

# **Chapter I**

## **Introduction**

The researcher exploring several subjects in this chapter, including the background of the study, identification of the problems, limitation of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, and significance of the study.

### **1.1. Background of the Study**

In a very diverse society, there are different ethnicities, nationalities, and religions living together. Unfortunately, the existence of diversity can cause in numerous kinds of issues between individuals and group. Racism is a common type of conflict which happens when people of some races view themselves as superior and disrespect other races that they consider as inferior. This incident not only causes inequality, but can also cause other problems in society. Given the complex dynamics within racism, *The Devil in a Blue Dress* novel allows us to see racism from a different perspective. This novel brings us into the post-World War II Los Angeles society and clearly shows the racial tension affecting the main character, Easy Rawlins, through the narrative of the events that happens. This novel offers a deep understanding of the impact and influence of racism that portrayed in everyday life.

Mosley's novel *Devil in a Blue Dress* is about a detective's journey with a mystery and crime theme. The novel was first released in 1990 and is set in Los Angeles post-World War II. It gives a pretty good idea of how

serious things were in Los Angeles because of race at the time. Literary and mystery awards were received for this book by readers and writers' groups who appreciate this genre of fiction. This novel served as a bridge for readers to read Mosley's other works, as he has always contributed as an influential crime fiction writer. Despite the fact that this book did not receive any major awards, it still had a great influence on the genre of literature and mystery.

In the novel's narrative, Easy Rawlins is the protagonist who takes us into the rich history of Los Angeles after World War II. Easy Rawlins, an African-American war veteran, gets trapped in a complex network of mysteries as he makes his way through the city's twisted streets. *Devil in a Blue Dress* is more than just a mystery novel, but it can take us into the racial conflict in America at that time. Besides highlighting the disappearance of a woman in a blue dress, the novel's narrative also shows racial nuances, such as prejudice against some African-American characters who find it difficult to show their true selves. The novel explores self-discovery and identity. *The Devil in a Blue Dress*, which has a deep understanding of the social and political conditions of the time, triggers deep reflection and discussion on the issues of racism that still exist in American culture.

One example of racism in this novel is Easy's encounter with a drunk white man, "He was in the same blue suit. He lay across the bed, his arms out like Jesus Christ but the fingers. were jangled, not composed like they were on my mother's crucifix. He didn't call me "colored brother" but I

recognized the drunken white man I'd met in front of John's place". (p. 44)". The biased perspective of Mouse as Easy Rawlins best friend "That's just like you, Easy. You learn stuff and you be thinkin' like white men be thinkin'. You be thinkin' that what's right fo' them is right fo' you. She look like she white and you think like you white. But brother you don't know that you both poor niggers. And a nigger ain't never gonna be happy 'less he accepts what he is" (p. 97). The bitter reality of racism that many African-Americans in the United States encounter is reflected in the experiences of the main character, Easy Rawlins. Easy, a private investigator of African descent, often faces racial prejudice and discrimination in his life. This novel is a reflection on the impact of racism on the lives of individuals and communities.

Racism is a long-standing and continued attitude or act of unfairness in judging people in society. Racism starts when some groups of people have a belief of superiority or inferiority in their perception of other groups, based on racial differences in physical features such as hair, eyes, body shape, and skin color. Although time has passed, racism is still a significant problem in our lives, which hinders the creation of a fair and equal life for society. Feagin and Vera (1995) in Idris (2017) explain "Racism is more than just a problem of individual episodes of widespread discrimination, it represents a widely accepted racist ideology and the power to deny other racial groups the dignity, opportunities, freedoms, and respect available to the group through a set of socially organized ideas, attitudes, and practices". This shows that racism is not just the result of individual behaviors that insult

each other. Racism is the result of beliefs within the structure of society, which result in unequal treatment of certain groups and limit their opportunities in life. This biased worldview has resulted in physical differences between groups and unequal relationships as a fellow human being.

