and how it contributes to the formation of collective behavior. Accordingly, tradition is examined not merely as a narrative element but also as a representation of broader social systems that regulate human actions.

Additionally, this study incorporates social conformity theory as a supporting framework to explain individual behavior within the social structure depicted in the story. Conformity theory posits that individuals tend to align their actions with group norms and expectations, often suppressing personal judgment to maintain social acceptance (Asch, 1956). Moreover, the concept of obedience, as demonstrated by Milgram (1974), is employed to understand how individuals may engage in harmful actions under social pressure and structured authority. These concepts are applied to analyze how social compliance emerges among the characters and how it facilitates the continuation of tradition as well as the occurrence of collective violence.

The data of this study comprise words, phrases, sentences, and narrative

elements drawn from *The Lottery*, first published in 1948. The text itself serves as the primary data source, while secondary data are obtained from books, journal articles, and scholarly works related to sociological literary criticism and social conformity theory. These sources are used to support the interpretation and strengthen the theoretical foundation of the analysis.

The data collection techniques employed in this study are documentation and library research. The documentation method involves close reading of the text to identify relevant passages that represent the themes of tradition, social compliance, and collective violence. Meanwhile, library research is conducted to review theoretical and critical sources that provide insights into the sociological and behavioral aspects of the study.

The data are analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the first stage, relevant data are selected and categorized based on the research focus. In the second stage, the data are organized into thematic patterns, particularly those related to

tradition, social compliance, and collective violence. Finally, conclusions are drawn by interpreting the relationships among these themes.

Furthermore, Creswell's (2014) analytical procedures are applied, encompassing the organization and preparation of data, comprehensive reading of the text, coding of relevant segments, theme development,

presentation of findings, and interpretation of meaning. Through these systematic steps, the analysis remains structured, reliable, and aligned with qualitative research standards.

By combining the sociological approach to literature as the main framework with social conformity theory as a supporting perspective, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of both structural and behavioral aspects within the narrative. This integration enables the study to explain how tradition operates at the societal level, how social compliance functions at the individual level, and how these elements collectively result in acts of violence within the community.

3. Result and Discussion

1. Introduction to Findings

This section presents the findings and discussion of the study on *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson, with a focus on the representation of tradition, social compliance, and collective

violence. Employing the sociological approach to literature as the primary framework, the narrative is examined as a reflection of social structures, cultural norms, and collective consciousness. Furthermore, social conformity theory is applied to elucidate how individuals respond to these structures through patterns of compliance.

Within this framework, tradition is conceptualized as a form of social structure that organizes and regulates behavior. Simultaneously, social compliance refers to the internalization of norms that guide individual actions. These processes are interconnected and contribute to the emergence of collective violence within the community. Accordingly, the findings are organized according to three main themes: (1) tradition as a social structure, (2) social compliance as norm internalization, and (3) collective violence as a social outcome.

2. Research Findings

Table 1. Representation of Tradition, Social Compliance, and Collective Violence

No	Theme	Textual Evidence	Sociological Concept	Interpretation
1	Institutionalized Tradition	“The original paraphernalia for the lottery had been lost long ago.”	Social structure	Tradition persists without meaning
2	Ritual Transformation	“There had been a recital... but years ago this part... had been allowed to lapse.”	Cultural shift	Meaning fades but practice remains
3	Internalized Compliance	“They only half listened to the directions.”	Norm internalization	Behavior becomes habitual
4	Conditional Resistance	“It isn’t fair, it isn’t right.”	Weak agency	Resistance is situational
5	Prepared Violence	“The pile of stones... was ready.”	Social normalization	Violence is anticipated
6	Collective Violence	“And then they were upon her.”	Collective Behavior	Responsibility is diffused

The table demonstrates that tradition, social compliance, and collective violence are interconnected components within the narrative. Tradition functions as a social structure that is internalized by individuals, leading to conformity and ultimately resulting in collective violence.

Theme 1: Tradition as a Social Structure

The findings indicate that tradition in The Lottery functions as an institutionalized social structure that persists despite the erosion of its original meaning. The ritual endures not because its significance is comprehended, but because it has become entrenched within the community's collective consciousness.

"The original paraphernalia for the lottery had been lost long ago."

This quotation demonstrates that the villagers no longer retain knowledge of the tradition's origins. Nevertheless, the practice persists as a normalized social activity. From a sociological viewpoint, this illustrates how social structures can operate independently of their historical foundations.

Moreover, the narrative depicts the progressive decline of the ritual:

"There had been a recital...but years ago this part...had been allowed to lapse."

This suggests that the symbolic elements of the tradition have diminished over time, while the core practice remains unaltered. Consequently, the ritual

transforms into a mechanical act devoid of deeper meaning.

The lottery's persistence also reveals resistance to social change:

"Over in the north village they're talking of giving up the lottery."

