

## BEYOND BOUNDARIES: COUNTERCULTURE IN HARPER LEE'S TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

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### ABSTRACT

This research article examines the birth of new cultural practices owing to individual and group inclinations in a literary text *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) by an American writer Harper Lee. This text offers a textual situation that contains a debate around the appropriate and inappropriate attires from the cultural viewpoints. Employing the transcultural theory propounded by Wolfgang Welsch, particularly, the concept of untenable cultural delimitation, the researcher has selected the narrative pieces of the novel in which the clothing behavior of a group or individuals is significantly discussed. Afterwards, the codes, categories and themes are developed for the generation of the analytical framework. Certain individuals and groups who went against the dominant culture were brought together for drawing the conclusion. Two themed analytical framework consisting of individual characters and group scenario is analyzed dominantly through the within case analysis method. Each case is analyzed without much comparison to another case because the case is rich and detailed in itself. This yields the result that a culture cannot accommodate all the interests, inclinations and preferences of an individual or group. The characters go beyond boundaries forming the counterculture. Hence, the study brings the conception to the light that a fictional text includes characters who contribute to the formation of a counterculture. The novelty of the research can be claimed that no research hitherto has studied the attires in the novel to prove the challenge to the cultural delimitation.

**Keywords:** Clothing Behaviors, Cultural Delimitation, Cultural Imperatives, Individual Inclinations, Within Case Analysis

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The characters clad in certain attires cannot be ignored as their attires have significant effects on the formation of new values. This study takes the cases from the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee and categorizes them into two groups: individuals who challenge the dominant mode of culture and groups who go against the dominant culture.

*To Kill a Mockingbird* is chosen in that the dominant character Scout Finch and her father Atticus Finch have unique clothing behavior. Scout Finch, a girl character, does not prefer to wear the clothes that a girl would have worn while her father does not abide by the attire conventions in the premises of a court.

Concerning the structure of the article, it subsumes the method of study: within case analysis, generation of codes and themes, employment of Welsch's theory of cultural delimitation and its limits and the analytical framework involving the study of clothing behavior of individuals and groups. The literature around the corpus follows the methods section and highlights the major areas of attention that the corpus has principally drawn. The frame for analysis of the study is twofold. The ultimate section involves conclusion that highlights the finding of the study: one's own culture has limits because it cannot accommodate the inclinations and preferences of individuals and groups. The implication is that cultures are always in the making and they cannot be taken as the closed spheres.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This American classic has drawn much attention of critics and scholars alike because it is considered the text that is most read by Americans after Bible. Such a text has been, oftentimes, researched around some major themes. The representative themes have been discussed in this review. Critics such as James B. Kelley, Ted Gournelos, Stephen Henighan, R.A. Dave and Grace Ann Hovet have rendered the sustained attention to *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The novel predominantly raises three issues – moral issues, the lessons for life and context (Kelley, 2010, p. 8). Moral nature is discussed taking Atticus Finch's sound moral stance and Bob Ewell's evil nature as the reference points. On occasions, the novel turns out to be a case for teaching readers that one needs to support the people who

are not supported. Hence, it stands for the call for a justice. The context, obviously, is the racial discrimination and its scenarios.

Further, “racial discrimination and oppression” (Gournelos, 2009, p. 191) is discussed in the novel. In fact, a white member standing for the black member in the society would be a new case at the time when the novel was written. When whole the society was against the black people, a white male advocating for the rights of the black individual would have been a novel case. Same issue as “white liberals who try to help oppressed African- Americans in the Pre-Civil Rights era” (Henighan, 2008, p. 40) has been studied and duly focused.

Another important study carried around the novel is the dichotomy of the two worlds- children’s and that of grown-ups (Dave, 2007, p. 41). How do the children conduct in times of the difficulties and how do the grown-ups do? “Scout’s angry response to wearing a pink dress” (Hovet, 2009, p. 28) initiates a new response on why certain characters do not like certain clothes while the other characters impose such dress on them.

