

# Acts of Anti-Racism Reflected in Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1960)

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**Abstract**— This research aims to identify and analyze acts of anti-racism as reflected in Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1960). The method used in this study is a descriptive qualitative method to elaborate the acts of anti-racism occurred in the novel. The results showed the acts against racism in the novel can be encountered in Atticus Finch character which served as a lawyer to defend a black man which has been accused as a white woman rapist. Another act against racism found is how Atticus Finch taught his children about equality.

**Keywords**— Anti-Racism, Descriptive Qualitative, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Harper Lee.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Various types of human life are described in the literature, such as economic, religious, political and even social. It involves social status discrimination or even racial discrimination (Buell, et al., 2011). Racism is the belief that human beings should be divided into distinct and exclusive biological entities known as "races"; that there is a causal relationship between genetic physical traits and personality traits, intellect, morality, and various cultural and activity traits; that some races are inherently superior to others (Spears, 2020). In addition, as literary works, novel can reflect the social conditions of society in a detailed and realistic way. According to Tahir, et al., (2020, p. 7). The novel reflects the way people think when confronting the problems of their environment Sumardjo & Saini, (1986, p. 18). Therefore, one of the themes that is commonly taken up in novels is racism, because it is one of the life problems that actually occurs in human social life, which is the distinction in skin color that makes black skin a minority.

Racism arises from a mindset that views that people are distinguished based on their origins (Sniderman, et al., 1991). This stigma then encourages racial communities that feel superior to dominating other racial communities. As a result of this unfair treatment, African-Americans experienced problems and difficulties in managing their lives, which were not only felt at work or in their social status, but also suffered from various forms of racism, both in the form of prejudice and in the form of discrimination and rejection. Oliver, (2003, p. 5) suggested that many African Americans, especially males, were stereotyped as stupid, violent, and dangerous criminals. This expression shows that the racism committed by whites against

blacks is not only social and professional violence, not only physical, but also psychological and cruelty.

The racism felt by African Americans can be seen in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) by Harper Lee. In this novel, readers can feel the discrimination by white people. Written by Harper Lee in 1960, the novel became an instant bestseller upon publication. In fact, this novel won the Pulitzer Prize. This novel was also recognized by people all over the world. The Journal Library in Southern America named this book as the "Best Novel of the Century". This appreciation is not overstated, as this novel is able to convey many moral messages from which to learn, without making the reader feel like they are being lectured.

The reason why the writer chooses the topic is because the novel depicts racism that happens to African-American which has also affected their social lives. This is clearly explained in the content of this novel through the story. This is very interesting to analyze so that later readers can learn more about the fights against racism reflected in the novel (Indrasari, et al., 2020).

## II. LITERATURE BACKGROUND

Racism is a debatable concept among people around the world. The rise of racism often leads to people's fanaticism towards members of their race and will cause people to treat people differently. Some people think their group is better than other groups. From then on, they will see their group as superior to the others. People who consider themselves superior believe that they have special rights among the inferior races. This condition is then referred to as racism. According to Ida & Wulandari, (2020, p. 38) racism is a system of domination that operates in social processes and social institutions; others see it as operating in the individual consciousness. In short, racism is negative treatment reserved for a group that considers its group to be the superior one, having the best conditions in many aspects, such as biological, economic, and educational.

When the American Civil War ended in 1865, the Confederate States of America entered the period of Reconstruction and rejoined the Union. As part of this reintegration, the states were admitted back into the Union to abolish the slavery constitution. The 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution was passed, abolishing slavery in the

United States (Bestor, 1964). The end of slavery meant freedom for about 4 million African Americans in South America. President Abraham Lincoln wanted to improve the lives of former slaves in before he was assassinated. Following that, Lincoln was replaced by Andrew Johnson. However, he insisted on protecting states' rights, which is why he opposed giving even limited voting rights to Southern African-Americans, as it was a violation of states' jurisdiction. Another important element early in Reconstruction was the fact that while the Southern United States was obligated to support the abolition of slavery, it was not obligated to allow greater freedoms for African Americans (Richardson, 2004). Thus, the southern states of the United States were free to enact laws that restricted the liberty and economic opportunities of newly freed African Americans. This started the introduction of the Black Code (Mays, 1983).

The black code was instituted to ensure the continuity of white supremacy created by the institutions (Glatthaar, 2002). It was also introduced to ensure a stable supply of cheap labor. For example, the Homelessness Act, which states that an African-American can be declared homeless if they are unemployed and have no fixed address. Anyone who was homeless had to get fined. Those who failed to close the fine had to serve a period of labor. In addition, Stewart (1987) said that Black Codes also limit economic freedom and opportunity for African-Americans. For example, some states restricted the types of property that African Americans could own. In other cases, African-Americans have been banned from certain occupations (Fairuz, et al., 2022, p. 151). Other restrictions imposed by the Southern United States under the Black Codes included a ban on African-Americans carrying firearms or testifying in court unless the cases in question involved African-Americans (Hasnia, et al., 2021).

