

THE MAIN CHARACTER'S STRUGGLE FOR EQUALITY IN HARPER LEE'S *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*

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Abstrak

Dalam novel bertajuk *To Kill a Mockingbird*, isu *kesetaraan* menjadi ide utama yang dibahas oleh sang pengarang. Bagaimana praktek ketidaksetaraan terjadi di masyarakat yang masih terjebak di dalam paradigma lama semacam prasangka dan diskriminasi sebagai suatu budaya yang salah. Tujuan utama dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui bagaimana tindakan perjuangan untuk *kesetaraan* yang dilakukan oleh Atticus Finch sebagai salah satu tokoh sentral dalam novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* oleh Harper Lee, menggunakan konsep *5 dimensi kesetaraan* dari Baker et. al. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif sebagai metode riset dalam usaha untuk menganalisis novel. Aspek-aspek *kesetaraan* yang diperjuangkan oleh karakter utama bukan hanya meliputi *isu kesetaraan* yang ada di masyarakat, seperti *isu kesetaraan gender*, *isu kesetaraan ras*, dan *isu kesetaraan sosial*, melainkan lebih fokus pada konsep *5 dimensi kesetaraan*, yang diantaranya ada *kesetaraan kehormatan dan pengakuan*, *kesetaraan sumber daya*, *kesetaraan kasih sayang*, *perhatian dan solidaritas*, *kesetaraan kekuasaan*, dan *kesetaraan pekerjaan dan pendidikan*.

Kata kunci: *Kesetaraan, Perjuangan, Dimensi kesetaraan*

Abstract

In *To Kill A Mockingbird*, the issues of *equality* become the main idea which is discussed by the writer of the novel. The inequality practices happened in the community who was still being trapped in the old paradigm such as prejudice and discrimination as a wrong culture. The main purpose of the study is to recognize how the *struggle* action for *equality*, which was done by Atticus Finch as one of the central character in Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* using Baker et. al. concept's of *the 5 dimensions of equality*. This study uses descriptive qualitative as the research method to analyze the story. The aspects of *equality* which was struggled by the main character are not only based on *the issues of equality* in the society; such as *gender equality*, *racial equality*, and *social equality*, but also focused on the concept of *the 5 dimensions of equality*, such as *equal respect and recognition*, *equal resources*, *equal love, care, and solidarity*, *equal power*, and *equal working and learning*.

Keywords: *Equality, Struggle, Dimension of equality*

INTRODUCTION

Struggle is the result of someone's motivation to reach his goal. When people want to have something, they will need some efforts to have it. The effort can be big or just a little thing, but it is still their action of struggle to get what they want. Struggle that the people do will give various impacts in their life - either it is good or bad - as the result of the effort done. The impacts of the struggle done can influence

not only the people who are struggling but also the other people around them. It means that the decisions that have been made can determine the way of their life.

Struggle is a concept that cannot be separated from any living creature in this world, because we believe that in order to survive we need to struggle. Not only for human being but also another creature in this world also need to struggle in order to survive. When animals need foods to survive, they will try to find some

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natural resources such as fruits or tree or any other plants to eat. Some animals will hunt others because they do not eat plants. This condition is the product of the life's circle, which means the term of hunt or to be hunted become necessary. Same as animals, humans need to struggle in order to survive. For human, struggle becomes more complex because it is for the basic need such as food and love. There was more motivation for human in order to reach self-actualization after they get their primary need.

To Kill a Mockingbird tells us the story of the main character Atticus Finch, a well-known attorney in his city and his struggles for equality. He was a figure of a noble white man who had been appointed to defend a black man who came from low society in the city named Tom Robinson, who was accused of raping a white woman. This case became a dilemma for him because he already knew it would be hard for him and people around him, especially his children. They were too young to understand what really happened with their father when they started to realize that their neighborhood turned against them and they suddenly got bullied at school and even at home. This moral value of Atticus shows us that the struggle for racial equality is never easy. There will be many obstacles when someone is trying to do what is right.

Equality is a traditional idea that tied to the two great ideologies of liberalism and socialism. Another role of equality is as one of the guiding principles behind political, economic and social reform (Franklin, 1997:1). Equality is a relationship between two or more people or groups of people in which they have the same obligation and right in every aspect of life. The main principal of equality is quite simple, which makes everybody has the equal treatment from other people and makes sure that everybody can obtain their right, but it is not easy to explain what kind of treatment that should be afforded, and what aspects should be fulfilled in order to get the right.

