



A STUDY OF STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AND RACIAL INJUSTICE IN LEE'S TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

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Abstract:

The study includes Johan Galtung's structural violence Theory (1969) introduced in influential article "violence peace and peace Research. Structural violence means systemic indirect harms to individual but it is done through legal ways. Structural violence refers to social structure or institutions harm individuals by preventing them from meeting basic needs. It is indirect, built in to systems like poverty, racism, or inequality, often appearing invisible yet deeply damaging (Galtung, 1969). The objective of this study is to examine the way literature shows invisible forms of social injustice. The Novel was set in 1930s Alabama, dispensed a concrete picture of indirect violence through racism, injustice and institutional failure. The story focuses on a trail of Tom a black man blamed of raping White women. He is innocent despite evidence in the favor of him he dies brutally. Tom's death indicates implanted racial bias within the judiciary system. The Novel explores structure system law, education and social norms advocate inequality and oppressed the disempowered people. The structure violence is evident Tom character in novel to kill a Mockingbird. Novel explores deep themes of racial injustice and moral growth through the innocent eyes of scout Finch. Harper Lees uses the trial of Tom Robinson to highlight the entrenched racism in southern society and the importance of empathy and integrity. This qualitative textual analysis highlights inequality and sufferings. Society's treatment toward Tom character shows the racism and social status, moral values. The significance of this research is as it talks about indirect violence, inequality, social injustice and racism.

Key words: social injustice, inequality, moral values, legal system, structural violence

Introduction

Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, published in 1960s, is a landmark novel in American fiction

.set in the racially segregated southern United States during the 1930s, The story centers on the young and innocent scout Finch, who learns important moral lessons from her father. However, she gradually loses her innocence after witnessing the deeply flawed and unjust social structure of her town. The novel primarily focuses on the trial of Tom Robinson a Black man falsely accused of raping a White woman. Key themes in the novel include the loss of innocence, the development of moral values and the prevalence of racism. Harper Lee wrote this novel during the Civil Rights Movement, using it to highlight racism and systematic injustice in America. Drawing on Johan Galtung's theory of structural violence (1969), which categorizes violence into Direct violence, structural violence, cultural violence, According to Johan Galtung's structural violence theory harms doesn't always involve physical harm. It can also take indirect forms like racism, institutional failure, and systemic inequality, which are often accepted as normal parts of daily life.

The article by Saney (2003) presented a critical viewpoint on *To Kill a Mockingbird*, highlighting fixed concerns from African Nova Scotian educators and parents about the novel's portrayal of Black people. Similarly, In her article Baecker (1998) "Telling It in Black and White: The Importance of the Africanist Presence in *To Kill a Mockingbird*," Baecker summarized how Harper Lee's novel addressed racial themes through the existence of African American characters, using Toni Morrison's concept of the "Africanist presence" in American literature. Baecker appeal that although the novel was widely studied, it was often interpreted in a way that centered white characters such as Atticus Finch, while minimize the significance of racial injustice. She pointed out that characters



like Tom Robinson and the setting of Maycomb played a crucial role in clarifying how literature reflected and reinforced societal values and racial power structures. Further, M.E.A(2002)The study examined the moral values found in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee and analyzed its potential as a substitute teaching material in high school. The researcher emphasized that moral values played a crucial role in persuasion human behavior and could serve as motivation for positive actions. Through a descriptive method, the study identified key innate moral values in the novel, including justice, honesty, and responsibility. Angela Davis (2003) had similarly claimed that the prison system had hidden deeper social problems like racism and poverty. Both viewpoints had aligned with Johan Galtung's theory, which explained how institutions could silently cause harm by limiting people's rights and chances.

Research Problem:

Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* is widely examined for its portrayal of racial and social injustice, as well as institutional failure. The novel encourages deeper reflection on the subtle, indirect forms of harm embedded within its narrative. Tom Robinson's false accusation reveals the powerful influence of racial prejudice in the legal system, while Atticus Finch's moral integrity is challenged by the very institutions meant to uphold justice. Through Scout's experiences, the novel also illustrates the development of moral understanding in the face of societal prejudice. Using Johan Galtung's theory of structural violence, this study analyzes the novel portrays normalized forms of social harm and aims to highlight as such indirect violence contributes to the marginalization of individuals.

