



STRUCTURAL RACISM IN ANGIE THOMAS'S NOVEL *THE HATE U GIVE* (2017)

Geovani De Silva Ananda¹, Muhd Al-Hafizh²

English Department

Faculty of Languages and Arts

Universitas Negeri Padang

email: geeovanide@gmail.com

Abstract

This article discusses a novel entitled *The Hate U Give* (2017) by Angie Thomas. The issue raises structured racism against African-Americans after the existence of human rights and to find out to what extent the implied author contributed to expressing the issue. This analysis uses Gramsci's Hegemony theory, interpretation of the text and context to dissect the contents of the novel. The results of the analysis shows that structured racism can be seen in two forms: the media and institutions. First of the two is the media as a stereotype circulator and the last of the two the institution discriminates against African-Americans.

Key words: *Structured racism; African-American; stereotype; discrimination*

A. INTRODUCTION

The Hate U Give (2017) a novel written by Angie Thomas, portrays the issue of structural racism. *The Hate U Give* is an acronym of THUG. In urban dictionary, THUG is The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everyone, popularized by American rap artist, 2Pac. Since 1992, THUG Life was a creed to give order to the rise of gang violence and drug dealing. The novel is related to that problem. The main character, Starr Carter, witnessed her friend got shot by police. They were on the way home with a car and then the police stopped them. The officers asked Khalil to exit the car. Due to the difficulty of the situation, he tried to entertain the protagonist with a joke and acted like he wanted to brush his hair. Suddenly, the officer opened fire, shooting him multiple times. The protagonist was raised and live in the Garden Height, a black neighbourhood. She studies in an elite private school in an affluent white part of the city, the Williamson Prep. She stood out in the segregated area as the only African-American admitted into the campus. The society where she lives makes her feel too white while at school she feels too black. Because of that, she differentiates her personality. She never uses slang at school. In her neighbourhood, people are accustomed to drug deals due to economic reason including the victim. He was not in any deals at that time.

¹ English ELLSP of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang graduated on March 2020

² Lecturer of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang



The officer who open fire did not get any charge. This analysis applied an implied author in analysing this novel as structural racism is depicted in two forms: media and society.

This novel is important to be analysed because it is proved that racism still exists in America after the declaration of human rights. Racism in the United States changes became uniformity of forms. It permeates all aspects of life and extends to all communities of colour. Racism dominates and provides a social rationale and philosophical justification for degrading and violence towards people based on colour. The issue also supported by Banks (2000):

“Race” then only applies to non-whites, which explains why, according to Williams, the dominant society resents and represses “race matters,” and why “race . . . tends to be treated as though it were an especially delicate category of social infirmity [analogous to some] unfortunate negotiation of social difference” as a physical disability.” (P.186)

The quotation above shows how racism is aimed towards disadvantaging the colored. The society is easier to accept the bright one in major aspects such as education, health, economy and a place to live. This behaviour is expected to disappear after the ratification of human rights. However, there are other ways to perpetuate power. The ruling class created system of rules that purposely keeps African-Americans behind. This system of rules is called an invisible system. These rules will create barrier to hinder the development of the colored race, especially African-American by segregating public facilities such as schools, restaurants, even something miniscule as separating water fountain at public places. These systemic segregations are eventually incorporated within everyday life and given the name as structural racism.

This system starts from the historical and cultural dimensions that can provide the privileges and the disadvantages of having a colour that adapts from time to time. Structural racism has become a feature of existing social, economic and political systems.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This analysis used the novel *The Hate U Give* (2017) by Angie Thomas has done through text and context-based interpretation. Implied author was a strategy that used to reveal the meaning of the novel. It reflects structural racism by examining narrator’s statement as the observer in this novel. Implied author can be understood in two ways: reading between the lines by reconstructing the story of the text and interpreting the meaning of the text. This analysis deals with the concept of Hegemony by Gramsci.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the issue of structural racism in the novel *The Hate U Give* (2017) by Angie Thomas. Structural racism in this analysis refers to the system in terms of social, institutional and regulations that perpetuate racial group inequality. The protagonist, Starr Carter, and Khalil are the representation of African Americans. They were friends that born and raised in the poor neighbourhood, Garden Height. The implicit interpretation can be applied in revealing the issue as structural racism can be seen in two forms: media and society.

