



THE IMPACT OF RACISM ON CHARACTERS IN HARPER LEE'S NOVEL TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

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ABSTRACT

The study entitled *The Impact of Racism on Characters in Harper Lee's Novel To Kill a Mockingbird* was analyzed using descriptive qualitative method to describe the data. This study aims to describe the impact of racism experienced by the characters in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, namely Atticus and two of his children. The impact of racism that occurs in society in the novel is a reflection of the actual condition of society at that time. This study shows the impact of racism on Atticus and his family. Atticus Finch (white people) defends Tom Robinson (black people) from the legal entanglement. The impacts of racism in this novel includes the psychological impact and social impact. The psychological impacts are guilt, fear, sadness, trauma. The social impacts obtained after struggle with white Supremacy that the people of Maycomb believe in are a conflict of "man versus society", the character must confront the surrounding society including discrimination and violence.

Keywords: *Character, racism, impacts, white people, black people*

INTRODUCTION

The study of literature has long been a subject of fascination for scholars. Within this field, the concept of the novel has garnered particular attention, as it represents a unique form of storytelling that has evolved significantly over time. In this article, we will explore the concept of the novel within the context of expert theories and how it has been shaped by various literary and cultural influences. The term "novel" is derived from the Italian word "novella" which refers to a short narrative or story (Nurgiyantoro, 2013). However, the modern novel is typically defined as a lengthy work of fiction that is written in prose and is divided into chapters.

As the novel evolved, it became a more realistic and complex form of storytelling, with a greater focus on character development and psychological depth. The rise of the novel as a popular form of literature can be traced back to the 18th century, with the emergence of writers such as Jane Austen and Charles Dickens. These writers helped to establish the novel as a respected form of literature, and their works continue to be widely read and studied today. One of



the key expert theories surrounding the novel is that it is a product of its time and place. In other words, the themes and storylines of a novel are often influenced by the historical, cultural, and social context in which it was written. For example, a novel set in 19th century England may explore themes of class and gender roles, while a novel set in contemporary America may delve into issues of race and identity.

Another expert theory of the novel is that it serves as a means of social commentary and critique. Many novels are written with the intention of shedding light on social issues and offering perspectives on the world in which we live. For instance, novels such as “To Kill a Mockingbird” by Harper Lee and “The Great Gatsby” by F. Scott Fitzgerald explore issues of racial inequality and the corrupting influence of wealth, respectively. In addition to their social commentary, novels can also serve as a means of escapism for readers. The immersive nature of the novel allows readers to transport themselves to different worlds and experience new and exciting adventures (Helmie, 2018). This can be particularly appealing to readers who are looking to escape the stresses and challenges of their everyday lives.

In a multicultural society, diversity cannot be denied, and everyone should be able to respect differences. However, this difference cannot be easily accepted in society and instead causes division and hostility. Human races classified into three major groups, namely the Mongoloid race or the yellow race, the Negroid race or the black race, and the Caucasoid race or the white race. This categorization does not necessarily indicate that a race is superior to others. However, in society, this fact has led to the social class and led the practice of racism. The cause of this social problem is not recognizing or not accepting differences in physical appearance such as skin colour, hair colour, body shape and other biological elements. In a particular community, this difference triggers different mindsets in society. This difference in mindset can eventually cause problems or even oppression against certain groups and races.

On 20-25 April 2009, the United Nations held an Anti-Racism Conference in Geneva, Switzerland, with the title Duban Review Conference. This conference was initiated as an effort to realize world peace that is free from the dangers of racism. However, the issue of racial discrimination still occurs in various parts of the world, such as the case of racial discrimination that befell George Floyd in 2020, a black man who was killed by white police in the United States, as reported in the Kompas General Daily on June 3, 2019. This proves that public awareness of this social issue is still deficient. It is not surprising that racial discrimination has become part of a worldwide global issue and is in the spotlight of many parties.

One of the mediums used to build public awareness of this issue is through literary works. A literary work is not only a reflection of the real world, which is conveyed imaginatively by the author. More than that, a literary work has its own world, which is capable of presenting messages, criticism, and even ideology when other mediums are unable to convey it. Literary works are able to change



the way of thinking and human behaviour to become cultured, humane and self-aware. One of the essential values that can be learned from literary works is the understanding of diversity in society. Therefore, not a few writers raise the theme of discrimination in their writings. Be it racial or ethnic discrimination, gender, religion and even social class. So, a study on the issue of institutionalized racial discrimination in literary works is very urgent to be carried out in order to obtain specific news from the perspective of writers.

Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a classic work of literature that has had a significant impact on the way that race and racism are perceived and addressed in society. Set in the Deep South during the 1930s, the novel tells the story of a young white girl named Scout Finch who witnesses the racism and prejudice that her community has towards African Americans. Through the character of Atticus Finch, a compassionate and fair-minded lawyer, Lee presents a powerful critique of racism and its damaging effects on individuals and society. *To Kill a Mockingbird* serves as a powerful social commentary on the issue of racism. The novel explores the ways in which racial stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination can have a detrimental impact on both the victims of racism and the perpetrators. Through the character of Tom Robinson, an African American man falsely accused of a crime, Lee illustrates the systemic racism that was prevalent in the Deep South during the 1930s. The trial of Tom Robinson serves as a microcosm of the larger societal issues of racism and discrimination, and shows the devastating effects that these issues can have on individuals and communities. Through the character of Atticus Finch, Lee presents a model of moral courage and compassion that encourages readers to stand up against injustice and discrimination. The novel serves as a call to action for readers to recognize and challenge the racism that exists within their own communities and to work towards creating a more fair and just society.

To Kill a Mockingbird is a beautifully written novel that engages readers on a deep emotional level. The characters in the novel are complex and well-developed, and the story is both heart-wrenching and uplifting. Since its publication in 1960, the novel has sold over 40 million copies worldwide and has been translated into more than 40 languages. It has also been adapted into a number of film, stage, and television productions, further demonstrating its widespread appeal and impact. The novel has inspired countless readers to confront their own biases and prejudices, and to work towards creating a more inclusive and compassionate world. It has also sparked important conversations and debates about the issues of race and racism, and has served as a catalyst for social change.

There are numerous reasons why Harper Lee's work was chosen as the object of study. *To Kill a Mockingbird* presents a powerful critique of racism and its damaging effects on individuals and society. The novel is a beautifully written work of literature that draws readers in and keeps them engaged from beginning to end. After all, it has been widely circulated and has received many awards. The material object of this study is the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee.



The awards Lee has received include the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1961, the Quill Award for Audiobook in 2007, and others. This award is given to American authors who have inspired and contributed to society. In addition, the award also aims to activate the spirit of mutual respect for cultural differences in society.

To find comparisons and new inspiration for the study being conducted, the researcher reviewed previous study results. This helps the researcher to position the study and show its originality of the study. The following is a previous study that is still related to the theme the researcher is studying. Ndiba (2016) with the title *Diskriminasi Ras Dalam Novela Heart of Darkness Karya Joseph Conrad*. In her analysis, the researcher examines discrimination and the impact of racial discrimination itself. The researcher found forms of violence and enslavement committed by white people against black people in Africa. From this study, can be seen some similarities and differences between the previous study conducted and this study. There is a similarity between the previous study, and this study is they both analyze the impact of discrimination in the novel. While the difference between the previous study and this study is in the novel object studied. The previous study uses the novella *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad as the object, while this study uses the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee as the object.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Characters are the people shown in a story. Characters and characterizations are two elements of a literary work that are interrelated and cannot be separated from the creation of a literary work. Through characters, the author gives an overview of the characters in a story. Depiction or painting of the character is called characterization or characterization.

Character or characterization is a life that is written in literary works. The characters in a novel can be distinguished into several types of naming based on their role and importance. The first character mentioned is the main character of the story (central character), while the second character is an additional character or peripheral character (peripheral character) (Nurgiyantoro, 2013, p. 258).

The main character is the character whose narration is prioritized in the novel in question. It is the character that is most often told about. Both as the perpetrator of events or as the impact of events. Meanwhile, a character with an insignificant role because the appearance only complements, serves, and supports the main actor is called an additional character or supporting character. In the direct presentation of the character (Direct presentation), the author describes or describes the character explicitly and openly in the story about what the character is like. While the depiction of the character indirectly (Indirect presentation), the author only shows the reader about the character from the character's behaviour and actions.