In addition, Jim Crow law was applied in 1876-1965. Jim Crow law and system of etiquette were backed by real and threatened violence. Black people who violated Jim Crow standards, such as drinking from the living water fountain or attempting to vote, risked their homes, their jobs and even their lives. Whites could physically hit blacks with impunity (Higginbotham, 2013).

All sexual interactions between black men and white women were illegal, illicit, socially repugnant, and fell under Jim Crow's definition of rape (Kelley, 1993). Myrdal refuted this belief in the following way: "There are many reasons to believe that this figure has been inflated by the fact that a mob which accuses of rape is immune from all further investigation; from the broad southern definition of rape which includes all sexual relations between black men and white women; and the psychopathic fears of white women in their contact with black men". most blacks were lynched for claiming civil rights, violating Jim Crow etiquette or laws, or as a result of race riots (Klarman, 2006: Sukmawaty, et al., 2022).

After 1945, the civil rights movement gained widespread support and attacked Jim Crow nationwide. The Supreme Court ruled in 1954 that racial segregation was de jure unconstitutional, but de facto this continued into the 1970s. President Lyndon B. Johnson urged Congress to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which established the Jim Crow Separation

Act repealed restaurants, hotels and theaters. The Voting Rights Act ends discrimination in union, state and local elections (Richardson, 2004).

From the above explanation, the researcher concludes that the introduction of the Black Code was intended to ensure the continuation of the white supremacy created by the institutions later replaced by Jim Crow laws and the system of etiquette supported by violence and threats. Black people who violated Jim Crow standards risked their homes, their jobs and even their lives. After 1945, the civil rights movement gained widespread support and attacked Jim Crow nationwide until the voting rights act ended discrimination in the state.

Anjarsari, (2015) wrote a research entitled *Anti-Rasisme Dalam Novel Perjalanan Burmese Days Karya George Orwell*. This study aims to examine the role of Orwell in writing travel notes (reports). there are changes in terms of form, content, and function of travel writing, making researchers disassemble Orwell's position in the travel report. This research approach uses Carl Thompson's concept of negotiation, self and other people, so that it is found how Orwell's position and role in viewing and responding to the apartheid (racist) political situation in Burma will also directly reveal the tendencies of influence that exist within Orwell.

Intan, (2017) also analyzed the novel entitled *Novel Charlotte Karya David Foenkinos: Sebuah Narasi Tentang Diskriminasi, Rasisme, dan Holocaust*. The Nazis, who have been in power since 1933, have made no secret of their distaste for Jews. Adolf Hitler even declared that "Rational antisemitism must lead to a system of legal opposition, the ultimate goal of which is to track down all Jews". He also developed the idea that the Jews were an evil race that dominated the world. Nazi antisemitism was instilled in religious situations and in political contexts. Later, the Nazis added a further dimension, namely racial anti-Semitism. With logic, aggression, religious communities instead of race, the Nazi games have various kinds of discriminatory actions, racism, to the Holocaust. This dark phenomenon in human history is also revealed in the novel *Charlotte* by David Foenkinos, a French writer who often receives literary awards. The discussion will be carried out using a descriptive analysis method through a structural approach that includes an assessment of aspects, settings, and points of view.

Iban, et al., (2019) also wrote a research entitled *Anti-Racism: A Study of The Main Characters in The Help (2009) Novel by Kathryn Stockett*. *The Help* is a novel written by Kathryn Stockett and published in 2009. This book describes the treatment of black maids by white masters in Jackson, Mississippi, in the 1960s. The key characters Skeeter, Aibileen, and Minny were the centre of this study's analysis of anti-racism. The goal of this study was to examine the anti-racism attitudes of the main characters in *The Help* novel as well as the reasons behind their development as such. This study is qualitative in nature. Gordon Allport's prejudice and discrimination theory and social psychology theory were the two theories employed in this study. The study's findings demonstrated that the main characters' anti-racism behaviour included verbal hostility, avoidance, and segregation. In the meantime, identification variables in social psychology,

motives, and social characteristics are what cause the main characters to become anti-racist individuals.