The example of a real-life case that researchers can provide regarding racism as a reflection of literary representation is the suspected racist attack on four teenage girls in Canada on November 21, 2023. A person was allegedly responsible for attacking the vehicle they were driving with an axe while shouting racist insults. According to the victims, police did not initially take the incident seriously because the victims were black. Although the attack caused fear and trauma to the victims, the authorities did not immediately take serious action (Global News, 2023). Another form of discrimination can be seen based on what happened at a soccer match in Birmingham in 2023. Black player Juninho Bacuna was thrown out of the match for resisting acceptance of racial slurs, and a 52-year-old man was arrested by police on suspicion of breaching public order with racial slurs (BBC, 2023). In both situations, racism and persecution occurred because the cause lay in the initial negative prejudice and aggressive behavior towards black people, even though they had done nothing wrong. The researcher decided to do an analysis of "Devil in a Blue Dress" because it offers a comprehensive and in-depth look into racism in the United States of America after World War II. The narrative illustrates the challenges that people face in a society that is plagued by racial prejudice, as well as the

complex ways in which racism impacts the day-to-day activities of an individual. The researcher uses detective Easy Rawlins journey to examine racism impact on his narrative. The researcher shows how racism influences character relationships and experiences. Easy Rawlins investigative adventures are also introspective. This shows how racism affects everything from career to relationships.

Using the literary sociological theory of Alan Swingewood (1972), the study analyzed how Racism Representation and Its Impact in Walter Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress* represented the systemic, institutional, interpersonal and internal racism experienced by Easy Rawlins and other African-American characters in Los Angeles in 1948. This research shows how Mosley's stories reveal social injustice and discrimination in the society of the time, as well as its impact on the lives and identities of the characters. It also looks at the historical and cultural contexts that influenced their experiences, showing how racism affected interpersonal relationships, institutions, and social norms.

## **1.2. Identification of the Problems**

The research background explained that literature reflects human existence and history. Walter Mosley's *"Devil in a Blue Dress"* explores post-World War II Los Angeles' racial tensions. This book has influenced mystery and literature, while not winning any honors. Easy Rawlins, the protagonist, solves mysteries in Los Angeles' historic neighborhoods while navigating the city's racial tensions.

Racism in the novel *Devil in a Blue Dress* does not simply describe discrimination, but also shows the impact of racial prejudice on African-American characters. Identity, self-discovery, and racism are explored in the work and lead to in-depth discussions about the social and historical conditions of the era. Although it did not win any major awards, Walter Mosley's work still influenced discussions about race. This novel utilized sociology of literature theory developed by Alan Swingewood is used to examine the issue of racism in the novel "*Devil in a Blue Dress*". This theory explains how racism affects individuals and society in terms of job search, legal encounters, and interracial relationships in the novel. This research aims to understand the phenomenon of racism and its impact.

### **1.3. Limitation of the Study**

The main focus of this research is to describe racism in the novel "*Devil in a Blue Dress*". During this research process, real-life experiences will not be taken up in this research. Instead, the research will be limited to the characters and events that occur within the novel itself. The only focus of this research is to acquire an understanding of the different aspects of racism displayed in the narrative.

#### **1.4. Research Questions**

In the context of the problem identification described above, the research problem to be answered in this study is formulated in the form of two questions, which are:

1. How is racism represented in the novel *Devil in a Blue Dress*?
2. What is the impact of racism towards African-American people in America as reflect in *Devil in a Blue Dress*?

#### **1.5. Objectives of The Study**

Through this research, the researcher intends to answer the research problem and find the results of the research objectives. The main objectives of this research include:

- To discover how racism represented in *Devil in a Blue Dress*. thus, this study aims to explore and analyze how the novel "*Devil in a Blue Dress*" presents the theme of racial discrimination. The focus is on understanding the narrative structure and techniques used to portray racial tensions in the story.
- To discover how racism reflects the impact of racism on African-American characters in Los Angeles during the 1940s. By focusing on specific literary evidence and clearly observing its portrayal, this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the social and personal impact of racial discrimination in American culture.

### **1.6. Significance of The Study**

The purpose of this study is to provide a good overview for the English Department, fellow students, and other community members.

Therefore, the main objectives to be achieved in this study are:

1. The purpose of this study is to use sociological theory in studying literary works, with the aim of improving the current resources for analysis, and literary criticism in the English department at Pasundan University.
2. The purpose of this study is to provide a framework for using Alan Swingewood's theory to examine racial bias in novels. This research is expected to provide significant insights for students and academics conducting research related to racial issues.