

A MARXISM ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL “ENTITLED TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD”

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Abstract

Literary works have a close relationship with history. Thus, Marxism theory exists to analyze the class struggle or social issues depicted in the literary works based on the true events in the past. According to Birchall in 1977, Marxism can see the human history and concern to analyze the dynamics and contradictions of the capitalist system. Thus, this research is conducted to see the class struggle and other social issues inside the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* because of the era of The Great Depression, by using Marxism theory. To collect the data, the researchers used the library research method, by using two sources of data, which are primary data and secondary data. By using the method of research, the researchers can reveal the issues, the aspects that caused those issues, and the characters that depicted those issues inside the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. This research can be used as a reference or guidance for future researchers who want to conduct research about Marxism or the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Through this research, it also can raise the knowledge of society about Marxism theory.

Key words: Capitalism, Class Struggle, Marxism, The Great Depression, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, World War II

INTRODUCTION

Literary work is one of the ways to express the experience of a person in the past [1]. It makes literary work also can be used as a tool to portray the history that happened in the past [2], [3]. So, history plays an important role in shaping literary works [4]. The increasing of the portrayal of history in literary works occur the theory to analyze how the author of the literary works portrayed history in his or her story [5]. Because the author of literary works often gets ideas to write their works from things that have happened, a theory is needed to analyze the way history portrayed in literary works [6], [7]. Marxism is a theory that used to see the class struggle that happened because of the history that has happened in the past [8], [9]. By using the theory of Marxism, people can see whether the literary works serve to perpetuate the ruling class ideology or not [10]. Class struggle, capitalism, and racism are some of the examples of the issues that happened in society because of some events that happened in the past [11], [12]. Marxism can see all human history and concern to analyze the dynamics and contradictions of the capitalist system

[13]. By looking at the class struggle and capitalist system, find other aspects caused by the class struggle and capitalist system become possible [14], [15]. In most cases, the issues of class struggle, racism, and discrimination are happened because of the system enacted in the past that affects social issues [16], [17].

In accordance with the Marxism theory that examines the effect of capitalism on labor, productivity, and economic, this research used the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. This novel was published in 1960 and even won the Pulitzer Prize for its writer, Harper Lee, in 1961. The researchers used this novel as the object of the research, because of the background of this novel. The novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* is written by Harper Lee in the background of the Great Depression and growing racial segregation in the American State of Alabama in the 1930s [18]. The Great Depression itself was the downtime condition in the past that happened because of World War II [19], [20], and it was the longest depression that ever happened in the world [21]. Romer in his article entitled *Great Depression* stated that The Great Depression changed the fundamentals in economics, politic, and culture in the United States [22], [23]. The Great Depression and the system of government in the past worsen the situation [24], [25], which makes some social issues such as a class of society, racism, and discrimination happened [26], [27], as portrayed in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

The novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* also affected by the American down condition in the economic sector and shows the breakdown of society's mind because of the capital system that happened at that time [28], [29]. The economic down condition or poverty affected society's attitude and behavior [30], [31]. As Easterlin said in her article, the concept of literature believes that he experienced in the past can maintaining human behavior and control the immediate environment [32], [33]. Thus, the traumatic event of World War II that leads to The Great Depression [34], [35], somehow, change the behavior and culture of the society [36], [37]. The poverty caused by World War II and The Great Depression brings up the issue of a class of society, racism, discrimination, and other issues [38], [39].

Therefore, in this research, the researchers used Marxism theory by Karl Marx, to reveal the class struggle and other impacts caused by The Great Depression or the system enacted in that novel. In conducting research, previous studies are needed to help the researchers doing the research. Thus, some previous studies with the same object and/or topic are

chosen as the guidance for the researchers. In this research, the researchers used 3 previous studies that used as the guidance that give more insight for the researchers. Meanwhile, 1 theory was used to give more references and foundation to reach the goal and purpose of this research.

In 2014, Tyson conducted research entitled *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* [40], [41]. Through that research, Tyson believes that Marxism is divided into two conditions [42], which are socio class and economic class [43], [44]. That two conditions are more complex compared to the religion, ethnic, and gender [45], [46], because it divides people based on their economic problem [47], [48], that has not certain standard to determine the level of the economy itself [49], [50]. Religion, ethnicity, and gender have standards to determine the level or class because those things have a clear and fix category [51]. Meanwhile, it is harder to determine someone's economic level by looking at their economic problem [52], [53], because the economic problem or issue is relative depends on who sees that [54], [55]. The research conducted by Tyson is useful for the researches because it gives knowledge on how to see and analyze the classes portrayed in literary works [56].