Author: Islamy, Jiaul Haque

The race is a social conception that arises from attempts to classify people into different groups. Racial identity is usually related to outward physical characteristics such as skin colour, hair texture, facial appearance, and eye shape. The concept of racial identity prevails in the United States as a social notion that is unquestionably linked to historical legacies such as slavery, the persecution of American Indians, issues of civil rights, and more recently, the increase in immigrants. It is challenging to state the consequences of racism because the effects can be conscious or unconscious. What we do know is that racism is as harmful to the recipients of this destructive behavior as it is to the perpetrators themselves.

Racism originates from domination and the underlying social thought of justification for belittling and committing acts of violence against someone based on their skin color. Racism also creates a sense of superiority from one race over another. This superiority leads to oppression and discrimination in areas such as politics, economics and others (Kencana, 2014, p. 10)

Racism is a manifestation of violent actions that are easily observable, even to those who cannot physically see it. It can give rise to individuals or groups having hateful thoughts towards minority groups, thus becoming another form of racism, aimed at subjugating minority communities. This belief is rooted in the idea that there is a direct link between physical characteristics of a race and one's personality, intelligence, morality and environment, which leads to the conclusion that the white race is innately superior to the black race. Racism encompasses various forms like racial prejudice, racial stereotypes and racial discrimination. There are two impacts of racism in this novel:

Psychological Impact

Acts of racism against minorities will increase mental health problems in individuals (Awwali 2020, p. 18). Racism is a prevalent issue that impacts people of all ages, races, and backgrounds, with minorities, particularly those belonging to ethnic or racial groups that have historically been marginalized and oppressed, being particularly susceptible to the negative effects of racism. One of the most significant impacts of racism is on mental health. Racism can lead to a rise in mental health issues in individuals.

One of the most significant ways in which racism can harm psychological is by causing feelings of stress and anxiety. When individuals are subjected to racist actions, they may experience feelings of fear, anger, and helplessness. These emotions can be overwhelming and can lead to long-term stress and anxiety. In addition, racism can also cause feelings of shame, guilt, and self-doubt. These negative emotions can lead to a sense of isolation and can make it challenging for individuals to form healthy relationships and connections with others.

Racism can also lead to the development of mental health disorders such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). When individuals are exposed to racist acts, they may experience feelings of hopelessness, despair, and



worthlessness. These emotions can lead to depression, which can be debilitating and can make it difficult for individuals to function in their daily lives. Additionally, racism can also cause individuals to experience traumatic events, such as physical or verbal abuse, which can lead to the development of PTSD.

It is important to note that the impact of racism on mental health is not limited to the individuals who are directly targeted by racist acts. The trauma caused by racism can be passed down through generations, leading to mental health problems in future generations. Additionally, the experience of racism can also have a ripple effect on the entire community, leading to an increase in mental health problems among all members of the community.

In conclusion, acts of racism can lead to an increase in psychological problems in individuals. Racism can cause feelings of stress and anxiety, lead to the development of mental health disorders, and affect the physical health of minorities. It is essential for society to acknowledge and address the harm caused by racism and work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable society for all. This can be done by educating the public about the effects of racism and implementing policies and programs that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. It is also important for individuals to speak out against racism when they witness it, and for communities to provide support for those who have been affected by racist acts.

Social Impact

Racism victims not only suffer from psychological impacts, but also face severe impacts in their social lives. They often get excluded by the general population and become the target of discrimination by the majority race, creating a divide between the oppressor and the oppressed.

One of the most significant social impacts of racism is the way it can create and reinforce inequality. Racism can lead to the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges based on race. This can result in individuals and groups being marginalized and excluded from participating fully in society. Racism can also contribute to a lack of representation and visibility for certain groups within society, further perpetuating their marginalization.

Another social impact of racism is the way it can contribute to discrimination and prejudice. Racism can lead to the formation of negative stereotypes and biases, which can then be used to justify discriminatory practices and policies. This can have serious consequences for individuals and groups who are targeted by these practices, and can further reinforce the cycle of inequality.

Racism can also have social consequences in terms of interpersonal relationships and social cohesion. It can create a sense of division and mistrust within society, leading to conflict and social unrest. This can be especially harmful when it occurs at a systemic level, as it can create widespread tensions and undermine the stability of society as a whole.