1. Media

The media as a stereotype circulator. In Advanced English Dictionary (2020), media means the journalists and other professionals who comprise the mass communication industry. The media which should be neutral instead openly show partiality by serving racial prejudice and stereotypes through African American. In Khalil's accident, the media guided their audience to believe that the police who opened fire Khalil did a great job. The media showed how people live in Garden Heights (shootouts are common occurrences) and what job they are doing (selling drugs). The media who interview the protagonist only questioning her about the victim's job and did not asking about the chronology or what actually happened. This condition is depicted from the following quotation:

“Do you know why he was at the party?” Gomez asks.
Why does anybody go to a party? To party. I assume it was for recreational purposes,” I say. “He and I talked about things going on in our lives.”
 “What kind of things?” she questions. (P.99)

The protagonist was interviewed in the quotation above. However, all the questions only questioning the victim. In utterance, "*why he was at the party*," showing the mistrust. By reading between the lines, the media wants to shows that the victim died because of himself (Khalil's job) by only questioning what and why they were at the party. In hegemony by Gramsci, leading with knowledge started with history book. At one point in the history, African-Americans were written off as uncivilized and uneducated people, eventually leading to be a stereotype. The African American here was automatically judged as a bad person because of the stereotype that people perceive about them. The media keep questioning the party because of the reputation it holds on people in the neighbourhood.

After the first protest of "*Just Us Justice*," the media interview the one-fifteen's family. The reporter played with the point of view and then show the impression of one-fifteen in his family as supported by the quotation:

But while the riots are my fault, the news makes it sound like its Khalil fault he died.

“There are multiple reports that a gun was found in the car,” the anchor claims. “There is also suspicion that the victim was a drug dealer as well as a gang member. Officials have not confirmed if any of this is true.” (P.140)

By the quotation, it shows his family’s defense. However, the reported lied about the hairbrush and write is off as a handgun. Gramsci’s thought about hegemony is the predominance obtained by consent rather than force of one class or group over other classes. In the situation, the media permit one-fifteen as a good officer who only does his job. Another disadvantage is that the victim lives in a bad neighbourhood, thus lowering his image further as mentioned by quotation below:

“Officer Brian Cruise Jr. Has been on the force for sixteen years,” the voice-over says, and more pics of him as a cop are shown. He’s been a cop for as long as Khalil was alive, and I wonder if in some sick twist of fate Khalil was only born for this man to kill. “A majority of those years have been spent serving in Garden Heights,” the voice-over continues, “a neighbourhood notorious for gangs and drug dealers.”(P.241-242)

Implicitly, the quotation above shows it is the victim's fault that led him to his own demise due to few reasons; first, he was a drug dealer and second, he lives in a bad environment. The media only blew these up as a way to gain viewership and circulate the stereotype mentioned above. The media did not investigate the reason why the victim did that job and use its power to influence others into believing and spreading misinformation for the supremacist’ gain.

The newspaper published Khalil’s black hairbrush to reinforce why the officer open fire, by the quotation:

Ms. O’frah opens a folder that’s on her desk, takes a piece of paper out, and pushes it toward me. It’s a photograph of Khalil’s black hairbrush, the one he used in the car. “That’s the so-called gun,” Ms. O’frah explains. “Officer Cruise claims he saw in the car door, and he assumed Khalil was reaching for it. The handle was thick enough, black enough, for him to assume it was a gun.” “And Khalil was black enough,” Daddy adds. (P. 214-215)

By the quotation above, it shows people’s perception with African American. It is proved that no matter what they do or say, it would only leads to bad things. The way the media defend one fifteen, who is the representation of the society itself, shows the failure of the declaration of human rights.

