

CRITICISM AGAINST RACISM IN HARPER LEE'S *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*
(Kritik Terhadap Rasisme di dalam Novel *To Kill A Mockingbird* Karya Harper Lee)

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Abstract

This research discusses racism in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The analysis is focused on the condition of America Southern society in 1930s, the blacks and whites' way of thinking, and racism in America Southern society. There are three problems discussed in this research; how representation of racism in the novel, the condition of America Southern society, and the world view in the novel. This type of research is qualitative research. The theory uses Lucien Goldmann's Genetic Structuralism. The result of this research shows that racism is developed by whites' mindset. Blacks become the victims of whites' mistakes because they are considered as the lowest class; whereas whites cannot control their minds, obstinate, irrational, and selfish. Unless blacks are whites, whites think that dark is the symbol of badness. The setting explains it happens when Great Depression era that changes the life of blacks and whites; and constructs racism in America Southern society. Clearly, racism causes the injustice in law. The novel presents the repetition of the law failure as the historical incidents that happen in 1930s-1950s. It was a sign of political setback in Southern America.

Keywords: racism, black, white

Abstrak

*Penelitian ini mendiskusikan rasisme didalam *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Analisis ini fokus pada kondisi masyarakat bagian selatan Amerika di era 1930, pola pikir orang kulit hitam dan orang kulit putih, dan rasisme didalam masyarakat bagian selatan Amerika. Ada tiga masalah yang didiskusikan didalam penelitian ini; bagaimana representasi rasisme didalam novel, kondisi masyarakat bagian selatan Amerika, dan pandangan dunia didalam novel. Tipe dari penelitian ini adalah penelitian kualitatif. Teorinya menggunakan Strukturalisme Genetik oleh Lucien Goldmann. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa rasisme berkembang dari cara berpikir orang kulit putih. Orang-orang kulit hitam menjadi korban dari kesalahan orang kulit putih karena mereka dianggap sebagai kelas paling bawah, sedangkan orang-orang kulit putih tidak bisa mengontrol pikirannya, keras kepala, tidak rasional, dan egois. Orang kulit putih berpikir bahwa gelap adalah simbol dari keburukan, kecuali jika orang kulit hitam adalah orang kulit putih. Terutama saat era great-depression yang mengubah kehidupan orang kulit hitam dan kulit putih; dan juga membentuk rasisme di dalam masyarakat bagian selatan Amerika. Rasisme dengan jelas menyebabkan ketidakadilan didalam hukum. Novel tersebut mempresentasikan pengulangan kegagalan hukum sebagai insiden sejarah yang terjadi di era 1930an-1950an. Hal tersebut adalah sebuah tanda kemunduran politik di Amerika bagian selatan.*

Kata kunci: rasisme, orang kulit hitam, orang kulit putih

Introduction

To Kill a Mockingbird is published in 1960 and written by Harper Lee based on true story in 1930s. The novel tells about a father named Atticus Finch who lives with two children named Jeane Louis Finch (Scout) and Jeremy Finch (Jem). Atticus is a white lawyer who defend the accused black named Tom Robinson. His job forces Atticus to face his environment. At that time, whites and blacks cannot live peacefully. The society makes the codes to limit their behaviour between white and black. The codes are called unwritten law.

The novel has an interesting background to analyze. It describes the life of people over Great Depression Era when racism still exists. Lee wants the readers know the life of whites and blacks. Lee actually represents her group because she is a part of her community in Alabama. Lee tells about the black who becomes the victim of white. Lee shows her disagreement to whites' behaviour although she is a white. Racism makes the law cannot work well. The unwritten law between whites and blacks defeats the written law. Racism develops very fast because it is supported by the condition of Great Depression Era when a lot of people become unemployment.

The applicable theory to analyze this research is Genetic Structuralism by Lucien Goldman. Goldman said in his book, "the literary work is critical insofar as it displays the author's creativity and originality in his relation to society" (1981:24). There is a relation when intrinsic parts is combined with extrinsic parts as the reality (originality of the text). The meaning of originality refers to socio-historical context. The context of history about the conditions when the novel is created and produced. Both of the historical backgrounds have relation with racism in the novel. There is an idea of the author that represents a group of people which has the same feeling, thought and idea, it is called world view. By the theory, the world view of the author can be found. The novel represents the way of thinking about racism.

