

**AGAINST RACIAL INJUSTICE IN HARPER LEE'S
TO KILL A MOCKING BIRD NOVEL (1960):
A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH**



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A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH**

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Abstract

The problem of this study is how racial injustice reflected in Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird. The objective of this study is to analyze the novel based on the structural elements and to analyze the novel based on the sociological approach. This study belongs to qualitative method. In this method, there are two types of data source, namely primary and secondary data source. The primary data source is the novel itself, meanwhile the secondary data sources are other materials related to the study. Both data are collected through library research and analyzed by descriptive analysis. Based on the analysis the researcher draws the following conclusions. First, based on the structural analysis of each element, it shows that the character and characterization, setting, plot, point of view, style, and theme are related to each other and form the unity into good quality of novel. It conveys a message that the racial injustice must be erased, because all people of all races are equal before the law. Second, based on the sociological analysis, there is a close relationship between the novel story and the reality of American life in the mid twentieth century.

Keywords: Racial Injustice, To Kill a Mockingbird, Sociological Approach.

A. INTRODUCTION

The primary theme of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is racial injustice. Racial injustice is a condition where people get different treatment because of their race. Nelle Harper Lee is an author who pays attention to the problem of injustice. She was born and raised in Monroeville, Alabama. She was the youngest of four children of Amasa Coleman Lee and Frances Finch Lee. She lives in New York now. (Syahrani, 2009: 07)

Nelle Harper Lee thinks that injustice must be erased, so she wrote *To Kill a Mockingbird*. "*To Kill a Mockingbird* was an astonishing first novel. It was published in 1960 and in the following year won three awards: the Pulitzer, the Alabama Literary Association Award and the Brotherhood Award of the National Conference of Christian and Jews. It also won the Best Seller' Paperback of the Years Award for 1962. It has sold millions of copies and had been translated in to many languages" (Hardrace, 1976: 5-6)

There are five reasons why the writer is interested in studying this novel. First, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is an interesting title of novel. Why is the book called *To Kill a Mockingbird*? Does it the literal meaning or figurative meaning? It is vague, so the reader wonder what the title means. The second interesting point of this novel is the characters. One of the most important aspects of writing a novel is the characters. Every author has their own way of creating characters. Lee's characters hold the reader's attention so they keep turning those pages looking for what is going to happen next; what the character will do next. The third is the setting. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is set in Maycomb County, an imaginary town in southern Alabama. This fictional town is made up for this story, and does not exist in real life. The period of the story of *To Kill A Mockingbird*, some 30 years before the growth of the Civil Right movement. The fourth is the point of view. The first-person narrator is Scout Finch, who is five when the story begins and eight when it

ends. Writing from a child's point-of-view is not easy. As a child Scout narrate the story naively and that makes the novel interesting. Fifth, *To kill a mockingbird* is a story that has many themes. The primary theme of the novel is against racial injustice. A literary work should have a message for the readers. Therefore, based on the racial injustice, the writer will analyze Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* using a Sociological Approach.

Fanianie stated that "Sociology is the science which studies objects in the form of human social activities. Literature is the art which is the expression of human life. Thus, between literature and sociology are actually two different areas, but they are complementing each other" (2000: 132). Sociology of society deals with the documentary aspects of literature provides a mirror to the certain age (Swingewood, 1972: 13).

In order to make this research valid, the writer takes some literature review to support the writer's research. Novita Indriana (2011) wrote "Analysis of Twentieth Century Southern American Society Reflected in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*". Fauziah Arini (2007) wrote "Racism in Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*: A Genetic Structuralism Approach".

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study belongs to qualitative method. In this method, there are two types of data source, namely primary and secondary data source. The primary data source is the novel itself, meanwhile the secondary data sources are other materials related to the study. Both data are collected through library research.

In collecting data, the writer will takes some steps as follow: Reading the novel repeatedly to get deep understanding. Reading some related books to find out the theory, data, and information required. Taking notes of important part in both primary data and secondary data sources. Arranging the data into several parts based on its classification. Analyzing the data. Drawing conclusion based on the analyzing data.

In analyzing data, the writer uses descriptive technique. The technique is used to describe the elements of the novel and make some understanding toward the novel. The writer identifies the relationship between the novel and the sociological background of the twentieth century American society in the sociological perspective.