2. Institution

The institution discriminates against African Americans. In Merriam Webster (2020), institution is defined as an established organization or corporation especially of a public character. In the novel, the institution refers to school and police. The discrimination can be seen through the number of African American student who studied in William Prep and the punishment of the police. The protagonist is the only one African American who studied in William Prep. Also, the protagonist experienced verbal racism in the form of jokes, or more severe case which is bullying. There are several instances of African-American unjustified shootings in the novel and it shows the cops who shot the unarmed African American are innocent.

I just have to be normal Starr at normal Williamson and have a normal day. That means flipping the switch in my brain so I'm Williamson Starr. Williamson Starr doesn't use slang—if a rapper would say it, she doesn't say it, even if her white friends do. Slang makes them cool. Slang makes her "hood." Williamson Starr holds her tongue when people piss her off so nobody will think she's the "angry black girl." Williamson Starr is approachable. No stank-eyes, side-eyes, none of that. Williamson Starr is non-confrontational. Basically, Williamson Starr doesn't give anyone to call her ghetto. (P.73-74)

From the quotation, the protagonist tries to be different from how she normally behaves and chooses to create a new version of herself, the Williamson Starr. By using this character, it shows that she has been influenced to hate herself for behaving like African-Americans. The hate had already seeped into her mind and conscious, ruining her life little by little. By using the implicit interpretation, society successfully leads people to believe that white people are the role model of how to behave, thus creating the white supremacy movement. The problem the protagonist faced is caused by unbelievable peer pressure from her surroundings as they do not openly accept who she is because of her race and start to show her how to behave by putting her down in "her rightful place."

The disadvantage of having a colored skin is having a job. Due to disparity level of education, African-American cannot apply for the same job as Whites. The quote below supports it by:

"Right. Lack of opportunities," Daddy says. "Corporate America don't bring jobs to our communities, and they damn sure ain't quick to hire us." (P. 168)

From the quotation, using the implicit interpretation, the protagonist's father explains to her that their community does not have any opportunity to

get a job. It could be proven by the number of African Americans that are working in police department and hospital. Companies in the United States do not want to hire them, and if they do, they make sure that the African-Americans are the last choice as can be seen by the result of the survey for National Public Radio, Robert Johnson Foundation, and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health in 2017. It shows that more than half of the African-American people who are asked about their experiences of having racism in applying for jobs, say that they are discriminated against the rule when they try to apply for a job.

The protagonist lives in a poor neighborhood. Drugs indicate violence. The gunshot is common here:

“The sunsets. We're in the middle of saying grace over pot roast and potatoes when the first gunshots ring out. We open our eyes. Sekani flinches. I'm used to gunshots, but these are louder, faster. One barely sounds off before another's right behind it.” (P.136)

The quotation described on the night after Khalil's funeral visualizes the situation in the Garden Height is getting worse. There are gunshots everywhere, but by utterance "*I'm used to gunshots,*" indicates that it is normal occurrences in Garden Height. The Garden Height is described as a poor neighborhood, with an unhealthy environment controlled by two hostile gangs, one of them called the Kings. The protagonist's father was in the Kings. Later on in his life, he decides to leave the gang for his wife and kid's safety.

In contrast in another neighborhood, they live in peace and have no worries as the quote proves down below:

I used to think the sun shone brighter out here in Uncle Carlo's neighborhood, but today it really does—there's no smoke lingering, and the air is fresher. All the houses have two stories. Kids play on the sidewalks and in the big yards. There are lemonade stands, garage sales, and lots of joggers. Even with all that going on, it's really quiet. (P.154)

Her uncle, Carlos, lives in the neighborhood mentioned above, Riverton Hill. The protagonist describes it as a healthy environment where the air is fresh and parents have no problem leaving their children to play outside. She also mentions that children can play around means is a very safe neighborhood. In the end, she also says that it is a quiet place even with so many activities in the neighborhood. By using the implicit interpretation, the protagonist shows the disparity between her neighborhood she used to live in compared with Riverton Hill. It also implies the contradiction or the border between them.