This research tries to find the description about racism in the novel and the world view of the author. Moreover, this research also analyze racism that is constructed in Southern society. The differences of life between blacks and whites are caused by the historical background. This research is used to understand the life of whites and blacks in 1930s through their way of thinking.

Research Methodology

This research is a qualitative research since we use qualitative data to analyze racism in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. According to Blaxter, et al, qualitative data focuses on collecting and analyzing data without numeric data (1995:60). The data here are all informations and facts about racism (from novel and other sources) are taken from various books, document and also internet sources. Primary data in this thesis are facts and information about racism in the novel. Meanwhile, secondary data are information and facts about Southern society condition in 1930s and 1950s.

These data are taken from novel, books, and internet. This research begins with the analysis of the novel by applying Goldman's theory to get general description. The theory is applied to find the world view of the author through the characters (Blacks and Whites) are a way of thinking and the illustration of racism mindset in the novel. We use Genetic Structuralism framework; human fact, trans-individual subject and significant structure to find the world view in the novel. Then, I analyze the condition in Southern society deals with racism to point out the world view in the novel as the effect of racism that is realized by the whites' mind. This research continues to answer the last question with analysis of socio-historical context of Southern America in 1930s. The description focuses on social phenomena such as facts about Black and White dealing with racism. I connect between world view in the novel and Southern America in 1930s to get racism construction based on the incidents between blacks and whites.

Result

Racism is developed by white's mindset that is internalized in whites' minds. Whites consider that dark is the symbol of badness. So, they humiliate the blacks. In fact, the writer wants to show the arrogancy of whites. Racism causes the law cannot give justice. A law failure as the historical incidents happen in 1930s-1950s is presented in the novel. It was a sign of political setback in Southern America. The sign was also shown the political negotiation of the black in the society.

Discussion

This discussion is divided into some subchapters. They are Southern America in 1930s, the life of blacks and whites, racism in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Southern America Society.

1. Southern America In 1930s

The setting of *To Kill a Mockingbird* novel was 1930 which racism became very close with human's life. Racism here was one problem of social condition in 1930s. The era was called Great Depression, the most traumatic era as long as American history (Haggarety, 2010:81). Many problems changed American's life in economical, political, and social aspect at that time.

People who live in America majority are Europeans. They come from England, Spain, French, and other Europe. When Great Depression happens, people who live in America consist of European and African. Long time ago, Africans were slaves.

There are some incidents that prove racism prevails and get the attention of Southern society. In the beginning of Great Depression era, the trial of Scottsboro boys was performed. At that time, the condition forced all of folks looking for jobs and using general transportation. The poorest whites used the same car with black. They would go to one place. There was a trouble when they were in the same place. There were a small group of white and nine blacks in a car. They got a fight in the car and whites reported the blacks that the blacks attacked them. Two young white women accused black of raping them. Finally, those blacks were called by National Guard and eight of them sentenced to death by the juries especially for the raping black men. One of nine blacks was young teenager that was sentenced to live in the prison. There were eleven juries handled the case and almost all of them sentenced the young black to death. The jurors consisted of whites farmer from the village and declared the boys were guilty. The other side, two young white women who confessed the black of raping them worked as prostitutes. They protected their mistake from moral responsibility by accusing the blacks of raping them. However, there are no sign of evil, bruises, and any other sign to prove that rape is happened (Haggeritty, 2010:83-86). The condition shows about the race prestige that defeats the law. Although blacks are not wrong, they are still sentenced wrong because they are colored. The important position in the government is majority occupied by whites.

The case of Scottboro Boys and Emmet Till describe how political condition at that time. Although the government system of United States is democracy and people can deliver what's on their mind, the issue of race impacts the people way of thinking in Southern Americans' life.

2. The Life of Blacks and Whites in *To Kill a Mockingbird*

All of Maycomb County people include blacks and whites sense the same condition that is caused by the crisis in Great Depression era. Their life is messy because they lost of their homes, their lands, their jobs, and money. In some aspect the crisis hit them harder than before. For the example in agricultural aspect.

