

**DEFENSE MECHANISM USED TO DEAL WITH TRAUMA CAUSED BY SOCIAL  
ELEMENTS IN THE NOVEL *THE NICKEL BOYS* BY COLSON WHITEHEAD  
(2019)**

**Thesis**

*Submitted as Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement to Obtain Strata One (S1) Degree in  
English Department*



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2023**

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Caused by Social Elements in The Novel The Nickel  
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**Defense Mechanism Used to Deal with Trauma Caused by Social Elements in  
The Novel *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead (2019)**

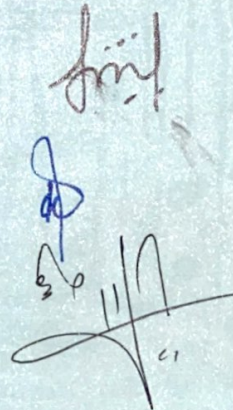
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## ABSTRACT

**Sisla Rahmi, 2023. Defense Mechanism Used to Deal with Trauma Caused By Social Elements In The Novel *The Nickel Boys* By Colson Whitehead (2019).**

**Advisor: Delvi Wahyuni, S.S, M.A.**

This thesis is the analysis of a novel entitled *The Nickel boys* (2019). This analysis finds the social elements such as racism, abuse, segregation. These social elements are caused by trauma to the characters in this novel, because of this trauma, the characters used defense mechanisms to deal with trauma caused by social elements. This thesis uses psychoanalysis theory from the novel entitled *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead (2019). This analysis uses the psychoanalysis literary theory by Sigmund Freud, and uses defense mechanisms from Cloninger's book the titled is *theory of personality*. This research found four defense mechanisms that the characters used to deal with trauma, such as identification, isolation, sublimation, intellectualization. : The data used for this research in the form of quotations, sentences, and phrases related to defense mechanisms and social elements , in the research using elements of literary elements such as plots, characters, identify social elements and defense mechanisms after that categorizing the data through psychoanalysis criticism theory. After categorizing the data and continue to read the novel several times and find related issues. After finding the data, the data uses psychoanalysis literary to analyze the data. The data are examined from books, journals, and articles. Answering research questions based on psychoanalysis theory based on the data in the novel. There are two findings in this research. First,

social elements that cause of trauma. Second, the defense mechanism that the characters used to deal with trauma.

*Key words: social elements, trauma, defense mechanism, nickel academy*

## ABSTRAK

**Sisla Rahmi, 2023. Defense Mechanism Used to Deal with Trauma Caused By Social Elements In The Novel *The Nickel Boys* By Colson Whitehead (2019).**

**Pembimbing: Delvi Wahyuni, S.S, M.A.**

Skripsi ini adalah analisis dari novel berjudul *the nickel boys* (2019). Analisis ini untuk menemukan elemen social seperti rasis, kekerasan, pemisahan. Sosial elemen ini adalah penyebab dari trauma dari karakter, karena trauma ini, karakter karakter menggunakan mekanisme pertahanan untuk melawan trauma. Skripsi ini menggunakan teori sastra psikoanalisis oleh Sigmund Freud, dan menggunakan mekanisme pertahanan dari buku Cloninger yang berjudul *theory of personality*. Penelitian ini menemukan mekanisme pertahanan yang digunakan karakter yang digunakan untuk melawan trauma, seperti *identification, isolation, sublimation, dan intellectualization*. Data yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini dari kutipan, kalimat, dan frasa yang berkaitan dengan mekanisme pertahanan dan elemen sosial. Penelitian ini menggunakan elemen literatur seperti, plot, karakter untuk mengidentifikasi elemen sosial dan mekanisme pertahanan, setelah itu mengkategorikan data dan memulai membaca novel beberapa kali. Setelah menemukan data yang menggunakan teori psikoanalisis untuk menganalisis data. Data dari buku buku, jurnal jurnal, dan artikel artikel. Menjawab pertanyaan berdasarkan teori psikoanalisis yang berdasarkan novel. Dua temuan dalam riset

ini. Pertama sosial elemen yang menyebabkan trauma. Kedua, mekanisme pertahanan yang digunakan karakter untuk melawan trauma.