There are some aspects in life that can be the *issues of equality*. Those aspects are gender equality, racial equality, education equality and social equality. Those aspects are directly related to people's life and can be different for each individual. Those diversities can make one person treated differently. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a novel that uses *the issues of equality* as the main idea of the novel. But for this study, rather than discussing about the *issues of equality*, this study tends to discuss about *five dimension of equality* concept by Baker et. al.

Five Dimensions of Equality

1. Respect and recognition: universal citizenship, toleration and the private sphere

The commitment to the social equality in the sense of recognizing the equal public status of all citizens and tolerating individual and group differences, as long as they respect basic rights is become fundamental element in the thinking of liberal egalitarians. (Baker et. al, 2004: 26). While citizenship is a form of political identity by which individuals are endowed with social rights and obligations within political communities. Needless to say, the meaning of citizenship has change according to the language-game and cultural context in which it is deployed. (Barker, 2004: 23)

2. Resources: poverty relief and the difference principle

The second dimension of liberal egalitarianism concerns the distribution of what can be called resources in a wide sense of term and it most obvious are income and wealth. (Baker et. al, 2004: 26). With the assumption that inequality practice in the distribution of resources is inevitable from its practices in the society, liberal egalitarian tries to regulate this inequality by combining minimum level with the principle of equal opportunity. The minimum level is a logical extension of the basic egalitarian commitment to satisfying human needs. The key point is that most liberal egalitarians are more concerned with

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eliminating poverty than promoting equality of resources. (Baker et. al, 2004: 26)

3. Love, care and solidarity: a private affair

The dimension of love, care and solidarity are generally absent from the work of most liberal egalitarians. When we try to relate the conditions of human being which is typically needed for even a minimally decent life, it is clear enough that relations of love, care and solidarity belong to the criteria. But when we turn to work of liberal egalitarians, there is only few discussions of these important goods. (Baker et. al, 2004: 28)

4. Power relations: civil and personal rights and liberal democracy

According to Baker et. al (2004: 29) the protection of basic civil and personal rights against the powerful, particularly the state, is a central and longstanding idea within liberalism. They also said that these rights include the prohibition of slavery, of torture and of cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment. Liberal egalitarian encompasses equality before the law, protection against arbitrary arrest and a right to the due process of law.

5. Working and learning: occupational and educational equal opportunity

Dealing with working and learning, the liberal egalitarian central principle is equal opportunity. The 'formal' interpretation of equal opportunity inspires anti-discrimination legislation that makes it illegal to deny education or work to people because of their religion, sex or other specified characteristics. The educational system should try to accommodate and vanishing obstacles faced by people from working class and other disadvantaged backgrounds in developing their talents. (Baker et. al, 2004: 30)

METHOD

This article use library study method and descriptive qualitative method. The data

source was taken from Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The data of this study was the struggle for equality depicted by the main character. Since the action is done by the character Atticus Finch, therefore this study will focused on Atticus.

In this study, the researcher is the main instrument to collect the data. Pen and paper were used to note the data that had been found. The data analysis technique was done in three steps: 1. Identifying the data; 2. Analyzing the data; 3. Drawing and verifying conclusion.

ANALYSIS

1. Struggle for equal respect and recognition

The idea about equal respect and recognition for everyone surely becomes an essential part of Atticus's life. He believes that all mankind are equally created and it makes him possesses another identity as an egalitarian. Sometime, it puts him in a hard condition such as in Tom Robinson's case. It becomes a contradiction because in one side, based on humanity, he knows that he must accept this 'challenge' to defend Tom Robinson. In other side, he already knows that he cannot win this case, no matter how hard his effort.

"Atticus, how bad is this going to be? You haven't had too much chance to discuss it."