Research Objectives:

The objective of this study was to examine the way literature shows invisible forms of social injustice and structural violence.

Research Questions:

- Q1. What prevents individuals from challenging structural systems ?
- Q2. What is the impact of structural violence on individuals?

Significance:

This research seeks to explore the hidden, indirect forms of harm in the novel, focusing on perspective such as racism, institutional failure, and systemic structure through the lens of Johan Galtung's theory of structural violence. (1969)

Delimitation:

The research focuses on the trial of Tom Robinson in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. themes: racism, social injustice, moral values, institutional failure, and systemic structure. Boo Radley and other characters Are not discussed in detail. This study uses Johan Galtung's structural violence theory, not use another theory.

1. Methodology.

2.1 Theoretical framework:

Johan Galtung's Structural Violence Theory(1969) explains the afflicted harm caused by systemic structures. Numerous studies centers on the racial injustice faced by Tom Robinson in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but there is a gap in investigating how other characters like Helen Robinson Mrs. Dubous and Dolphus Raymond are also harmed by these systemic structures.

This study applies Galtung's theory(1969) to show the hidden harm these characters

experience in the 1930s Southern American society. Johan Galtung's Structural Violence Theory (1969) identifies three types of violence: direct violence mean physical harm, cultural violence mean justifying beliefs and norms, and structural violence mean invisible harm caused by social systems.

2.2 Origin of Theory:

The origin of Structural Violence Theory comes from Johan Galtung's, a Norwegian sociologist and peace researcher. He first introduced the concept in 1969 in his article titled "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research", broadcast in the Journal of Peace Research.

2.2.1 Features of the Theory:

. Invisible Harm:

According to Galtung's structural violence theory (1969) afflicted harm is the denial of basic human rights through unjust systems. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Tom Robinson is falsely blamed and denied justice due to racism, while his wife Helen suffers emotional pain, misery, and social refusal after his death reflecting the hidden harm caused by structural violence.

Inner Struggle:

Galtung's structural violence (1969) theory involves indirect harm as emotional and psychological harm caused by harsh systems. Mrs. Dubose silently battles her addiction while maintaining dignity in a over critical society, and Helen Robinson struggles with inner pain after her husband's death. Their sorrows shows how society's structure can deeply affect individuals.

Systemic Structure:

Galtung's structural violence theory (1969) defines systemic structure as the legal, political, and social systems that create difference . In the novel, the prejudiced law court strict class divisions, and traditional society cause harm. Scout is sentimental hurt after seeing Tom's unjust trial outcome, showing how deeply injustice is fixed in the system.

Stand against injustice :

Atticus Finch's defense of Tom Robinson shows his opposition to the unfair social system in his community. Based on Galtung's idea of structural violence, harm can occur through unequal social systems, not just through direct actions. By standing up for an innocent Black man despite the town's prejudice, Atticus tries to protect justice and stay true to his moral values.

Research Design:

This research explored a qualitative research methodology to analyze Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* through the lens of Johan Galtung's (1969) Structural Violence Theory. The aim is to explore how structural violence—systemic, invisible harm embedded in social structures—is reflected through the characters and events in the novel.

Data Analysis:

This study is going to analyze the systemic structure. **Lee, says "simply because we were licked a hundred years before we started is no reason for us not to try to win." (Lee,1960, 78)**

Atticus knows he won't be able to get justice for Tom Robinson, who is falsely blamed of raping a white woman. Even though there is evidence proving Tom's innocence, Atticus loses the case Galtung's (1969) structural violence theory shows the systemic structure. He knows that racism is deeply rooted in the Southern system it has been there for over a hundred years and the court is affected. That's what he means when he says, "we were

licked a hundred years before we started.” (Lee’s 1960) Still, Atticus believes that just because the fight seems despairing it doesn’t mean we shouldn’t try. He bravely stands for justice, knowing he face backlash from the social group. This shows his strong moral values and teaches Scout and the reader that we should stand always on the right side, when it’s difficult.