Kata kunci: *elemen sosial, trauma, mekanisme pertahanan, akademi nikel*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, the writer praises to Allah SWT for all the strength, love, and protection to the writer to finish this thesis entitled “**Defense Mechanism Used to Deal with Trauma Caused by Social Elements to The Characters in The Novel *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead (2019)**”.

The Writer realizes this thesis couldn't finish and complete without my thesis supervisor Delvi Wahyuni, S.S., M.A, thank you for her advice, time, and support. The writer would like to thank to the examiners, Leni Marlina, S.S., M.A., and Dr. Muhd. Al-Hafizh, S.S., M.A. for their input, critics and suggestions to the writer to finish this thesis.

The writer would like to thank to Desvalini Anwar, S.S., M.Hum., Ph.D., as the head of the English Department and Dr. Muhd. Al-Hafizh, S.S, M.A., as the secretary of the English Department, and also the writer's academy advisor Dr. Hamzah to give support and help the writer to finish her study. Also, the writer would like to thank to all the lectures of English language department, Universitas Negeri Padang for all the lessons, knowledges, and supports during the writer's study.

The deepest gratitude to the writer's family, the writer's beloved parents, Mahyunir and Nurhayati (almh) for never ending love and affection for the writer. Also, for my brothers, Alex Pramana Putra, Jeri Kurniawan, Muhammad Ikhsan, for all the strength, love, support to the writer.

The writer also thank my best friend from senior high school (Ratu Fadilah, Silvani Indah Maulidia, Sinta Sulastri, Gustia Darti, Sintia Sapitri). Also for the love and support during the writer's study for *Bondol TBL* (lahtiva Rahmadaniah Putri, Mayang Wahyuni, Sarifia Larasati Putri, Sherina Alsyifa Amran). Also, thank for my friends from Nk'18 and Nk lit'18.

Padang, 13 Februari 2023

The Researcher

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1. Background of The Research**

Every human has a chance of being traumatized. Trauma is caused by several problems or conflicts in human life. Trauma is caused by several things in human life, such as conflict or human life problems. This conflict becomes a horrible experience imprinted on the soul and imprinted in the physical; this unpleasant experience becomes a shadow and has a destructive impact on mental and physical for a long time. Trauma is related to emotions and psychology. According to Figley (2012:14), trauma is defined as incidents and troubled memories, deadly experiences, and disturbing. Trauma occurs because of many things and aspects like natural disasters and social elements like racism, abuse, and violence that can be caused by trauma. Trauma can also be caused by significant conflicts such as war, radical group violence in society, and terrorism. Trauma also can harm a person's life. It can also cause physical injury to someone or trauma caused by an adverse event that had an impact on individual mental and emotional resilience.

Every human has different ways of facing situations, and emotions caused by trauma. Some of them can handle problems and conflicts in a peaceful situation, on the other side some of them are hard to handle emotions in facing problems and decreasing traumatic past events. In this case, this research need to use a defense

mechanism to control this and handle facing the problem or conflict. According to Bowis (2010:156), a defense mechanism is designed for the personality of individuals and approaches psychological therapy and treatment to personality disorders. According to the definition, a defense mechanism is a method to handle problems with different techniques such as projection, displacement, identification, isolation, rationalization, intellectualization, and sublimation.

This novel explains trauma and the defense mechanism that the unconscious uses to protect the person that caused trauma and handle problems with the defense mechanism. *The Nickel Boys* (2019) is a novel written by Colson Whitehead. This novel was awarded as the winner of the 2020 Pulitzer Prize in fiction. The nickel boys are based on a true story from Dozier School. This novel is about an academy or reform school only for boys that have operated for 111 years. Elwood is the main character in this novel. This novel describes life at Nickel Academy, and after leaving nickel academy. This novel depicts many traumatic scenes such as racism, bribery, physical violence, murder, segregation, and sexual harassment. Boys in Nickel Academy have a very traumatic experience. This incident or experience leaves a mental scar that must be passed. After the closing of Nickel Academy, the boys created an online forum to discuss and share their stories. Meanwhile, Turner chose to change his identity. He changed to Elwood's name, who had died in the Nickel Academy.