Nazir with his article entitled *Impact of Class on Life* also becomes the guidance for the researchers [57], [58], because he explained the purpose of Marxism clearly [59]. Nazir, in his article, wrote that the purpose of Marxism is to show how social life can affect society and gives impact to each other [60], [61]. Because one of the points that going to be explained by the researchers is the class struggle or the class of society [62], the research by Nazir will be a good insight for the researchers.

The last article used by the researchers is the research conducted by Winami. Her analysis entitled *Affection and Prejudice in To Kill a Mockingbird* was based on the psychologist theory of Sigmund Freud [63], [64]. But even though Winami used psychological theory, her article still can be used by the researchers as an insight [65], because it explained and revealed the racism and discrimination suffered by the characters because of the class of society [66].

Marxism is a theory named after its originator, Karl Marx [67]. In Marxism theory, Karl Marx posits the struggle between social classes [68], [69]. Basically, Marxism can be said as a social, political, and economic theory, which encompasses Marxist class conflict

theory and Marxian economics [70]. The theory of Marxism by Karl Marx is very important in this research. Because the researchers are talking about Marxism inside the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, so the researchers must use the theory of Marxism itself.

METHOD

For the research design, in this research, the researchers used the descriptive qualitative method. By using this method the researchers can state the data finding in the discussion part, the researchers believe that it was suitable for the purpose of this research, which was to analyze the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by using Marxism theory. This research was fully used a descriptive qualitative method. This research focused on discovering the nature of the specific topic under study. In data and data resources, the researchers used library research by collecting and gathering information related to the topic and object of the research. Thus, in analyzing the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the researchers used two sources of data as follows: 1) Primary Data Source; 2) Secondary Data Sources. The Primary Data Source is the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* that was written by Harper Lee and published in 1960 by J.B. Lippincott & Co. Meanwhile, the Secondary Data Sources are the materials related to the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Marxism theory. The related theories and previous studies are included in the Secondary Data Sources.

As the researchers had the data needed, the researchers also have to collect the data. Therefore, the technique and steps to collect the data should be done carefully by the researchers. The researchers are collecting the data from the primary data source and secondary data source within these steps: 1) Read the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*; 2) Collect all the important data about the topic of the study, which is Marxism, inside the novel; 3) Gathered all the data that has been collected; 4) Classify and determine the data that has been collected into several parts or groups with the same characteristic; 5) Implement Marxism theory to see the relevancy of the data that has been collected; 6) Arranged and developed the data that has been collected with the theory used, to reach the purpose of the research.

After collecting the data, the researchers need to analyze it. Thus, researchers need data analyzing techniques. By using a descriptive analysis method as the research design, the technique of data analysis will also use descriptive analysis and textual techniques. Furthermore, after the data are collected, the researchers will analyze the data by following

the procedures as follow, according to Barry (1995): 1) Make a division between overt and covert contents of the literary work; 2) Relate the context of literary works to the social class; 3) Analyze the nature of literary genre in terms of social period; 4) Relate the literary works to the social assumptions; 5) Analyze the political aspects which are determined by political circumstances. The 5 theory by Barry is used in analyzing technique because Barry suggests that there are 5 methods in analyzing literary works using Marxist theory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

By using and implementing the method of research, the researchers can find Marxism portrayed in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* through several aspects or issues that exist in American society. In this part, the data found by the researchers are divided into several sub-headings, as explained below.

- **Poverty**

The novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* clearly used the background of post-World War II through the portrayal of poverty or The Great Depression. Thus, the first point that impacts to other point is poverty. The poverty caused by The Great Depression post-World War II contributes in bringing up other social issues that will be explained after this point. The novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* depicted poverty through the characters Cunningham's' by using textual evidence. Cunningham's' was described as poor folk who cannot afford both education and proper meals. This novel even tells how Atticus knows very well about their family's poverty and how their family is not able to pay his fees. The poverty suffered by Cunningham's was caused by the Great Depression that mostly impacts the farmers. The covert reasons of poverty caused by the Great Depression was explored by the scholar.

