



## **SYSTEMIC RACIAL IN STEPHEN ADLY *GUIRGIS'S* PLAY *BETWEEN RIVERSIDE AN CRAZY* (2015)**

**Norazlin<sup>1</sup>, Muhd. Al-Hafizh<sup>2</sup>**

English Department

Faculty of Languages and Arts

Universitas Negeri Padang

email: [norazlinjee@gmail.com](mailto:norazlinjee@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

This article is about the analysis of a play *Between Riverside and Crazy* (2015) by Stephen Adly Guirgis. The problem of this analysis focuses on the issue of Systemic Racial. Systemic racial reflects the gap between White Americans and African Americans. The aim of this analysis is to find out the form of Systemic racial and to what extent it does in fictional devices. The analysis deals with Joe R. Feagin's concept of oppression. The result of this analysis shows that the discrimination and oppression happened to African Americans that cause by White Americans.

**Key words:** *Racism, Oppression, Discrimination*

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Humans are social creatures it means humans as citizen of society. In daily life, humans cannot live alone or meet their own needs. Even though they have position and wealth, they always need another human. However, humans also have bad character. They can evaluate humans from their behaviors, body shape, skin color.

According to Oxford Dictionary (2022) racism is the belief that some races of people are better than others, or a general belief about a whole group

<sup>1</sup> English ELLSP of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang graduated on December 2022

<sup>2</sup> Lecturer of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang



of people based only on their race. It means how humans make a group of people based on skin of color. They make a boundary between white people and black people that make the position of black people under white people.

Racial inequality is the inequality of opportunity and treatment that results from race. It can also be defined as limited economic and social opportunities distributed according to racial boundaries (Kerbo 1983, p. 250). Societies with high racial inequality are characterized by significant racial and ethnic differences in areas such as housing, education, income from work, and medical care. In social science, racial inequality is typically defined as imbalances in the distribution of power, economic resources, and opportunities.

These days, racial inequality still continues in numerous nations. It happens in unpretentious ways. Whereas it can be open and undisguised, it is not continuously simple to recognize. Individuals frequently think of racial inequality in terms of obvious activities, but it too exists inside systems, organizations, and societies. It is implanted within the reality of daily life. It can be promptly clear, but it can moreover be unobtrusive.

Racial inequality is divided into three types; structural, institutional and individual. Firstly, structural racial inequality refers to the interplay of policies, practices and programs of differing institutions which leads to adverse outcomes and conditions for communities of color compared to a white community that emerges in the context of racialized historical and cultural conditions. Secondly, institutional inequality related to policies, practice, and procedures that work to the benefit of white people and the detriment of people of color, usually unintentionally or inadvertently. Lastly, individual racial inequality is prejudice, bias, stereotypes or generalizations about an individual or group based on race. The impacts of racial inequality on individuals white people and people of color (internalized privilege and oppression). Individual racism can result in illegal discrimination.

According to Fryer Roland, racial [inequality](#) is an American tradition. It has manifested in American society in ways ranging from racial disparities in wealth, poverty rates, bankruptcy, housing patterns, educational opportunities, unemployment rates, and incarceration rates. Compared to whites, blacks earn 24% less, live five years less, and are imprisoned six times more often on certain days (Roland G. Fryer, Jr.). Scientists suggest that the large health inequalities between African Americans and White Americans are due to differences in access to good health care, health insurance and preventive care. Low-wage, low-skill, part-time non-welfare work is dominated by colored races in the United States, creating a working poor class (Kerbo, H. R. 1983).

Racial profiling, along with the more severe convictions of African-Americans convicted of crime, has led to their over representation in American prisons, and as a result, is less likely to re-enter mainstream society. Racial inequality continues to exist in the United States, as society is built around racial boundaries in favor of whites. Racial inequality persists because it lies in a "colorblind" society that is deeply rooted in racist practices that are largely ignored.

In America, there is a long history of White people having more power than the racial groups, especially black people. Although many people think of racial inequality as decreasing, there are still privileges that are experienced by White Americans that are not true for other racial groups (McIntosh's 1998). Indeed, after the 1954–1968 civil rights movement, the lives of African-Americans in the United States are changing. Many people state that African-American's life is much better than before. However, this situation is not that fine. Racial inequality continues to present today. For instance, police brutality toward African-Americans.

The presence of police brutality which coordinated at African Americans appears that a systemic racial inequality is still there indeed in this present day period. Many researchers found that African-Americans shot by the police without any reason. The law in the United States stated that this issue is a legal act of self-defense. The United States has a long history of treating blacks as inhumane and dangerous. In particular, dangerous black male stereotypes have been used to scare white citizens and motivate them to chain slaves and punish them for extreme criminal judgments and death. So that non Black people perceiving that action is a self-defense of the police. In fact, that racist act is a systemic racism that embedded in the United States.

The deep racial inequities that exist today are a direct result of structural racial inequality: the historical and contemporary policies, practices, and norms that create and maintain white supremacy. Thus, it is claimed that such racial inequality that happen in America is multifaceted and systemic.

The idea of systemic racial inequality is one of the themes that can be discussed in the play *Between Riverside And Crazy* (2015) by Stephen Adly Guirgis. The play *Between Riverside And Crazy* (2015) by Stephen Adly Guirgis shows about police officers' life in America. The play shows the differences legal treatment between white and black characters. There are seven characters of the play consisting of five black characters and two white characters. Firstly, Walter "Pops" Washington. He is the protagonist of this play. He is a retirement black police officer. He retired from the police because he was shot by a white cop. So then he fights for justice. However what he got after the violence was not justice but systematic discrimination. He is forced to close the cases he is suing or his life will be tortured and deprived of his rights as a retired civil servant. Then, Junior who is Pops's son. He is one of the targets of injustice that his father got because his father wanted to fight the government system in America. Junior's life is threatened with going in and out of prison and his criminal case will be exaggerated in the media. The next characters are Oswald and Lulu who are Junior's friend and girlfriend. They are the witnesses of racial inequality that faces by Pops. The other influential character is Church Lady who is the lady who helping Pops in healing his depression after got systemic racial inequality. Secondly, white characters; Detective O'connor and Lieutenant Caro. They were white cops who persuaded Pops to drop his lawsuit. They are messengers sent by the government so that Pops does not fight for his justice.