Despite awareness of alternative practices, the villagers elect to preserve the tradition. This underscores the power of collective consciousness, wherein shared beliefs are upheld to sustain social stability.

Therefore, tradition in the narrative operates as a mechanism of social control, molding behavior and strengthening group cohesion.

Theme 2: Social Compliance as Norm Internalization

The second finding reveals that social compliance in the story emerges from deeply internalized norms. The villagers partake in the ritual without questioning its purpose, thereby demonstrating an elevated degree of conformity.

"The people had done it so many times that they only half listened to the directions."

This quotation illustrates how repeated practice engenders habitual behavior. Individuals no longer engage in critical evaluation, as the ritual has

become an integral routine within social life.

From the perspective of social conformity theory, this behavior corresponds with the concept of norm internalization, wherein individuals adopt group expectations as their own. Asch's theory of conformity posits that individuals tend to align with group norms to evade social rejection, even when such norms contradict personal beliefs.

Furthermore, the absence of dissent among the villagers underscores the potency of social pressure. Compliance is sustained not through coercion, but through shared expectations and implicit norms.

The sole instance of resistance is articulated by Tessie Hutchinson:

"It isn't fair, it isn't right."

Nevertheless, her protest emerges solely after she is selected as the victim. This signifies that resistance is conditional and motivated by self-interest rather than moral awareness.

This pattern demonstrates that social compliance constrains individual agency while reinforcing collective behavior. Individuals prioritize conformity over ethical judgment, thereby enabling the tradition to endure.

Theme 3: Collective Violence as a Social Outcome

The findings demonstrate that violence in The Lottery constitutes a collective outcome shaped by social structure and conformity. The act of stoning is executed not by a single individual, but by the community as a whole.

"The pile of stones the boys had made earlier was ready."

This quotation indicates that violence is prepared in advance, implying that it constitutes an anticipated component of the ritual. The participation of children further illustrates how the practice is transmitted across generations.

"And then they were upon her."

This passage demonstrates that the violent act is performed collectively. Shared participation diffuses personal responsibility, rendering it easier for individuals to engage in harmful actions.

From a sociological standpoint, this embodies the concept of collective behavior,

wherein group dynamics supersede individual moral judgment. The normalization of violence emerges because it is embedded within tradition and perpetuated through social compliance.

engage in harmful actions within structured systems.

Beyond theoretical comparison, the story can be connected to real-life social practices. In numerous societies, traditions persist without critical evaluation, merely because they have been enacted over generations. This underscores the influence of collective consciousness in preserving social norms.

In real-world contexts, individuals frequently conform to avert conflict or exclusion. Consequently, certain practices may continue despite being acknowledged as problematic. This demonstrates that the issues presented in *The Lottery* are not merely fictional, but rather reflective of broader patterns of human behavior..

Discussion

1. Comparative Analysis

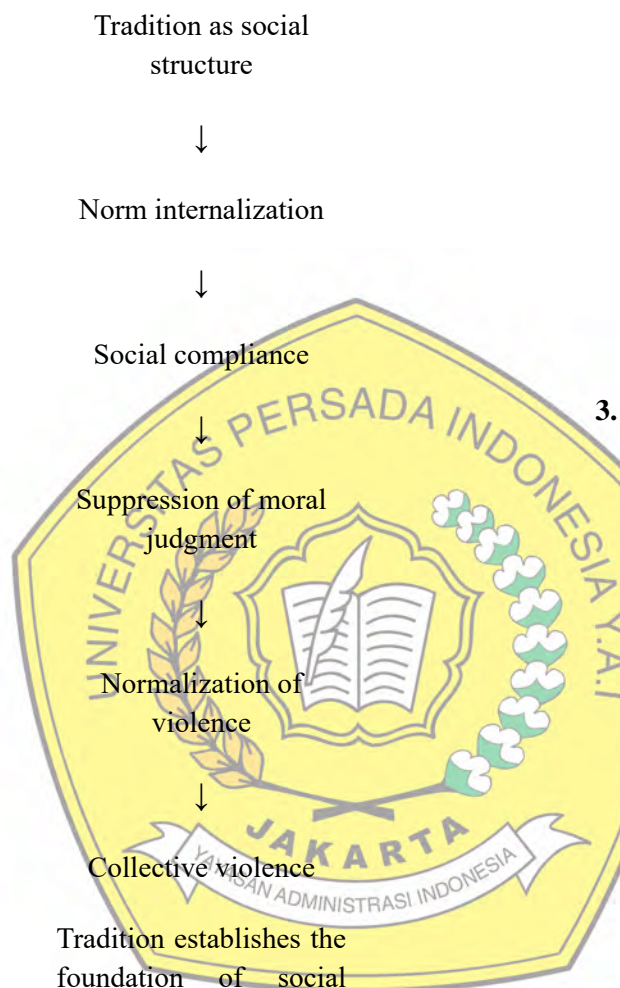
The findings substantiate the notion that *The Lottery* mirrors broader social realities wherein tradition functions as a mechanism of social control. From the perspective of the sociology of literature, the narrative illustrates how social structures mold behavior and sustain collective order.