The Great Depression itself was a critical period in American history that adversely affected all sectors of the American economy including agriculture (Ibrahim Khokhar, 2018). Thus, in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the author depicts Cunningham's as a farmer who feels the impact of the Great Depression. American history tells that the Great Depression had hit the American economy so worst until thousands of people lost their jobs because of economic crisis. The real portrayal of the economic crisis and the Great Depression are portrayed clearly in this novel and match the real history. The small towns that were affected because of the Great

Depression were depicted through the poverty suffered by Cunningham's at Maycomb, as the representation of rural and farming areas that get the impact of economic crisis. The poverty is portrayed in the novel in Chapter I and Chapter II of the novel.

- **Discrimination and Dictatorship**

The poverty caused by the Great Depression and World War II; somehow, bring up the issues of discrimination and dictatorship as well. The finding of the researchers about discrimination and dictatorship inside the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* are in line with the history happened in the past. In this novel, the author represents the way American's social life in the past. So, even though the novel was published in 1960, the set of the novel was in America in 1930s.

In chapter 26 of this novel, Mrs. Gate explains that the concept of democracy in her country is a dictatorship. The dictatorship in this novel also shows by their government who has the superpower to discriminate against people who do not have power or have less power. So the dictatorship affects the occurrence of discrimination issues.

“We are a democracy and Germany is a dictatorship, over here we don't believe in persecuting anybody. Persecution comes from people who are prejudiced. Prejudice she enunciated carefully”.

In this novel, the portrayal of discrimination and dictatorship are the same as the dictatorship of Hitler in the United States of America. The author of this novel wants to show the superior power of the leader through the dictatorship. Superior power possessed by the leaders, boards, and high-ups, make them have bigger power to discriminate against the minority group of people.

- **Racial Injustice**

The novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* also portrayed Marxism by using the portrayal of racial injustice. The racial injustice is fictionalized in the trial of Tom Robinson. In this trial, even if the accused is not found guilty rape, but the white jury still

accused him guilty then sentenced him. The action done by the white jury showed racial injustice. The jury accused and sentenced him not because he is guilty, but because of the different races of both of them. This novel highlights racial injustice as a social issue in American society.

The racial injustice or discrimination portrayed in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* is in line with the situation of American society in the past that was worst hit by racial discrimination. In American history, the discrimination and injustice of race continued after the slavery of black in America. Since that, racial injustice or discrimination keep happening in America even if not as worst as the past.

The evidence of racial injustice can be found in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In that novel, the black people were denied an education. The church of black people even in the pity condition, not as good as the church of white people. When Scout came to the First Purchase Church, Scout just knows that black people there cannot read or write, and the church also presented by the very poor picture (Ibrahim Khokhar, 2018). That scene proved that there is a racial injustice suffered by black people as seen from their education and church.

Thus, those things are the impacts of Marxism that mostly influence and harm society. But, the aspects of Marxism that portrayed in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* are not the imagination of the author, but the real situation that really happened in the past. So, every aspect of Marxism depicted in this novel must have a correlation with the history of America in the past or the situation there. Social issues such as poverty, racial injustice, dictatorship, and discrimination can happen because of the influence of some aspects, as explained below.

- Political Influence

Marxism happened for the first time in Europe in the 19th century, because of the international European socialist movement. It was included as the movement of the socialist revolution, which related to the communist parties established in Russian revolution eras. On the other hand, it was happened because of the current situation

at that time, where people wanted to get freedom, and they tried to make a movement that rejects Marxism. They rejected Marxism because they wanted to liberate themselves from the dictatorship of communism in the past. Thus, people believe that the system of Marxism can save them from a communist system, so they need to be able to share it in other countries and society. Because of the differences in belief and the emergence of the new system, Marxism, the beliefs of people are separated, where Soviet, China, and some other countries still believe in a communist system. The leaders of communists are Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Joseph Stalin, and Mao Zedong. Staunchly, and they claimed this theory as their power to dominate the revolution movement.

In another colonialism condition, Marxism has existed and gives the impact in several countries, such as Africa, Ethiopia, Benin, Angola, Kenya, and Senegal, and gets support from them. The unbalance of human resources between each country and the differences in belief, make the system of communism easily attack other countries. Since Marxism has a strong relationship with communism so that's why Marxism also related to something cruel.