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. (Lee, 1960:3)

The statement shows the condition in Maycomb which is not only happened to whites but also to blacks. The difficulties are perceived by people in Maycomb County. Great Depression era disturbs their transactions and activities. There are a lot of people who live in Maycomb. They do not understand how their life will be. Everybody is confused through the days without the certain purposes. When they have no money, they pay with product to replace money. They do the activities because because money is in the limited number. No money means they can go nowhere. It happened to the whole Southern America. People stay at their homes and keep alive in sorrowful condition

.....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. (Lee,1960:11) .

However, the poverty is suffered by farmers also gives big effects for another job because agriculture is the essential sector that operates economical condition in Maycomb. Another jobs such as doctor, dentist , and lawyer get the payment from the agriculture products. Hence, Great Depression affects to various jobs that are available in Southern America before the big problem of economy comes. The condition happens to the life of blacks and whites. They work together although some of them do not like each other because of race issue.

In the Great Depression era, whites hate the life of blacks. They believe that they are more civilize than the blacks, but this assumption is not accepted by all whites.

“The handful of people in this town who say that fair play is not marked White Only; the handful of people who say a fair

trial is for everybody, not just us; the handful of people with enough humility to think, when they look at a Negro, there but for the Lord's kindness am I." (Lee,1960:126)

In the other hand, the life of whites was different from the life of blacks. In the history, blacks were slaves. They were brought by whites to be the workers. Therefore, the mindset was hereditary to their children until 1930s. Whites employed the blacks in their homes for some necessities such as in this quotation below. Blacks worked for whites.

...“You’ve ruined ‘em,” said Jem. “Why don’t you get a colored man?”
...were traces of an old cotton landing, where Finch Negroes had loaded bales and produce, unloaded blocks of ice, flour and sugar, farm equipment, and feminine apparel.(Lee,1960:40,43)

Blacks cannot read and write because they never try to learn. Blacks only know how to work and collect the payment. They never learn how to read and write as good as the whites. When Scout comes to meet blacks, all of them cannot read and write. It shows how bad the life of blacks.

“They can’t read.” “Can’t read?” I asked.
“All those folks?”
“That’s right,” Calpurnia nodded...
(Lee,1960:66)

Until the Great Depression era, they bring their old habit in their life. Hence, blacks become workers because they do not have specification become doctor, lawyer, or another important position in the city. They are foolish in society lens. Moreover, whites capitalize them to get the profit of their shortage. Blacks in 1930s are placed in unimportant position because they could not read and write. The society was under estimated to them and judged them in wrong perception based on prejudice. This condition supported racism to developed in the society. The blacks realized their inadequacy. It made whites took the advantages of the life of blacks. The society connected the condition of blacks with their life's background to concluded that blacks were in the lowest class based on their past and their life.

3. Racism Analysis in *To Kill a Mockingbird*

The concepts about racism use to analyze racism in certain era. According to Joseph Jadza, the race issue is constructed by different point of view about something that concludes gender, the stereotype, and class (2009:167). It means everything that

differentiates between one and other based on race is called racism . Tyson states that racism has close relation with belief about superiority and inferiority, like physical characters or biological properties that becomes distinction to the race .The differences can be threatened criminology because of discriminatory practices such as prejudice, discrimination, segregation, expulsion, and extermination.

The first is discrimination. People differentiate between one and other. In this case people compare the life of whites and the blacks. There is a social asymmetry between blacks and whites.

“Tom Robinson’s a colored man, Jem. No jury in this part of the world’s going to say, ‘We think you’re guilty, but not very,’ ..
I don’t know of any law that says they can’t talk...(Lee,1960:117,83)

The quotation shows that Tom Robinson is considered a weak people because he is black. The society distinguishes people according to the skin color. When blacks get the troubles, the juries will be faced into two choices, sentenced the prisoner guilty or not. That’s impossible if the whites' juries sentence the blacks are right although the proofs are already given.

Another cause of racism is prejudice. Prejudice in the Great Depression era is the essential basis of racism. Whites considered that all of blacks were trash. The life of whites damaged the life of blacks as a whole.

Tom’s predicament: he would not have dared strike a white woman under any circumstances and expect to live long, so he took the first opportunity to run—a sure sign of guilt.....