C. RESEARCH FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The social reality in the mid twentieth century in America is reflected by *To Kill a Mockingbird* novel through some aspects. The aspects are social, economy, politic, science and technology, culture, and religion.

1. Social Aspect

In the twentieth century, a class model of Americans consists of working, middle and upper classes. This category was based on American's job status, income capital, and sometimes births. The working class is the minority in America who has historically been classified as poor, while the middle class is dominant and large majority in America. The middle class included white collar workers, executive, and professional workers. The upper class consisted of families and individuals that have high standard of living in the society. They have great wealth and great power in economy, and also have high income (Mauk and Oakland, 1997: 243).

The social aspect of America in the mid twentieth century can be seen from the social class of Americans. In her novel, Harper Lee creates the characters based on American social class. It consists of working, middle and upper classes. There are working class families such as Mr. Cunningham family and Mr. Ewell family. They are poor. Mr. Cunningham family is farmer. Mr. Ewell family is garbage collector. The

middle class is represented by Finch family. They are not rich but they are comfortable enough with their live. Atticus Finch is a lawyer. And her brother Jack Finch is a doctor. They are professional workers. The upper class is represented by character named Mr. Link Deas. He is the owner of cotton fields. He has so many employees; one of them is Tom Robinson a black people who is defended by Atticus Finch. Mr. Link Deas has great wealth and great power in economy, and also has high income.

Another important point of social aspect is the relation between black and white people. In the social life of America, there are some races but the social relation between white and black in America is not good enough. Most of white people could not accept black to be equal with them. In Harper Lee's novel there are some characters such as Atticus Finch, Scout, Jem, and Miss Maudie. They are white people who believe in equality and respect black people. There are some characters such as Tom Robinson, Helen Robinson, and Calpurnia. They are black people in the story. There are some characters such as Mr. Ewell, Mrs. Dubosse, and Mr. Cunningham. They are white people who could not accept equality. Even they believe in an assumption that that all Negroes basically immoral and un-trustable.

2. Economic Aspect

Economic Aspects contribute to the characters and characterizations. The character and characterization describes the condition at that time. Ewells are a picture of the lower economy.

“Atticus said the Ewells had been the disgrace of Maycomb for three generations. None of them had done an honest day's work in his recollection. He said that some Christmas, when he was getting rid of the tree, he would take me with him and show me where and how they lived. They were people, but they lived like animals.” (p. 30-31)

The economic of America grew after World War II. The United States experienced phenomenal economic growth and consolidated its position as the world's richest country. Gross national product (GNP), a measure of all goods and services produced in the United states, jumped from about

\$200,000-million in 1940 to \$300,000-million in 1950 to more than \$500,000-million in 1960. More and more Americans now considered themselves part of the middle class. (U.S. Department of State 2005: 267)

Americans are hard worker people. It can be seen from this quotation:

“During his first five years in Maycomb, Atticus practiced economy more than anything; for several years thereafter he invested his earnings in his brother’s education. John Hale Finch was ten years younger than my father, and chose to study medicine at a time when cotton was not worth growing; but after getting Uncle Jack started, Atticus derived a reasonable income from the law. He liked Maycomb, he was Maycomb County born and bred; he knew his people, they knew him, and because of Simon Finch’s industry, Atticus was related by blood or marriage to nearly every family in the town.” (p. 5)

There are various types of jobs in Maycomb such as: lawyer, doctor, dentist, and farmer. This is described in the story as quoted as follow:

“Atticus said professional people were poor because the farmers were poor. As Maycomb County was farm country, nickels and dimes were hard to come by for doctors and dentists and lawyers. Entailment was only a part of Mr. Cunningham’s vexations. The acres not entailed were mortgaged to the hilt, and the little cash he made went to interest. If he held his mouth right, Mr. Cunningham could get a WPA job, but his land would go to ruin if he left it, and he was willing to go hungry to keep his land and vote as he pleased. Mr. Cunningham, said Atticus, came from a set breed of men.” (p: 21)

3. Political Aspect

In 1933 the new president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, brought an air of confidence and optimism that quickly rallied the people to the banner of his program, known as the New Deal. “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself,” the president declared in his inaugural address to the nation.