- Philosophical Influence

Nowadays, Marxism theory is rejected by society because it has a relationship with the communism theory. Society has a certain stereotype of communist that they think it is cruel and bad, which lead them into the movement of reducing Marxism belief in many countries. Antonio Gramsci believes that Marxism theory can be the way to get freedom from the roles and regulations in economic and political demand in a country and he believes that it also related to social relations and awareness. So the impacts of the Marxism theory will grow by seeing the discipline in all aspects that done by society, such as economics, history, art, literary work, and social relation. From that, the researchers see from several literary criticisms that exist in German. Frederic Jameson in his analysis towards a literary work used Marxism theory to analyze and use the perspective of Marxism to finish his work (Lagassé, 2012).

From those causes and effects, the researchers have found the characters that support the findings of Marxism in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. There are many characters in this novel that support the depiction of Marxism by

Gramsci, but the researchers only explained three characters that considered as the three main characters who are strong and have big impacts, as explained below.

1. Atticus.

In this novel, this character depicted as a clever and educated person. Atticus is clever and smart because Atticus got proper education which leads Atticus into an educated person. Atticus is a lawyer for the middle until the upper class in the era of The Great depression. He needed to fulfill his needs and his family needs during their daily life. The compulsion of Atticus to give the best for his family and meet the needs of everyday life, make Atticus became a professional lawyer in that era. In that novel, Scout said “He does not do anything. Atticus does not drive a dump truck for the country he is not sheriff, does not farm and work in a garage...” (Lee, 1960). That statement strengthens the presumption of the researchers that Atticus is not included in low-class society.

2. Cunningham

In the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Cunningham became the victim of social issues that happened in The Great Depression era. The condition of Cunningham that included in the low-class society with the low average income made Cunningham as a clear depiction of capitalism in that era. To strengthen the presumption of the researchers, in that novel Scout said: “Are we poor as Cunningham?” (Lee, 1960). From that prove, the researchers believe that Cunningham is coming from a low-class society. The poverty caused by the capitalist system, and the unbalance system in that era. He lost his only job. That job is the only job that can make him survive in his life during the era of the Great Depression. So, by losing that job, he was unable to pay the loans and fulfill his daily needs.

3. Tom Robinson

Tom Robinson is a black people character in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Robinson also suffered from racism in around 1930s, because he is black. The racism that Robinson got, strengthen the issue of racism that happened at that time. Tom Robinson also a labor worker, the same as Cunningham. In this

novel, Tom Robinson accused by Bob Ewell, because she raped the white woman. The statement that demean black people in this novel stated by Bob Ewell “Nothing something creepy beside black people, do not fool your selves, it is all adding up....” (Lee, 1960).

From those three characters that have explained above by the researchers, it strengthens the presumption of the researchers that believe that the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* depicted Marxism. The characters, effects, and aspects as explained above, prove the existence of the Capitalist system, Marxism system, and the racial injustice in that era. Those things exist because of The Great Depression after World War II.

CONCLUSION

World War II affects the occurrence of poverty in that era, which usually known as The Great Depression. The events of World War II and The Great Depression somehow changed the behavior of society and brought out some social issues among the society at that time. The foundation of the social issues found by the researchers is poverty because poverty is the clearest impact of World War II. The massive deficit spending of a country, force some companies or institutions did the unemployment to their workers, which lead to the poverty or The Great Depression era. Poverty leads to other social issues that happened in America at that time, which are a dictatorship, discrimination, and racial injustice. The poverty suffered by society, make the power of the leader and the upper-class society became bigger, which give them access to do the dictatorship, discrimination, and racial injustice. Thus, poverty is the main impact caused by World War II that led to the occurrence of other social issues. The social issues that happened at that time as depicted in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* were happened because of some influences. The researchers found two influences that caused the occurrence of those social issues, which are political influence and philosophical influence. So politic and philosophy have big roles in bringing out social issues among society. The novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* is not only depicted Marxism or class struggle through the plot of the story but through the characters as well. For example, the issue of racial injustice was depicted through the character Tom Robinson; meanwhile, the issue of poverty was portrayed by the character Cunningham. So, the author of this novel strengthens the portrayal of Marxism, class struggle, and the effect of World War II through the events suffered by the characters.

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