Mahbub, et al., (2020) analyzed about racism entitled Anti-Black Racism in Kathryn Stockett's *The Help: A Critical Discourse Analysis*. The purpose of this study is to analyze the ideological structure of anti-black racism in the novel *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett. Furthermore the theory used in this study is the theory of Critical Discourse Analysis with the Social Cognition approach by Teun Van Dijk. In the Social Cognition approach Van Dijk analyzes discourse into 3 dimensions, namely: the text dimension, the social cognition dimension, and the social context dimension. The results of the analysis in this study illustrate that the ideological constructions of the author of *The Help*, Kathryn Stockett, which are constructed through the dimensions of text, dimensions of social cognition and dimensions of social context are anti-racism and abolitionism.

Bachtiar & Nugroho, (2018) wrote about racism seen from the novel entitled *Racism Reflected In Harper Lee's To Kill A Mockingbird* (1960). The main problem of this research is the problem in society called racism. Because of the differences between humans, and feeling that one race is better than another, as a result there is discrimination against the minor races in a society. The aim of this research is to examine Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* based on structural elements and analyze this novel based on a Sociological Approach.

Furthermore, researchers used qualitative methods. The researcher used two data sources, namely, the primary data source was novel. Secondary data sources from books related to the sociolinguistic approach, about references from the internet about *To Kill the Mockingbird*, and other sources related to the study. The data collection method is library research and the data collection technique is descriptive technique. Moreover, based on the research, the researcher got several conclusions. That study shows that there is Racial Discrimination appearing in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Racial discrimination is reflected in Tom Robinson who wants to get justice in court. They decided it was only because Tom was a man of color and no man of color had ever won against a white man in court. Second, in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee tries to give a picture of American society in the mid-20th century which emphasizes the events of racism in society. This phenomenon can be demonstrated in Scout society where some people consider people of color to be the lowest race, and refer to those who defend them as "nigger lovers".

### III. METHODOLOGY

As this research aims to elaborate act of anti-racism in Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1960), a qualitative study was used. Therefore, this study uses a qualitative method to deepen the understanding of the act of anti-racism in the novel. More specifically, the study takes the form of textual analysis. Therefore, the data from this study was used to develop the concept and theories explained previously.

The data was collected from the novel written by Harper Lee, *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1960). Before collecting the data, the researcher read the novel twice. The data came in the form of text. Additionally, the data had been framed from the point

of contention by identifying certain events and narratives considered to be the act of anti-racism in the novel.

The research is limited to discussing and analyzing how is anti-racism reflected in the novel. The procedure for analyzing the act of anti-racism reflected in Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1960) was conducted in three steps. The first step is to pay attention to the dialogues and acts of the character of the story. The collected data is presented in the form of citation. The second step is to interpret and analyze some selected conflict points and events. The analysis focuses on the act of anti-racism reflected in the novel. The last step, once the analysis is done, a conclusion is drawn. The analysis is presented below.

### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The fight against racism in these novel focuses on the struggle of Atticus Finch, a white lawyer who decides to defend a black man named Tom Robinson who is accused of raping a white woman. There are several things Atticus Finch has done in his fight against the common stigma that has long built up in the Maycomb community. One of them is the life lessons he teaches to his children Jem Finch and Scout Finch. Throughout the novel, we received various conversations and events that point to how Atticus Finch taught his children to be a fair and colorless human being. When Atticus defends Tom Robinson, he and his children face many problems. People threaten and insult him, Scout's friends humiliate her, and Mrs. Dubose also tells Scout that her father is a black lover in a dismissive tone. Scout asks Atticus this and Atticus explains:

*"You aren't really a nigger-lover, then, are you?"*  
*"I certainly am. I do my best to love everybody... I'm hard put,*  
*sometimes—baby, it's never an insult to be called what somebody*  
*thinks is a bad name. It just shows you how poor that*  
*person is, it*  
*doesn't hurt you. So don't let Mrs. Dubose get you down.*  
*She has*  
*enough troubles of her own."*

Through Atticus and Scout's conversation above, it can be seen how Atticus taught his daughter about racial equality and there is nothing to be afraid of if they do not hate black people. Even Atticus went on to tell Scout that people who boo in that way only show how bad they are. Furthermore, in everyday life, Atticus always teaches her children not to differentiate people based on the color of their skin. Tom Robinson's case had a huge impact on his life and the lives of his family. Sometimes Atticus had to give explanations for the incident that happened to him or his children. For example, when her school friends made fun of Scout because her father defend an African-American, she argued with Atticus about his actions. Scout and Atticus have the following conversation in the novel:

*"What'd he mean sayin' that?" I asked.*  
*"Nothing," Jem said. "Ask Atticus, he'll tell you."*  
*"Do you defend niggers, Atticus?" I asked him that evening.*  
*"Of course I do. Don't say nigger, Scout. That's common."*  
*"s' what everybody at school says."*  
*"From now on it'll be everybody less one—"*

*"Well if you don't want me to grow up talkin' that way, why do you send me to school?"*

Atticus could be apathy for the case, but he took the case and because he wanted to show his children how bad racism is, calling racism as Maycomb's common disease. What Atticus calls a disease is the way people treated other people of different races, or we could call it racism. The disease is caused by stereotypes in society that have long existed in the minds of everyone in society.