In addition to these negative social impacts, racism can also have broader economic consequences. It can lead to reduced productivity, as individuals and groups who are discriminated against may not have access to the same



opportunities and resources as others. This can result in a lack of economic growth and development, which can have negative impacts on society as a whole.

Overall, the social impact of racism is significant and far-reaching. It is important for individuals and societies to work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable world, in order to reduce the negative consequences of racism and promote social harmony and well-being for all.

METHOD

The method used by this writer is qualitative. According to Bogdan and Taylor in Moleong stated that qualitative research methods are research procedures that produce descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observed behaviour (Moleong, 2013: 04). In Bogdan and Taylor's explanation, there is conformity in the method that will be used by the researcher in supporting study on the novel. This study only descriptively involves writings or texts and does not involve presentations in the form of numbers. This descriptive analysis method will make it easier for the researcher to analyze so that the data will be described per the formulation of the problem formulated by the researcher. This method is used by the researcher because it is in accordance with the study conducted, namely describing the character as an object discussed in the research. In the process of describing it, the writer uses a characterization method based on Laurence Perrine. This method is used by the author to describe the characters being analyzed, both the depiction of the characters directly through the author's story and without the presence of the author through the appearance or actions of the characters themselves in the story.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the findings of this study demonstrate that the characters in the novel experience both psychological and social impacts as a result of racial discrimination. These impacts are discussed in more detail below.

Psychological Impact

After Atticus's defence, not only did his life change, but the lives of his children, Scout and Jem, too. Atticus and his family feel the psychological impact. After Tom Robinson's loss in court, Atticus is down and feeling guilty. Even her sister, Aunt Alexandra, felt the same sadness and showed an attitude she was not used to.

Data 1

"It ain't right, Atticus," said Jem.

"No, son, it's not right."

Aunt Alexandra was waiting up. She was in her dressing gown.

"I'm sorry, brother," she murmured. Having never heard her call Atticus' brother' before. I stole a glance at Jem, but he was not listening. He would look up at Atticus, then down at the floor, and I



wondered if he thought Atticus was somehow responsible for Tom Robinson's conviction. (Lee, 2010, p. 234)

The psychological state of the Finch family is depicted as being negatively impacted by their loss in court. The data above is a conversation between the characters Jem Finch, Atticus Finch and Aunt Alexandra. The conversation is taking place after the trial and conviction of Tom Robinson, a black man falsely accused of a crime. Jem expresses his disappointment and frustration about the outcome of the trial, saying "It ain't right, Atticus," to which Atticus agrees, saying "No, son, it's not right." The passage also shows that Jem is not listening to Aunt Alexandra's apology and is thinking about the injustice of the situation. Aunt Alexandra's apology to Atticus is also an indication that she understands the gravity of the situation, and that she recognizes the role of Atticus in trying to bring justice. The data highlights psychological impacts of the characters with the outcome of the trial. Atticus's agreement with Jem's statement and the fact that he is not able to provide a solution to the problem, highlights the powerlessness of the characters in the face of racism and injustice. The passage also shows that Jem may be beginning to understand the true nature of racism and how it affects the people in their community.

The psychological impact also appears to Scout among her friends. All of Scout's friends assume that Scout is no longer part of their group. They stay away from Scout, and no one cares about her. This made Scout sad, and she thought about leaving school because her days at school were very unpleasant. Scouts avoid school for various reasons, as explained in the excerpt below.

Data 2

"My father looked at me mildly, amusement in his eyes. Despite our compromise, my campaign to avoid school had continued in one form or another since my first day's dose of it: the beginning of last September had brought on sinking spells, dizziness, and mild gastric complaints. I went so far as to pay a nickel for the privilege of rubbing my head against the head of Miss Rachel's cook's son, who was afflicted with a tremendous ringworm. It didn't take." (Lee, 2010, p. 99)

This data describes the main character Scout Finch's efforts to avoid going to school. Scout mentions that she has been using various tactics to avoid attending school since her first day of classes, including faking illnesses such as sinking spells, dizziness, and stomach aches. She also mentions that she even paid a nickel to rub her head against the head of Miss Rachel's cook's son, who had ringworm, in the hope that she would also get the disease and be unable to attend school. Despite her efforts, Scout's father, Atticus, sees through her attempts and is amused by them. The data highlights Scout's psychological impacts from racism that lead to the discomfort and resistance to the idea of going to school. It also shows her resourcefulness and creativity in coming up with ways to avoid it, despite her father's insistence that she attend. It also reveals that Scout is willing to go to any lengths to avoid something she doesn't want to do, even if it is



something that is good for her in the long run. The passage also reveals the relationship between Scout and Atticus, as Scout is not able to fool him.