Reviewing literature surrounding this novel demonstrates that the study concerning untenability of the delimitation is unexamined yet. Consulting the literature available leads the readers to the foregoing major research themes. With this attempt, a research gap is paved. The gap can be articulated as the need to investigate the variation of perspectives in the people of a same culture in regards to the attires.

### **3. METHODS**

This study employs the theoretical concepts by Wolfgang Welsch. His concept of untenable cultural delimitation has become the central conceptual tool for the analysis. By untenable cultural delimitation, Welsch means to problematize the separation of intercultural interaction and confirms that “the basic flaw” of monocultural vision of culture is “to envisage cultures as closed spheres” (2009, p. 6). By this, he intends to establish a reasoning that a culture is not same to all of its members and not all the members can be accommodated by its boundary. The selection rationale of this theoretical concept includes Welsch’s efforts to discuss the variation of a given culture. His analysis of cultures and their internal differences led the researcher to choose the given conception.

Within case analysis has been the mode of analysis. This mode of analysis refers to the avoidance of the comparison of cases by focusing on the particular in order for

the searching analysis. Surfing through the sections of the novel and selecting the cases that contain the discussion of attires, the researcher has further sampled the cases where the delimitation is challenged and questioned; “Within-case analysis typically involves detailed case study” and the cases are analyzed without the attempt to see the patterns (Huberman & Miles, 2012. p. 17). The rationale for employing the within-case analysis includes the strong sense purpose. Eschewing the cross-case analysis, the within-case analysis drives the research to the intense analysis of the available cases.

Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* is chosen as the corpus because the central characters such as Scout Finch and Atticus Finch have unique clothing behaviors. Both of them are unconventional in this regard. This study has exploited this source for that reason.

The analytical framework for the study contains the twofold frame: the clothing behavior of groups in a culture and the individuals. The purpose of this comparison is to show that it is not merely the individual impulses that are against the dominant cultural modes but even the groups demonstrate such practices.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the novel has offered two thematic discussions: the examination of individual’s clothing behavior and that of the groups. The behaviors are similar and contribute to the argument of the article that the cultures cannot accommodate the adherents’ inclinations: there is the birth of new values in terms of attires.

##### **Challenging Cultural Delimitation: Formation of New Values**

A Halloween Time becomes an occasion for breaking the attire traditions when human beings are turned into animals such as cow with the help of attires. A Christian group called Menonnites does not even wear buttons in their shirts. A group of people acts strangely; they are wearing overalls and denim shirts and buttoned up to collars even in summer time. Atticus Finch challenges the attire tradition by unbuttoning and loosening his attires in the court premises. Mr. Tate has worn normal clothes instead of his luxurious clothes when attending the court session of Tom Robinson. This section represents how the group related behaviors are challenging the cultural traditions.

During a Halloween pageant, Cecil Jacobs is asked to wear like a cow. This pageant becomes a scene that sets a time for Bob Ewell’s attack on Scout and Jem. As Scout’s costume is a ham, Cecil’s is a cow. This act of creating fun, terror and

humor displays a scenario that Halloween pageant acts as the representative scenario for the cultural customs particularly the costumes. Why would one wear like a ham and the other as the cow? The rationale behind this is that they are representing the agricultural themes of the region. Nonetheless, turning humans to animals is an act of transcending the usual customs, as Cecil Jacobs is asked to wear like a cow and Agnes Boone would be turned to butter-bean and yet another a peanut” (Lee, 1960, p. 278).

There are people attending the trial of Tom Robinson. Scout Finch and her brother too are attending this. This is so because Atticus Finch is defending Tom Robinson. Among the people attending such a trial are Mennonites. Mennonites historically are the groups of Christian followership. Harper Lee mentions the Mennonites here to show that the trial has become so famous that even the Mennonites are attending the trial of Tom Robinson being defended by Atticus Finch. Mennonites men are shown unusual. They do not use buttons on their attires. Lee shows that Mennonites avoid even the colorful dresses. They criticize Miss Maudie for her colorful attires and flowers as they take them to be the sinful objects. Not only that, they also do not shave their beards because their spouses wish to tickle the beards after the marriage (p. 174).