Further, M.E.A.(2002) The study examined the moral values found in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee and analyzed its potential as a substitute teaching material in high school. The researcher emphasized that moral values played a crucial role in persuasion human behavior and could serve as motivation for positive actions. Through a descriptive method, the study identified key innate moral values in the novel, including justice, honesty, and responsibility.

Lee says, Mr. Underwood compares Tom Robinson’s death to the “senseless slaughter of songbirds by hunters and children „(Lee, 1960, 244)

Tom Robinson is a good and innocent character who is falsely accused of raping Mayella Ewell, a white woman. In reality, Mayella’s father, Bob Ewell, is an offensive and abusive man who likely beat her and then blamed Tom to cover up the truth. This false allegation is a direct result of the systemic racism and social injustice that were deeply rooted in Southern American society at the time. The legal system fails Tom not because of a lack of evidence but because of the color of his skin. According to Johan Galtung’s theory of structural violence (1969), harm can occur not just through physical acts, but also through unjust social structures that oppress specific groups. Tom’s death reflects this invisible form of violence society does not acknowledge his inner struggles or his suffering because racism and injustice are considered normal and acceptable. People remain silent because they have been conditioned to accept this inequality as part of everyday life.

That is why Mr. Underwood compares Tom Robinson’s death to the “**senseless slaughter of songbirds.**”(Lee’s) Just like mockingbirds, who only sing and bring beauty, Tom did no harm and tried to help someone in need. His death is not just a tragedy it is a mockery of justice, revealing how deeply structural violence and racial stereotypes are embedded in society.

Angela Davis (2003) had similarly claimed that the prison system had hidden deeper social problems like racism and poverty. Both viewpoints had aligned with Johan Galtung’s theory, which explained how institutions could silently cause harm by limiting people’s rights and chances.

Lee says “I simply want to tell you that there are some men in this world who were born to do our unpleasant jobs for us. your father’s one of them. “Miss Maudie’s (Lee, 1960, 219)

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus Finch represents the moral conscience of Maycomb as he defends Tom Robinson, a Black man falsely accused of raping a white woman. Despite highlight evidence of Tom’s innocence, Atticus loses the case due to deep rooted racism in the legal and social systems of the 1930s American South. This injustice destroy Jem, who believed in the fairness of the judicial system. Jem feels depressed after the trial, not just because the



decision is unfair, but because he realizes how the whole system is built to work against people like Tom. This connects to what Galtung's (1969) called structural violence when harm is done through unfair systems, not direct attacks. The law court isn't just a place for justice in this case; it becomes part of the problem. Later, Miss Maudie tries to help Jem understand that Atticus did something brave. Even when he knew he probably wouldn't win, Atticus still stood up for the truth. This shows that standing by your values can still matter, even in a society full of injustice. The article by Saney (2003) presented a critical viewpoint on *To Kill a Mockingbird*, highlighting fixed concerns from African Nova Scotian educators and parents about the novel's portrayal of Black people. Over the years, the Black Educators' Association (BEA) and other community members urged the Nova Scotia Department of Education to remove the book from school curricula, arguing that it maintains racial stereotypes and humiliation for African-Canadian students. In 1996 and again in 2002, after continued pressure, the government responded by removing *To Kill a Mockingbird* along with two other books from the confirmed reading list. Critics argued that the novel used degrading language, including repeated use of the N-word, and presented outdated, paternalistic views of race that undermined Black students' dignity. The media, according to Saney, mischaracterized this advocacy as censorship, defending the book under the guise of preserving freedom of speech. Saney concluded that the opposition to the book stalks from a deep understanding of racism and education, and he emphasized the need to confront racism consistently and clearly within the curriculum. (Saney 2003)

Lee says “Things haven't caught up with that one's instinct yet. Let him get a little older and he won't get sick and cry. Maybe things 'll strike him as being not quite right, say, but he won't cry not when he gets a few years on him .”(Lee,1960, 205)