The possibility of a person being traumatized by several things, such as trauma due to racism, physical abuse, verbal abuse, or segregation. In this case, not everyone who had a bad experience becomes traumatized. Some people who get

symptoms will disappear after several weeks, but some people find it hard to handle emotions in facing the problem and decrease past traumatic events. In this case, the type of people that are traumatized, such as a minority in social society between minority and majority, not only in terms of numbers, but from the point of view of the way they are treated, either from minority to majority or from majority to minority. The majority who cannot accept diversity or differences will lead to oppression. The minority group will determine the relationship nature of the minority group to the majority group will be assimilation into the society itself; this case of the minority is one of the causes of traumatizing some people.

The main character and some characters from this novel got trauma caused by social elements in their life. This trauma is caused by several bad experiences or conflicts that caused trauma. Therefore, not only one factor but also several factors cause trauma. There are causes of trauma discussed in this novel such as racism, bribery, physical violence, murder, segregation, and sexual harassment. Therefore because of this multiple trauma, the main characters use defense mechanisms for facing this multiple trauma.

There are several types of research on defense mechanisms, the study entitled "The Main Characters Defense Mechanism in Cormac Mccarty's Novel on The Road this previous research by Husni Mubarok from the State Islamic University of Sunan Ampel Surabaya. This research is about How is the main character described in The Road novel also What types of defense mechanisms are undergone by the main character in The Road novel. There are several researchers have already discussed this novel but used different points of view. This research

is from Dedi Kurnia P from Universitas Airlangga with the title "Racial Discrimination Toward Curtis Elwood in The Nickel Boys (2019) By Colson Whitehead". This research about discrimination is expressed through its main character. Also, an analyst how the oppression of Curtis Elwood in the novel The Nickel Boys. Meanwhile, the writer of this study is interested in the analyst defense mechanism used to deal with trauma caused by multiple factors in the novel The Nickel Boys (2019) by Colson Whitehead. The second previous research written by Mehvish Bashir and friends entitled "Traumatic Elements of Oppressed Black American: Micro-Aggression in Colson Whitehead's Nickel Boys", this research discussed the identification of micro-aggression and trauma of black people in America. The third previous study was written by Wesley A Hopkin from the University of North Alabama, the United States entitled "The Nickel Boys' Elwood through the Scope of Joseph Campbell's Hero Journey.

The difference between this research with previous research about the issue of defense mechanisms is this research will find trauma caused by multiple factors in the characters and because of that trauma the characters need to use defense mechanisms to deal with their trauma, meanwhile the differences between this research that have already used this novel before, the previous research only focus on one issue such as racial discrimination, abuse, meanwhile, this research will be discussing several issues in this novel and how the characters deal with that issue that becomes of trauma to the characters

Unlike the previous research, this research entitled "Defense Mechanism Used to Deal with Trauma Caused by Social Elements In The Novel in The Nickel

Boys (2019) by Colson Whitehead", What factor causes multiple trauma to the characters in *The Nickel Boys* (2019) by Colson Whitehead, also defense mechanism the characters used to deal with trauma caused by social elements in *The Nickel Boys* (2019) by Colson Whitehead.

### **1.2 Focus of the Problem**

This study will focus on social elements that caused trauma to the characters in *The Nickel Boys* (2019) by Colson Whitehead, also what are defense mechanisms the characters used to deal with trauma caused by social elements in *The Nickel Boys* (2019) by Colson Whitehead.