“Maycomb was an old town, but it was a tired old town when I first knew it. In rainy weather the streets turned to red slop; grass grew on the sidewalks, the courthouse sagged in the square. Somehow, it was hotter then: a black dog suffered on a summer’s day; bony mules hitched to Hoover carts flicked flies in the sweltering shade of the live oaks on the square. Men’s stiff collars wilted by nine in the morning. Ladies bathed before noon, after their three-o’clock naps, and by nightfall were like soft teacakes with frostings of sweat and sweet talcum. People moved slowly then. They ambled across the square, shuffled in and out of the stores around it, took their time about everything. A day was twenty-four hours long but seemed longer. There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with, nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County. But it was a time of vague optimism for some of the people: Maycomb County had recently been told that it had nothing to fear but fear itself.” (p. 5-6)

Miss Caroline printed her name on the blackboard and said, “This says I am Miss Caroline Fisher. I am from North Alabama, from Winston County.” The class murmured apprehensively, should she prove to harbor her share of the peculiarities

indigenous to that region. (When Alabama seceded from the Union on January 11, 1861, Winston County seceded from Alabama, and every child in Maycomb County knew it.) North Alabama was full of Liquor Interests, Big Mules, steel companies, Republicans, professors, and other persons of no background.¹⁸

American government is emphasis on Democracy. It can be seen while Scout teacher teach her about Democracy in the school. Democracy means Equal rights for all, special privileges for none.

“Democracy,” she said. “Does anybody have a definition?” “Us,” somebody said. I raised my hand, remembering an old campaign slogan Atticus had once told me about. “What do you think it means, Jean Louise?” ““Equal rights for all, special privileges for none,” I quoted. “Very good, Jean Louise, very good,” Miss Gates smiled. In front of DEMOCRACY, she printed WE ARE A. “Now class, say it all together, ‘We are a democracy.’” We said it. Then Miss Gates said, “That’s the difference between America and Germany. We are a democracy and Germany is a dictatorship. Dictator-ship,” she said. 249

4. Science and Technology Aspect

In the mid twentieth century many people in America have high technology in their life. This condition inspired Harper Lee to criticize this condition through the plot of the novel. In the novel Harper Lee describes telephone as the high technology in the communication.

“The telephone rang and Atticus left the breakfast table to answer it. “That was Eula May,” he said when he returned. “I quote—‘As it has not snowed in Maycomb County since 1885, there will be no school today.’” Eula May was Maycomb’s leading telephone operator. She was entrusted with issuing public announcements, wedding invitations, setting off the fire siren, and giving first-aid instructions when Dr. Reynolds was away.” (p. 66)

The quotation above describes that telephone has a good effect for people. This technology can help people to make their life easier. Besides, they have high technology in transportation that time. They have train and taxi to travel.

“Two days later Dill arrived in a blaze of glory: he had ridden the train by himself from Meridian to Maycomb Junction (a courtesy title—Maycomb Junction was in Abbott County) where he had been met by Miss Rachel in Maycomb’s one taxi; he had eaten dinner in the diner, he had seen two twins hitched together get off the train in Bay St. Louis and stuck to his story regardless of threats. He had discarded the abominable blue shorts that were buttoned to his shirts and wore real short pants with a belt; he was somewhat heavier, no taller, and said he had seen his father.

Dill's father was taller than ours, he had a black beard (pointed), and was president of the L & N Railroad." (p. 36)

Harper Lee also describes the Dewey Decimal System. It is a new education system that time.

"I'm just trying to tell you the new way they're teachin' the first grade, stubborn. It's the Dewey Decimal System." Having never questioned Jem's pronouncements, I saw no reason to begin now. The Dewey Decimal System consisted, in part, of Miss Caroline waving cards at us on which were printed "the," "cat," "rat," "man," and "you." No comment seemed to be expected of us, and the class received these impressionistic revelations in silence. (p.18)

5. Cultural Aspect

The cultural condition in America on the mid twentieth century influences Harper Lee to make the setting. There is a culture in Maycomb County that of all days Sunday was the day for formal afternoon visiting: ladies wore corsets, men wore coats, children wore shoes. This is described in the story as quoted as follow:

"The shutters and doors of the Radley house were closed on Sundays, another thing alien to Maycomb's ways: closed doors meant illness and cold weather only. Of all days Sunday was the day for formal afternoon visiting: ladies wore corsets, men wore coats, children wore shoes. But to climb the Radley front steps and call, "He-y," of a Sunday afternoon was something their neighbors never did." (p. 9)