In addition, Atticus feels that Tom Robinson's accusation was clearly unfair and purely a matter of skin color. In fact, Tom was innocent because his left arm is crippled and he is unable to hurt and rape a girl. Given the fact, Atticus was motivated to stand up for Tom Robinson to uphold justice in Maycomb County and tried to fight injustice, which had a major impact on Maycomb. A man who values justice, he was willing to defend Tom Robinson because he saw that the people of Maycomb tended to blame him without regard to facts, truth, or evidence.

Different from other people in Maycomb, who were influenced by stereotypes about African Americans, Atticus tried to stand up for the innocent man despite being African-American. At Tom Robinson's trial, Atticus defended him by presenting some clear evidence that put Tom Robinson in a position of innocence. He explained that Mayella Ewell's injuries were all on the right side of her body, meaning it was impossible for a crippled left-hander like Tom to perform such actions. As Mr. Heck told Tate about his conviction in court, when Atticus asked which side of Ms. Ewell's face received the wounds of the man who tortured her:

*"Just describe her injuries, Heck."*

*"Well, she was beaten around the head. There was already bruises comin' on her arms, and it happened about thirty minutes before—"*

*"How do you know?"*

*Mr. Tate grinned. "Sorry, that's what they said. Anyway, she was pretty bruised up when I got there, and she had a black eye comin'."*

*"Which eye?"*

*Mr. Tate blinked and ran his hands through his hair. "Let's see," he said softly, then he looked at Atticus as if he considered the question*

*childish. "Can't you remember?" Atticus asked.*

*Mr. Tate pointed to an invisible person five inches in front of him and said, "Her left."*

*"Wait a minute, Sheriff," said Atticus. "Was it her left facing you or her left looking the same way you were?"*

*Mr. Tate said, "Oh yes, that'd make it her right. It was her right eye, Mr. Finch. I remember now, she was bunged up on that side of her face...."*

*Mr. Tate blinked again, as if something had suddenly been made plain to him. Then he turned his head and looked around at Tom Robinson. As if by instinct, Tom Robinson raised his head. Something had been made plain to Atticus also, and it brought him to his feet. "Sheriff, please repeat what you said."*

*"It was her right eye, I said."*

*"No..." Atticus walked to the court reporter's desk and bent down to the furiously scribbling hand. It stopped, flipped back the shorthand pad, and the court reporter said, "Mr. Finch. I remember now she was bunged up on that side of the face."*

Furthermore, Atticus got a chance to tell the jury and the rest of the white audience what he thought of the case. Atticus did not say much about the details of the evidence that logically shows Tom Robinson was completely innocent, but he had a speech that shows how bad the court was when it pretended to be blind and sentenced Tom Robinson guilty as the guilty one.

*"Gentlemen," he was saying, "I shall be brief, but I would like to use my remaining time with you to remind you that this case is not a difficult one, it requires no minute sifting of complicated facts, but it does require you to be sure beyond all reasonable doubt as to the guilt of the defendant. To begin with, this case should never have come to trial. This case is as simple as black and white.*

*"The state has not produced one iota of medical evidence to the effect that the crime Tom Robinson is charged with ever took place. It has relied instead upon the testimony of two witnesses whose evidence has not only been called into serious question on cross-examination, but has been flatly contradicted by the defendant. The defendant is not guilty, but somebody in this courtroom is.*

*"I have nothing but pity in my heart for the chief witness for the state, but my pity does not extend so far as to her putting a man's life at stake, which she has done in an effort to get rid of her own guilt.*

From the quote above, we can conclude how Atticus Finch's attitude was in defending the slandered Tom Robinson. Atticus succeeded in proving that black is not always bad and white is not always good. That the case that happened to Tom Robinson was purely because he was a black citizen who was the target of prejudice against white people.

## V. CONCLUSION

This research aims to explore the acts of anti-racism as reflected in Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1960). The previous chapter shows that the act of anti-racism is represented through the novel. The result of the analysis shows that act of anti-racism focuses on the struggle of Atticus Finch, a white lawyer who decides to defend a black man named Tom Robinson who is accused of raping a white woman. From the analysis, it can be inferred that in the midst of the bad influence of racism, there are still people who are willing to take action against this bad behavior either in a legal way or in its implementation in everyday life through the figure of Atticus Finch who dared to defend Tom Robinson and also introduces to his children about the value of equality.

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