....“Why were you scared?” “Mr. Finch, if you was a nigger like me, you’d be scared, too.”(Lee,1960:104)

Discrimination and prejudice give some effects. The horrifying effect of racism is injustice. The victims of the whites' evil automatically get injustice in their life. When the blacks and whites get the trouble, blacks are sentenced guilty in law. Whites doing anything to get what they want.

The worse effect of racism are expulsion and extermination.

“Now don’t you be so confident, Mr. Jem, I ain’t ever seen any jury decide in favor of a colored man over a white man...”

A jury never looks at a defendant it has convicted, and when this jury came in, not one of them looked at Tom Robinson....

(Lee,1960:111,112)

The black man is always sentenced to death if they get the trouble with white woman. That is one of the codes in the Southern society. The juries come from whites and relatively poor farmer in the countryside. The countryside people are the most difficult people to change their minds. They keep their old tradition and support racism grows fast. Although the lawyer proves with the facts that black is not wrong, the whites' society cannot accept the reality.

Besides the injustice, expulsion is not only sensed by the blacks but also anyone who is related to them. It shows from the quotation below.

“My folks said your daddy was a disgrace an’ that nigger oughta hang from the water-tank!”

...but now he’s turned out a nigger-lover we’ll never be able to walk the streets of Maycomb again. He’s ruinin’ the family, that’s what he’s doin’.” (Lee,1960:41,45)

Maycomb people mock Atticus who defends a black. It points out that whites try to eliminate the blacks from their life and society. They think that blacks are trash, so that they choose to evacuate them. Whites do not like blacks very much. Their mindset that is based on prejudice make them doing unnecessary thing.

Extermination is the most awful effect of the racism. Extermination works to hurt someone physically. It will evoke the death of people. When whites cannot think rationally, they can kill blacks instead of people related to black.

Mr. Tate rocked on his heels and said patiently, “He’d flung Jem down, he stumbled over a root under that tree and— look, I can show you.”(Lee,1960:145)

Mr.Ewell tries to kill Jem as the son of black's lawyer. It shows that white tries to kill black, individually or group. From the statement points out that whites also attack another white if they defend the blacks. That is why, there is no whites unwilling to defend the black. The ending of the whites' dissatisfaction, they will kill the blacks and finish the problem through the way to death.

4.Racism in Southern America Society

Racism actually happened since long time ago before Great Depression era. The key of the evidence was in white's mindset. The whites think that they were in the higher position, more civilized, and more

honorable than blacks. Based on the opinion above, the problem could happen between them.

In the past, blacks were defeated in war in Southern America. They were forced become slaves. They should work for whites in whites' lands. The history supported their over confident about their race. The incidents shown that racism still existed were Scoutborro Boys in 1930s and Emmet Till in 1950s. Both of the incidents happened in the difference time about 20 years where the condition of Southern America was also different. If someone was a part of blacks, the Southern society did not want to accept the black to live closer with them.

In the Southern society blacks are known as workers, because their body performance are stronger than whites. There are a lot of whites under estimate to the life of blacks. They have wrong assumption such as blacks are criminals, blacks are liars, blacks are trash. Their mindset cannot be changed by the logic.

However the novel represents the behaviors of whites' society to blacks' society. The community who is disagree with racism is presented by some characters such as Atticus's family and his neighbours. The condition can be better if the whites abolish their prejudice, stop discrimination, and change the mindset . The justice can be achieved.

Conclusion

The novel depicts racism in Southern society. Moreover, the novel describes the people in Great Depression era when the economy of United States is collapsed. In this thesis racism is the effect of whites' minds who think that they are in the higher class than blacks. In this case, the blacks become the victims of whites' prejudice.

Through the novel, Lee describes the condition of blacks and whites. Although Lee is a white, she shows a lot of troubles are done by whites. She shows that whites are trash for the society. Whites only take the advantages of blacks in Great Depression era's problems.

Whites' mindset also support the construction of racism because racism is created by the society itself. The society has the codes that everybody is prohibited to break the codes. If the whites always think they are superior and blacks are inferior, the construction of racism is difficult to abolished.

Racism makes the Blacks get injustice in law aspect. The incidents of Scouttboro Boys in 1930s and Emmet Till in 1950s described the injustice in law. It was a sign of political setback in Southern America from 1950s to 1930s. The sign was also shown the political negotiation of the black in the society.

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