Institution who distinguishes Africa America that goes to humiliation by the white is still happening. In her daily life, the protagonist got racial joke:

Hailey didn't come. Her dad didn't want her spending the night in "the ghetto." I overheard my parents say that. (P.39)

The quotation shows the reason why her friend's father does not approve Maya and Hailey to come and visit her in Garden Height. Hailey, who was white, was not able to come because her father does not want her daughter to spend the night in "*The Ghetto*." The ghetto is a word used to address a part of the city especially the slum area where the minority lives. By using implicit interpretation, it clearly shows that Hailey's father indirectly humiliates the protagonist's family and also the other African American as a whole that live in a slum and he will not allow her daughter to spend her time in that kind of place.

The protagonist's parents educated their children on how to react when the police come. It is something uncommon but they were living in a bad environment and as the African American:

My parents haven't raised me to fear the police, just to be smart around them. They told me it's not smart to move while a cop has his back to you.

Khalil does. He comes to his door.

It's not smart to make a sudden move.

Khalil does. He opens the driver's door.

"You okay, Starr—" *Pow!*

One. Khalil's body jerks. Blood splatters from his back. He holds on to the door to keep himself upright.

Pow!

Two. Khalil gasps.

Pow! Three.

Khalil looks at me, stunned.

He falls to the ground. (P.27)

The quotation above shows that, by using the implicit interpretation, the action of the police is completely unjustified. First, the victim was unarmed. Second, there is nothing suspicious found in his car. Indeed, the victim does not follow the police officer's order to do not move when he goes back to his patrol car. However, by shooting him three times on his back because he just wanted to check the protagonist's condition was excessive. The sudden move the victim makes to check on the protagonist does not give the police officer enough justification to open fire and shoot him dead. The riot caused another problem. It could harm innocent people:

Sirens wail outside. The news shows three patrol cars that have been set ablaze at the police precinct, about a five-minute drive away from us. A gas station near the freeway gets looted, and the owner, this Indian man, staggers around bloody, saying he didn't have anything to do with Khalil's death. A line of cops guards the Walmart on the east side.

My neighborhood is a war zone. (P. 138)

The quotation visualizes the chaos of the Garden Height when people try to speak up about Khalil's death. "*A War*," will always disserve all of the

parties involved, and the innocent people will end up being disadvantaged, the Indian man in the data is one of the examples.

The discriminate she got from her daily life makes her to questioning what she did wrong and why everybody hates her people. However, she is not mad. Meanwhile, she keep doing good by stopped the riots with “put your hands up. This is not a gun.”

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The issue of structural racism is revealed in a novel *The Hate U Give* (2017) written by Angie Thomas. The implicit interpretation contributes to shining the light to the meaning beyond the novel. Text-based and context-based are important strategies in uncovering the issue of structural racism. This analysis also deals with the concepts of hegemony by Gramsci. Structural racism in this novel refers to the system in terms of social, institutional and regulatory that perpetuate racial group inequality. Through implicit interpretation, it can be examined that structural racism has done in two forms: media and society. THUG Life in this analysis reflects to both the racism that is done by an individual or institution.

Media judges subjectively by preaching the bad things only about African-Americans. In society, African-Americans has been stereotyped by the lack of socioeconomic status and under educated., African-Americans who was only paid as workers has no option other than living in a slum area. Besides, it is hard for them because most African-American at the time have to live paycheck-to-paycheck to made it through the day. Understandably, the point mentioned above contributed to their low level of education and their variation of job cause of their race.

The Hate U Give can be symbolized as a voice to fight back. The hate is used as a power against racial inequality they have faced in their whole life. The society speaks up about unity in diversity but in contrary, must follows their wishes.

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