When examined through the lens of social conformity theory, the behavior of the villagers corresponds with Asch's concept of conformity. Individuals adjust their actions to align with group expectations. Similarly, Milgram's theory of obedience provides insight into how individuals may

2. Cause and Effect Analysis

The relationship between tradition, social compliance, and collective violence can be explained through the

following causal framework:



Tradition establishes the foundation of social behavior. As individuals internalize these norms, they become increasingly unlikely to challenge them. This phenomenon gives rise to conformity, wherein group expectations supersede personal values.

Consequently, moral judgment becomes suppressed, thereby

permitting violence to be normalized. Over time, such practices are integrated into the social system, culminating in collective participation in harmful actions.

This cause-and-effect relationship illustrates how structural and behavioral factors interact to generate social outcomes.

3. Interpretation of Findings

The findings demonstrate that social structures significantly shape individual behavior. The enduring tradition, alongside strong social conformity, fosters conditions wherein individuals fail to critically assess their actions.

One interpretation suggests that violence in the narrative is not attributable to individual intent. Rather, it stems from collective acceptance. Social norms serve as mechanisms of control that influence conduct at both structural and individual levels.

This indicates that the central concern

presented in the narrative is the lack of critical awareness. By failing to question established norms, individuals become complicit in systems that sustain harm.

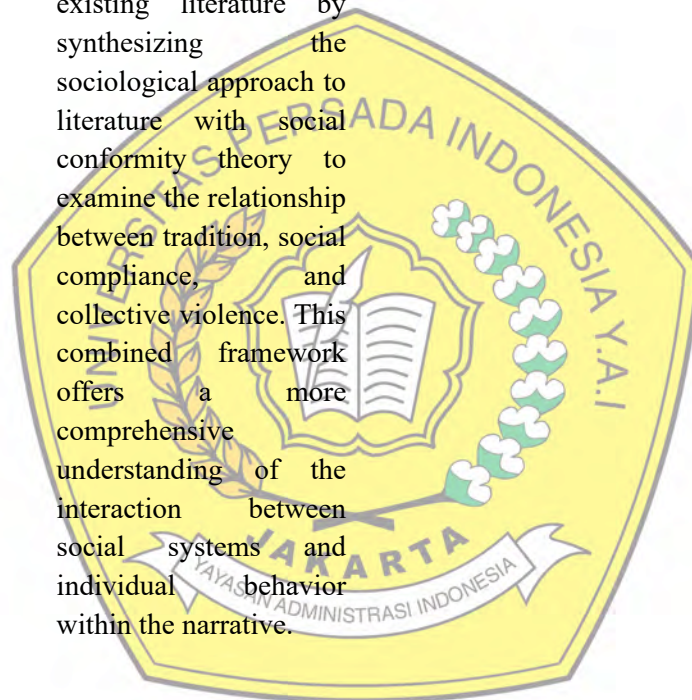
4. Novelty

This study adds to the existing literature by synthesizing the sociological approach to literature with social conformity theory to examine the relationship between tradition, social compliance, and collective violence. This combined framework offers a more comprehensive understanding of the interaction between social systems and individual behavior within the narrative.

sociological and psychological perspectives can be integrated to analyze literary texts.

- **Practical Implications**

The findings underscore the importance of critical awareness when evaluating traditions. Societies must be prepared to challenge established norms to prevent the perpetuation of harmful practices and foster more equitable social systems



Implications

- **Theoretical Implications**

This study emphasizes the role of literature as a mirror of social structures and collective behavior. It illustrates how

4. Conclusion

This study examines the representation of tradition, social compliance, and collective violence in *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson through the lens of sociology of literature, supplemented by social conformity theory. The findings reveal that tradition within the narrative operates as a social structure that endures across generations, even when its original significance has vanished. This

endurance illustrates how social systems sustain continuity through collective acceptance rather than rational justification.

Additionally, the study discovers that social compliance arises through norm internalization, wherein individuals adopt and adhere to group expectations without critical assessment. The behavior of the villagers demonstrates how conformity functions within a social system, constraining individual agency and suppressing moral judgment. Consequently, individuals prioritize social acceptance over ethical considerations.

The interplay between tradition and social compliance ultimately results in the normalization of violence. Collective violence in the story is not depicted as an isolated act, but rather as a socially constructed outcome shaped by shared beliefs and practices. The diffusion of responsibility within the group further solidifies the acceptance of harmful actions.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes that unquestioned traditions, when combined with robust social conformity, can establish conditions wherein violence becomes normalized within society. This finding underscores the significance of critical awareness when evaluating social norms and traditions. Individuals and

communities must be prepared to challenge established practices to prevent the perpetuation of harmful behaviors and to cultivate more just and humane social systems.

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