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Mr. Dolphus Raymond consoles Dill, who is emotionally worried by the injustice shown during Tom Robinson's trial. Dill's tears show his innocent reaction to a deeply defective system. Mr. Raymond explains that Dill is still young and sensitive, but as he grows older, he will become insensitive to cruelty a reflection of how adults learn to endure systemic racism. Although society wrongly assumes Mr. Raymond is a drunk man living with a Black woman, they fail to understand his inner psychological struggle. He only pretends to be drunk so people can accept his choices. He suffers silently. Galtung's (1969) structural violence theory explains this kind of indirect harm Mr. Raymond is not physically hurt. The racism and social pressure force him to hide his true identity. Lee says “She died beholden to nothing and nobody. She was the bravest person I ever knew .”(Lee,1960, 116)

Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose is an old, conservative lady who strongly opposes Atticus Finch's decision to defend Tom Robinson, a Black man. She openly insults Scout and Jem whenever they pass by her house. In response to her harsh words, Jem angrily destroys her camellia bushes. As a punishment, Atticus makes Jem read to Mrs. Dubose regularly. This punishment leads Jem to understand the deeper struggles Mrs. Dubose faces. Psychologically, she fights to maintain her pride and dignity in a society that looks down on weakness. She is addicted to morphine and is trying to free herself from this addiction before she dies. This battle causes her severe pain, but she refuses to be seen as weak. According to Galtung's (1969) theory of structural violence, Mrs. Dubose suffers from indirect harm — not only from her illness and addiction but from the social expectations and judgment placed on her. Despite her flaws and harshness, Atticus praises her courage, calling her “the bravest person I ever knew.” This shows how Mrs. Dubose's story reflects the theme of moral courage in the novel.



Similarly, In her article Baecker (1998) “Telling It in Black and White: The Importance of the Africanist Presence in *To Kill a Mockingbird*,” Baecker summarized how Harper Lee’s novel addressed racial themes through the existence of African American characters, using Toni Morrison’s concept of the “Africanist presence” in American literature. Baecker appeal that although the novel was widely studied, it was often interpreted in a way that centered white characters such as Atticus Finch, while minimize the significance of racial injustice. She pointed out that characters like Tom Robinson and the setting of Maycomb played a crucial role in clarifying how literature reflected and reinforced societal values and racial power structures

Lee says “She just fell down in the dirt. Just fell down in the dirt, like a giant with a big foot just came along and stepped on her.”(lee,1960, 244)

Helen Robinson, the wife of Tom Robinson who was falsely accused of raping a white woman, represents the silent suffering caused by systemic racism. After Tom attempts to escape prison and is shot dead, Helen receives the sad news. As Scout narrates, “She just fell down in the dirt. Like a giant with a big foot just came along and stepped on her”.(Lee) Helen’s deep sorrow and shock become painfully clear. Though she does not speak much in the novel, her suffering speaks volumes. Through her experience, Galtung’s (1969) Structural Violence Theory is reflected Helen becomes a victim of indirect harm caused by racial injustice and social inequality. She is emotionally and socially crushed by a society that refuses to recognize the pain of a Black woman. Her grief is invisible to the white society, who ignore her suffering simply because of her race. The systemic structure show’s racism not only harms individuals directly involved in legal injustice but also deeply injury their families, especially women like Helen who are left behind to carry the emotional and financial burden.

Another, The U.S. justice system had shown clear signs of structural violence, as Black Americans had been imprisoned at much higher rates than white Americans (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2023). Wacquant (2009) had argued that prisons had been used to control and disempower poor and minority population ,reinforcing difference.

Conclusion:

The conclusion explores the themes of social injustice, systemic structure and institutional failure through the lens of(Galtung’s 1969) theory of structural violence. It highlights society often consider normal invisible harms making them difficult to identify or challenge. These harms are fixed in stereotypical thinking and systemic structures, which prevent people from questioning inequality. As a result individuals suffer indirect harm in the form of emotional, psychological, and social trauma. This suffering is often internalized and endured in isolation with individuals facing multiple crises and sorrows without support. The conclusion emphasizes that indirect forms of harm though less visible than direct violence can have deep lasting effects.

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