### **1.3. Research Question**

Two research questions were used to analyze the issues in this novel:

1. What are social elements that caused trauma to the characters in *The Nickel Boys* (2019) by Colson Whitehead?
2. What are defense mechanisms the characters used to deal with their trauma caused by multiple factors in *The Nickel Boys* (2019) by Colson Whitehead?

### **1.4 Purpose of the Study**

This study has some purpose, there are:

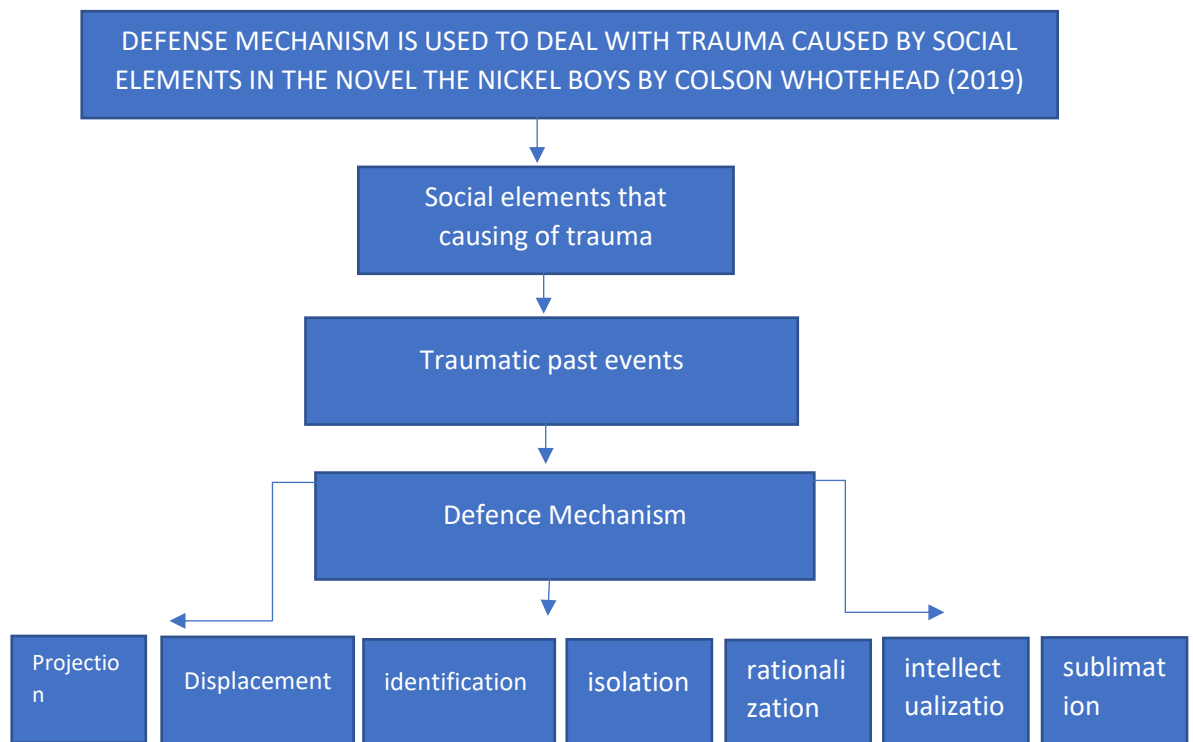
1. To find the social elements that caused trauma to the characters in *The Nickel Boys* (2019) by Colson Whitehead.



- 
2. To identify the types of defense mechanisms the characters used to deal with trauma caused by social elements in *The Nickel Boys* (2019) by Colson Whitehead.

## 1.5 Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework shows the characters got trauma caused by social elements such as abuse, racism, segregation because of this trauma the characters need to use defense mechanisms to deal, to force their trauma.



From this conceptual framework social elements such as abuse, racism, and segregation is caused of trauma that become traumatic past events to the characters in the novel, so because of this trauma, the characters need to used defense mechanism to deal with their trauma such as: projection, displacement, identification, isolation, rationalization, intellectualization, and sublimation.