We can see the costumes that wear by some men in the mid twentieth century, most of them in overalls and denim shirts buttoned up to the collars. Some wore hats pulled firmly down over their ears:

"I looked around the crowd. It was a summer's night, but the men were dressed, most of them, in overalls and denim shirts buttoned up to the collars. I thought they must be cold natured, as their sleeves were unrolled and buttoned at the cuffs. Some wore hats pulled firmly down over their ears. They were sullen-looking, sleepy-eyed men who seemed unused to late hours. I sought once more for a familiar face, and at the center of the semi-circle I found one." (p. 155)

6. Religious Aspect

In the novel, Harper Lee shows one of the US religions. It is Protestantism. This is portrayed in Miss Maudie. She is Finch's neighbor who has protestant religion.

“Apparently deciding that it was easier to define primitive baptistry than closed communion, Miss Maudie said: “Foot-washers believe anything that’s pleasure is a sin. Did you know some of ‘em came out of the woods one Saturday and passed by this place and told me me and my flowers were going to hell?” “Your flowers, too?” “Yes ma’am. They’d burn right with me. They thought I spent too much time in God’s outdoors and not enough time inside the house reading the Bible.” My confidence in pulpit Gospel lessened at the vision of Miss Maudie stewing forever in various Protestant hells. True enough, she had an acid tongue in her head, and she did not go about the neighborhood doing good, as did Miss Stephanie Crawford. But while no one with a grain of sense trusted Miss Stephanie, Jem and I had considerable faith in Miss Maudie. She had never told on us, had never played cat-and-mouse with us, she was not at all interested in our private lives. She was our friend. How so reasonable a creature could live in peril of everlasting torment was incomprehensible. “That ain’t right, Miss Maudie. You’re the best lady I know.” Miss Maudie grinned. “Thank you ma’am. Thing is, foot-washers think women are a sin by definition. They take the Bible literally, you know.” (p. 45)

From this quotation we learn that there are two different types of protestant: Baptist and foot-washer Baptist. Foot-washers believe anything that’s pleasure is a sin. They take the Bible literally.

The setting of place takes in Maycomb County where there are two different types of Churches: white church and Black church, and people at that place usually go there every Sunday.

First Purchase African M.E. Church was in the Quarters outside the southern town limits, across the old sawmill tracks. It was an ancient paint-peeled frame building, the only church in Maycomb with a steeple and bell, called First Purchase because it was paid for from the first earnings of freed slaves. Negroes worshiped in it on Sundays and white men gambled in it on weekdays. (p. 119)

First Purchase was unceiled and unpainted within. Along its walls unlighted kerosene lamps hung on brass brackets; pine benches served as pews. Behind the rough oak pulpit a faded pink silk banner proclaimed God Is Love, the church’s only decoration except a rotogravure print of Hunt’s *The Light of the World*. There was no sign of piano, organ, hymn-books, church programs—the familiar ecclesiastical impedimenta we saw every Sunday. It was dim inside, with a damp coolness slowly dispelled by the gathering congregation. At each seat was a cheap cardboard fan bearing a garish Garden of Gethsemane, courtesy Tyndal’s Hardware Co. (You-Name-It-We-Sell-It). (p. 121)

D. CONCLUSION

The story in the novel reflects the social, economic, political, science and technology, cultural, and religious aspect in the mid twentieth century of America. Thus, the reader can see the condition at that time by understanding the story of the novel. Based on the sociological analysis of *To Kill a Mockingbird* above, the writer concludes that Harper Lee as an author of its novel concerns the social condition of America in the mid twentieth century. The story of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is taken from a history that happened in Harper Lee's real society, where she presents the fact of her own childhood life. She describes the social condition of the society in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, in order to show to the reader about the social reality of America. She feels there is injustice that the Blacks get. Then, she shows it in the novel by creating the characters and characterizations, setting, plot, point of view, style and theme.

Harper Lee criticizes the relation between Black and White that is inharmonious. Most of white people could not accept black as equal as them. The white people have the right and power to do everything that they want but the Blacks have no strange to against them. Regarding to the conflict between the white and Black people, Harper Lee has great hopes in every part of the story. She wants a condition where there are no differences and injustice between them. They are all human, no matter Black or White. They should respect each other. Racial injustice must be erased, because all people of all races are equal before the law.

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