Social Impact

The social impact of white supremacy on the people of Maycomb opposed the liberalism held by Atticus. This caused Atticus to experience the social impact, a “man versus society” conflict. Atticus is part of the Maycomb community. Nevertheless, the system in the Maycomb community sided with white skin with its White Supremacy, and Atticus' thoughts were considered to be contrary to the general Maycomb community. The conflict between Atticus and the Maycomb community caused him and his two children to experience the effects of racism, as explained in the excerpt below.

Data 3

“Come here, Scout,” said Atticus. I crawled into his lap and tucked my head under his chin. He put his arms around me and rocked me gently. “It’s different this time,” he said. “This time we aren’t fighting the Yankees, we’re fighting our friends. But remember this, no matter how bitter things get, they’re still our friends, and this is still our home.” (Lee, 2010, p. 108)

The quote above is a conversation between the main character Scout Finch and her father Atticus Finch, regarding Atticus' decision to defend his client, Tom Robinson, who is black. Scout is upset and confused about the what is happening, and Atticus is trying to comfort her and provide her with a sense of perspective. He tells her that their current situation is different from past events, as they are now fighting against their friends, instead of an external enemy. He emphasizes that despite the bitterness and conflicts that are arising, the people they are fighting against are still their friends and the town they live in is still their home. Atticus's words convey the theme of the complexity of human relationships and the idea that people can hold different perspectives and still care for each other. He also emphasizes the importance of keeping a sense of perspective and the idea that even in difficult times, one's home and community should be cherished and respected.

Data 4

I ran in the direction of Jem's scream and sank into a flabby male stomach. Its owner said, “Uff!” and tried to catch my arms, but they were tightly pinioned. His stomach was soft, but his arms were like steel. He slowly squeezed the breath out of me. I could not move. Suddenly he was jerked backwards and flung on the ground, almost carrying me with him. I thought Jem's up. (Lee, 2010, p. 289)

The data describes a scene where Jem and Scout experienced. Jem and Scout Finch are physically harmed by Bob Ewell. Scout is running in the direction of her brother Jem's scream and runs into the stomach of the man. The man tries to grab her arms but they are pinned down and he starts to squeeze the breath out



of her, making it hard for her to move. Suddenly the man is pulled away and thrown on the ground, leaving Scout to think that it was her brother Jem who saved her. The passage uses imagery to describe the man's stomach as "flabby" and his arms as "steel" to convey the contrast between the man's soft exterior and his strength. Scout also demonstrates the fear and vulnerability that she feels in the moment of being attacked and the relief she feels when she is saved.

CONCLUSION

To Kill a Mockingbird is a fascinating novel to analyze, as it explores various aspects of human experience. By examining the characters in the novel through the lens of character theory, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the themes and issues that are addressed in the story. One key aspect of the novel is the setting, which takes place in the small town of Maycomb in the American South. Maycomb is situated in an area that is still heavily impacted by racism, with white people considering themselves superior to black people and viewing them as uncivilized. This belief serves as the justification for the racism that white people perpetrate against black people in the novel.

The impact of racism in Harper Lee's novel "*To Kill a Mockingbird*" is directed towards several characters, namely Atticus Finch, Jem Finch, Scout Finch, and Alexandra Finch. Atticus Finch is a white lawyer who defends Tom Robinson against a crime he did not commit, Jem Finch is Atticus Finch's son, Scout Finch is Atticus Finch's daughter, and Alexandra Finch is Atticus Finch's sister. The impact of racism in this novel includes psychological and social effects. The psychological effects received are fear, sadness, and trauma. The social effects obtained after the struggle to help Tom Robinson from the legal entanglement are a conflict of "man versus society", the character must confront the surrounding society.

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