This shows that Mennonites places emphasis on the clothes as the sign of commitment to the God. Wearing very simple connotes the higher commitment while wearing colorful dresses is the sinful act as these Protestants believe. They believe that bright colors are boastful and the signs of pride which in turn is sinful.

In the Maycomb County, there take place many occasions in which other members to go against the cultural prescriptions regarding the attires. In an occasion, Scout has an understanding: although she was growing a little weary of it, she believed Jem had good reason to act the way he did given his chances of succeeding after Atticus returned home. She scanned the throng. Even though it was a summer night, the men were mostly wearing denim shirts with the collars buttoned up and overalls. Since their sleeves were unrolled and buttoned at the cuffs, she assumed they must be cold-natured. A few had hats that were securely pulled down over their ears. They were drowsy-eyed, grumpy males who didn't appear to be used to the late hours. (p. 168)

This instance shows that the people were not following the mood of summer. Even in the summer mood wearing fully is, in a way against the cycle of the nature.

Next time, as Atticus Finch was defending Tom Robinson, he was not quiet internally. His internal disturbance could be seen through his clothing styles. More particularly, he would wear differently, or, he would style the clothes differently:

Atticus paused, and then he did something he didn't ordinarily do. He unhitched his watch and chain and placed them on the table, saying, 'With the court's permission- 'Judge Taylor nodded, and then Atticus did something I never saw him do before or since, in public or private: he unbuttoned his vest, unbuttoned his collar, loosened his tie, and took off his coat. He never loosened a scrap of his clothing until he undresses at bedtime, and to Jem and me, this was the equivalent of him standing before us stark naked. We exchanged horrified glances. Atticus put his hands in his pockets, and as he returned to the jury, I saw his gold collar button and the tips of his pen and pencil winking in the light. (p. 223)

Scout Finch expresses her view regarding the movement of Atticus Finch's clothing. She is demonstrative of his behavior. Whether Atticus was conventional or unconventional could be determined through his fidgeting of the clothes. If he was well, he would wear the way the society expected him to wear. When he felt that something went wrong, his clothes would express this. In this connection, Atticus's clothing choices were the indicators of his mindset. If he was to follow the customs, he wore in a way. If not, he wore in radical way. In another instance, unlike Mennonites, Mr. Heck Tate had worn very formally while attending the trial. He gave recognition to the judicial system; he abandoned his usual informal dress and wore very formally: Mr. Tate was well attired for the event. His timber jacket, high boots, and bullet-studded belt were gone, and he was dressed in a standard business suit that made him appear somewhat like every other man. After that, he stopped frightening me. He was listening intently to the circuit attorney while seated forward in the witness chair with his hands clenched between his knees (p. 183). Mr. Tate was to answer questions by Gilmer. Before this, he was well-attired. He seems to have given value to his profession.

Connecting these evidences around the theme of untenability is an effort of this study. Humans are turned to animals through costumes. Aunt Alexandra wears corset underneath the dressing-gown. Mr. Tate changes his usual high boots, lumber jacket and bullet-studded belt to ordinary on the day of Trial. Mennonites do not wear buttons. In the summer's night men in the overalls and denim shirts are buttoned up to the collars. The children's dresses are applied starch and turned like the tent. Scout wears overalls rather than the dress and camisoles. Alexandra asks Scout to wear dress rather than the pants. Atticus Finch unbuttons his vest, his

collar, loosening his tie, and takes off his coat on the day of trial. Atticus pushes his hat to the back of his head and puts hands on his hips when he is enraged. As the groups have multitudes of wishes and expectations, the culture that contains the values that might look fixed can never accommodate the wishes and expectations of its followers.