"It couldn't be worse, Jack. The only thing we've got is a black man's word against the Ewells'. The evidence boils down to you-did—I-didn't. The jury couldn't possibly be expected to take Tom Robinson's word against the Ewells'." (Lee, 1960: 117)

The quotation above is coming from the dialogue between Atticus and his brother, Jack. Jack feels that his brother rarely talks about this case, even when he knew that it could be a hard case for him. Atticus said that the jury is difficult to be expected to make Tom's words become useful when against the Ewells, it vividly shows that in a society which white

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people are in superior position and black people are in inferior position in the society, white people tend to use their power to defeat black people in every aspects of life. When they see that they have a good chance to do this, they will do this anyway. In a place a court, someone should has an equal position before the law, and people should find fair condition in a trial, but it will not happen if white people against black people in a trial.

2. Struggle for equal resource

The second dimension of liberal egalitarianism concerns the distribution of what can be called resources in a wide sense of term, and it most obvious are income and wealth. (Baker et. al, 2004: 26). As an egalitarian, Atticus thinks that it is a must for him to serve the society even if he will not get any commission for his work. He knows that in such of a hard time after depression, while some people in the society do not have any money to pay his service, he still has the responsibility to help them.

After a dreary conversation in our livingroom one night about his entailment, before Mr. Cunningham left he said, "Mr. Finch, I don't know when I'll ever be able to pay you."

"Let that be the least of your worries, Walter," Atticus said. (Lee, 1960: 26)

It shows that in a hard time after the great depression in America, people are not easy to afford income and wealth and it forces Atticus puts humanity above his own important. He holds the idea that people must help each other in order to survive. His job as a lawyer has urged him to serve the society whether he will get the payment or not. For Atticus, his service as a lawyer is another form of resource that he can give for other people, instead of income and wealth.

Mr. Cunningham does not leave anyway, sure it is difficult for him to pay Atticus with money, but he will pay Atticus with something else such as load of stove wood,

a sack of hickory nuts, a crate of smilax and holly, or a croker sack full of turnip greens. When Scout asked Atticus about it, he said that Mr. Cunningham had more than paid him. (Lee, 1960: 27)

Atticus says that professional people like them are poor because the farmers are poor. As Maycomb is farm country, nickels and dimes were hard to come for doctors and dentists and lawyers and entailment are only a part of Mr. Cunningham's vexations. It means that Atticus has the same idea with any other liberal egalitarian. According to Baker et. al, (2004: 26) the key point is most liberal egalitarians are more concerned with eliminating poverty than promoting equality of resources.

3. Struggle for equal love, care and solidarity

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the idea of equal love, care and solidarity for all people become essential to be discussed. In this realm, many characters have shown their effort to make it possible. In a town like Maycomb, which consisted of so many folks and different kind of people, prejudice and discrimination became common value in the society. People tend to ignore any form of solidarity unless they have same idea about it. They put the idea that they must have a common thing to share, such as skin complexion and social status. It means that they will despise any other people who coming from different race, and avoid having many relations with them. They also put the idea that social status determines the way people interact each other.

Jem held out a filthy piece of paper. Atticus took it and tried to read it. "Why do you want Mr. Radley to come out?"

Dill said, "We thought he might enjoy us..." and dried up when Atticus looked at him.

"Son," he said to Jem, "I'm going to tell you something and tell you one time: stop tormenting that man. That goes for the other two of you." (Lee, 1960: 64)

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For Atticus, it is not right for his children to disturb other people of their curiosity. It is impolite to ask Mr. Radley out when he has no intention to go out, especially with those children. Atticus tries to respect other people by asking those children to stop disturbing that man again.

4. Struggle for equal power

According to Baker et. al, the protection of basic civil and personal rights against the powerful, particularly the state, is a central and longstanding idea within liberalism. He also says that these rights include the prohibition of slavery, torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment. (Baker et. al, 2004: 29). It means that the idea of equality of power becomes essential for any liberal egalitarian and Atticus has longstanding principle with this idea.

"His first two clients were the last two persons hanged in the Maycomb County jail. Atticus had urged them to accept the state's generosity in allowing them to plead Guilty to second-degree murder and escape with their lives, but they were Haverfords, in Maycomb County a name synonymous with jackass." (Lee, 1960: 5)

The quotation above vividly shows us that since the beginning of his practice as an attorney, he is a man who has faith in everyone. He has the willing to do anything necessary in order to save other people, even when he knows that those people could not save. Atticus seems never care about the background of his client. He never pays attention about race (white people or negroes), gender (man or woman), education (educated or uneducated) or social background (rich or poor). It shows that he is such a person who will put tolerance above prejudice, and he will hold on to it until the end. It seems like he can see the goodness in everyone's heart, even if that person cannot see it.

5. Struggle for equal working and learning

After Atticus heard the story and found that the reason of her daughter refusal to go to school again is silly, he said that it is okay for Scout when she felt irritated with her teacher's statement about him. He agreed with Miss Caroline about her point of view about the best education for children. He understands about it, when Miss Caroline says that he has done the intervention relating to his daughter's reading and writing ability. Because it is a fact that Scout can read and write in her first year of school, which is not normal for a child in her age.

"No I can't," said Atticus. "I have to make a living. Besides, they'd put me in jail if I kept you at home—dose of magnesia for you tonight and school tomorrow." (Lee, 1960: 39)

The quotation above vividly shows that in a town like Maycomb, it is a sin for the parent of white children if they do not send their children to school, especially public school in the town. Atticus says that he will be sent to the jail if he let his daughter stay at home. Making Scout can find her interest to go to the school again, Atticus tells her daughter another fact about the Ewells.

"They can go to school any time they want to, when they show the faintest symptom of wanting an education," said Atticus. "There are ways of keeping them in school by force, but it's silly to force people like the Ewells into a new environment—" (Lee, 1960: 40)

From the quotation above we can see that in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Ewells become the most uneducated family in the whole story. They are living in a white people society and it should make them can get education easily. But in fact, they are as uneducated as colored people. When the authorities have given all children of white people the same opportunity for learning at school - even for people like

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Ewells - it means that the authorities have provided equal learning for all white people. They only need to come to the school every day due to learn some knowledge, which is for their own sake.

"If I didn't go to school tomorrow, you'd force me to."

"Let us leave it at this," said Atticus dryly. "You, Miss Scout Finch, are of the common folk. You must obey the law." (Lee, 1960: 40)

As a common folks, people like Atticus must obey the law. He believes that law is the most important thing for people as the social creature. Without a law, people will be uncontrolled and have no different with animals. In other hand, Maycomb has the Ewells as the opposite of Atticus. People like Ewells are having no intention to act as the common folks, they also do not have any willing to obey the law. They act as they want and only follow their instinct in order to live.

CONCLUSION

Atticus was a lawyer, and he believed that all human being were created equal. Based on his idea about equality, it surely made him as an egalitarian. In Maycomb, Atticus could see that there were many possibilities for this inequality practice happened around him. He held *the five dimensions of equality* as his basic idea, and such kind of invisible guide-line for his struggles for equality.

The first dimension is equal respect and recognition. Sometimes, his struggles for equal respect and recognition had put him in a hard condition such as in Tom Robinson's case.

The second dimension is equal resources. As an egalitarian, Atticus thought that it was a must for him to serve the society even if he would not get any commission for his work. He knew that in such of a hard time after the depression period, while some people in the society did not have any money to pay his

service, he still had the responsibility to help them.

The third dimension is equal love, care and solidarity. In a town like Maycomb, which was consisted of so many folks and different kind of people, prejudice and discrimination seemed to become common value in the society. People tend to ignore any form of solidarity unless they had the same idea about it. They put the idea that they had to have a common thing to share, such as skin complexion and social status. The brief example of this case comes from Atticus's intervention about his children curiosity about Boo Radley. For Atticus, it was impolite to ask Mr. Radley out when he had no intention to go out, especially with the children. Atticus tries to respect other people by asking those children to stop disturbing that man again.

The fourth dimension is equal power. Atticus seemed to never care about the background of his client. He never paid attention about race, gender, education or social background. It shows that he was such a person who would put tolerance above prejudice, and he would hold on to it until the end.

The fifth dimension is equal working and learning. For a liberal man like Atticus, children had the same position as an adult in term of education. He believed that children had equal opportunities to get the information about something as an adult. When adult had some information, in any circumstances, children had their right to ask about that information too.

For Atticus, the difficulties of his struggles were not important because he held the idea that where there is a will, so there will be a way. He believed that with such a great power, there should come a great responsibility. When he was appointed to defend Tom Robinson in his trial, he was become a different man for his society. He believed that the responsibility of changing the wrong value in the society was not only his own responsibility, but also the society. No matter the result of his action, he would continue it anyway. He believed that as long as there was inequality

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practice happened in the society, people like him would always come to try.

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