### **Cultural Imperatives and Individual Inclinations**

The followers of any culture are expected to remain under its control in the absolute sense. The cultural imperatives involve “the requirements for maintain the cultural apparatus, regulation of human behavior, socialization and the exercise of authority” (Fernandez, 2012, p. 102). Unlike the preceding section, the cases in this section have taken the individuals for the consideration. Earlier, it was the groups that went against the dominant cultural modes. Concerning the dominant culture, Furnish E. (1999) offers support for identifying the dominant culture as:

There are two ways in which dominant culture might be identified: first, through the ubiquity of particular ideas, meanings, discourses, and practices in everyday life and, second, through case studies of particular instances in which aspects of a dominant culture are challenged and how these challenges are deflected or absorbed by the hegemonic culture” (p. 20)

In the ensuing section, the individuals are challenging the dominant mode of the culture. Atticus Finch pushing his hat back to his head, Scout Finch wanting to wear overalls and pants instead of the dress, and the camisole, Calpurnia using a lot of starch in the ironing of clothes, and Aunt Alexandra wearing corset under dress cannot be taken as one time behavior. Their tendency can look peculiar to the culture. Nonetheless, their efforts to form new cultural modes can be the initiative by an individual.

Atticus does not have any disagreement on the unconventional clothing of his daughter Scout Finch as Aunt Alexandra. It is because he seems to have an inclination that protest for an act can be carried out through the activities of clothing. Rather than having a reservation to Scout's clothing, he shows his disagreement to Dill's and time and again to Jem's clothing behavior. Atticus commanded, “Stop ringing that bell.” Dill grabbed the clapper; in the silence that followed I wished he ‘d start ringing it again. Atticus pushed his hat to the back of his head and put hands on his hips. Jem,’ said, ‘what were you doing?’ ‘Nothin’, sir’ (p. 54). When Atticus is angry or indignant, he displays it through his clothing

behavior. His hat, tie, vest, among others, are the semiotic demonstration of his indignation. Although Atticus seems excellently balanced, his clothing behaviors show his internal working. Thus, Atticus's clothing behavior demonstrates the internal working and the psychological make-up of his inner self.

Scout's clothing choices are not containable by the customs of the society. She does not follow the dictation of the cultures. She flouted the imperatives of the cultural norms:

Aunt Alexandra was fanatical on the subject of my attire. I could not possibly hope to be a lady if I wore breeches: when I said I could do nothing in a dress, she said I was not supposed to be doing things that required pants. Aunt Alexandra's vision of my deportment involved playing with small stoves, tea sets, and wearing the Add-A-Pearl necklace she gave me when I was born. (p. 90)

Not surprisingly, Atticus invites his sister to take care of his children in the absence of his wife. His wife is dead owing to the heart attack. Nonetheless, Aunt Alexandra, Atticus's sister is peculiar in terms of clothing preference. She would not allow Scout to wear the clothes that the boys would wear whilst Scout loves the clothes of the boys. This unconventional preference of Scout shows that her choice is not containable by her culture. Not only that, it is not only her aunt who opposes her preference that goes against the cultural prescriptions, it is a neighbor of Finches who orders Scout to follow the cultural customs or Scout would be doomed to the shame:

Don't you contradict me!' Mrs. Dubose bawled. 'And *you*- 'she pointed an arthritic finger at me- 'what are you doing in those overalls? You should be in a dress and camisole, young lady! You'll grow up waiting on tables if somebody doesn't change your ways-a Finch waiting tables at the O.K. Café-hah!'. I was terrified. The O.K. Café was a dim organization on the north side of the square. I grabbed Jem's hand but he shook me loose. (p. 112)

Similar to Aunt Alexandra's orders Mrs. Dubose questions the attire preferences of Scout. As her aunt warns her that she cannot be the ray of sunshine to her widower father in the pants and she should not do anything that she cannot do in the dress, here is the neighbor Mrs. Dubose who warns her that wearing the overalls by the girl would embarrass the name and fame of the Finch family. Scout is afraid of



such warning. She is imposed the cultural prescriptions by her aunt and the neighbor. In yet another instance, Scout is asked to wear unusual dress:

Next morning she began earlier than usual, to 'go over our clothes'. When Calpurnia stayed overnight with us, she slept on a folding cot in the kitchen; that morning it was covered with our Sunday habiliments. She had put so much starch in my dress it came up like a tent when I sat down. She made me wear a petticoat and she wrapped a pink sash tightly around my waist. (p. 130)

Calpurnia asks Scout to wear unusually. Whilst she wants to wear her own preferences, Calpurnia irons her clothes in such a way that it is not easy enough to her. These cases of Scout Finch in which she is punctuated in terms of attires stand for the analysis that she is not let free for the attire choices. If we take that other member such as Aunt Alexandra, Mrs. Dubose and Calpurnia as the voices of the cultural institutions, obviously, Scout is the individual who is entrapped by the societal and the cultural imperatives. The tug of war between the cultural imperatives and the individual choices shows that a culture cannot contain the preferences of an individual and the sense of the cultural delimitation is all but insufficient in the lives of the adherents of the cultures. Flouting the cultural conventions is not conducted by Scout alone.

Scout compares Aunt Alexandra with Mount Everest. She is so cold. Her wearing behaviours are also unique. Scout often swears that Aunt Alexandra wears corset beneath the gown. Alexandra disapproves of Scout's tomboyism and Scout's swearing comes significant when Aunt attempts wearing corset even under the bathrobe:

Aunt Alexandra was waiting up. She was in her dressing gown, and I could have sworn she had on her corset underneath it. 'I'm sorry, brother,' she murmured. Having never heard her call Atticus 'brother' before, I stole a glance at Jem, but he was not listening. He would look up at Atticus, then down at the floor, and I wondered if he thought Atticus somehow responsible for Tom Robinson's conviction. (p. 234)

These cases, when analyzed with the within-case method demonstrate that Alexandra wearing corset even under the dress, Calpurnia using starch while ironing and turning the clothes like tent, Aunt Alexandra and Mrs. Duboise warning Scout to wear the attires of a lady and not that of the boys and Atticus breaking the norms of the court formality unbuttoning his vest in the court show

that, on occasions, the individuals go against the mainstream culture because of its inability to accommodate their interests, needs, preferences and wishes.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This vestimentary study is an attempt to show that one's own culture cannot contain all the tastes of an individual. The objective of the study is to examine the attire behaviours of groups and individuals in the novel. Using Wolfgang's theory of untenable cultural delimitation, the evidence selected have been analyzed in the mode of within-case analysis. It has been found that the individuals and groups are not willing to follow the cultural dictation. Oftentimes, the cultural cruelty and its edge troubles an individual/group. Hinting at the representative cases, Scout Finch, a case in hand, is asked to wear dress and not pants and overalls while she simply does not want to wear the dress and the camisoles. Aunt Alexandra and Mrs. Duboise force her to wear camisole and dress or she would have regret. As she is expected to be the sunbeam in the family, her father's life who is a widower, she does not seem to follow the warning of Alexandra and Duboise. Atticus's unconventional wearing such as unbuttoning the collar and loosening tie in the formal context could be taken as the breach of the legal convention. In the legal context, on the trial day, the barristers are expected to wear appropriately. Contrarily, he goes against the conventions of the attire codes. These representative cases stand for the problems of the cultural delimitations. A culture, thus, cannot be said to have a clearly defined boundary. The individuals adhering to a given culture should not be considered that they follow the culture in its entirety. The research claims the originality as it is the only research in this text through the perspective of attires. In other words, this article claims that it is the only research that has carried out the vestimentary analysis.

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