There are two articles that related to the play *Between Riverside and Crazy* (2015) by Stephen Adly Guirgis. First the study by Julia Crooijmans (2018), entitled "*Between Riverside and Crazy*" takes on police violence, class and race. It contains about the discrimination that get by Pops, the black retire police officers. The writer focuses on the distinct treatment between black white police. Second study is the study by Crish Joseph (2017), entitled *GableStage's Between Riverside and Crazy Follows a Black Cop Grappling With Racism*. It shows about the complexity of black police officer's life. Inthe article, the writer stated that the character of the play faces not only discrimination but also a dilemma case. The black man got shot is not a common black people but also a police. In spite of he was a police but he cannot get the injustice for his case. Both articles and this analysis have differences. This analysis focuses on the issue of the systemic racial inequalityshowed by the retirement black police officer. In the play, the ex - police was getting shot six time eight years ago. It forces him to retire of being a police at that time. The ex-black police strive to get the injustice for his case but thefact is contradictory. He forced to agree of the settlement that offers by the government. The one and only thing he got after the retirement is his apartment in the riverside. However, if he still wants to fight the government, he will get discrimination. For example, in this play, the white cop stated that the ex-black police had to pay ten times the rent for his apartment. News of hisson who is a drug addict is threatened to be disseminated and the punishment for his son will be extended. Therefore, this problem is important to be discussed. Racial inequality is not just doing by common white people. It is done by the government toward the black people. The racial inequality is happen in a subtle way. It is multifaceted and systemic.

## B. RESEARCH METHOD

This research is qualitative research. According to Endaswara (2011), qualitative research is a way in describing the result of the research which the data is possessed in the form of words and pictures. The research is being the key features of the instrument of the research and the crucial point is the process than result because it based on interpretation. The research will gather the data that is related with the issue of systemic racial in play *BetweenRiverside and Crazy* (2015) by Stephen Adly Guirgis.

The analysis of play *Between Riverside and Crazy* (2015) by Stephen Adly Guirgis's is analyzed through conversation between characters and based interpretation. The play is also analyzed by using fictional devices on play such as characters, plot (conflict), and setting. These devices connected to each other and give the contribution in revealing the meaning of the play. Characters are used to reveal the issue about Systemic Racial Inequality which done by white people in America. Plot is used to find out the conflicts between the characters. Setting deals with the situation, atmosphere, and condition faced by main characters in the play. In addition, this analysis deals with the concept of Oppression Approaches by Joe R. Feagin.

## C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the issue of Systemic Racial Inequality in Stephen Adly Guirgis's play "*Between Riverside and Crazy (2015)*". Systemic Racial in this analysis refers to African-Americans who get unfair treatment from White-American. The dramatic elements such as character, plot (conflict), setting and stage direction contribute in uncovering the meaning beyond the play. Text-based and context-based interpretation also have the important role in discovering the issue of Systemic Racial. This play shows the differences in legal treatment between white and black characters. Systemic racism is not just done by common white people, but it is done by the government toward the black people. In addition, there are seven characters of the play consisting of five black characters and two white characters. The concept of oppression by Joe R. Feagin are used to analyze the play.

### 1. The forms of Systemic Racial

Systemic racial is a form of racism that implanted within the laws and controls of society or an organization. White-American oppression kept African-Americans down by crushing them physically, psychologically and in many other ways. The White-American always give failed treatment to African-American that makes them uncomfortable. The government makes White-American superior and black are inferior. The Government appears as the most important institutions in the racialization process because their actors have imbedded the "race" category into many public policies and laws. The racist attitude that occurs is an injustice that is not visible but is deeply embedded in institutions in various countries, especially in the United States. According to Joe R. Feagin, there are six forms of systemic racial, but in this analysis will consist of three forms:

#### 1.1 Alienated Social Relation.

In the United States, it is a common issue that African Americans being alienated by white. White as the oppressor has created and constructed the social arrangement of African Americans who have lost control over their own life. African Americans just make relations with people who have the same position as them. African Americans cannot be free to do what they want in their life. It makes them cannot reach something much better for their life. In social life, the living environment of black is only around them. It is can be seen in the quotation below:

Oswaldo : ... oh snap, hold up. This guy in the *Post*, I know him!

Pop : Let me see that umm-hmm, just what I thought! Oswaldo : What?

Pop : Oswaldo, three morning of five, you start up with, "oh I know this dude in the paper"

Oswaldo : But I know a lot of people

Pop : Yeah, but do you know any people who ain't criminals, Oswaldo?! Cuz it's neverthe guy who rescued the puppy that you know.

Or the brother saved a baby from a burnin' building. But any motherfuckerperpetrates a felony an ends up in the *New York Post* that's always the mother- fucker you know!" (p.8)

From this quotation above explain how White Americans alienated African American from their social life. Because of that, African Americans can only relate to certain groups of people like, fellow black, criminals, drugs user, robber, etc. From this quotation, we can see that character Oswaldo only knew certain people. It is like a criminal, the guy who rescued the puppy, or the brother saved a baby from a burnin' building. It is means that these people live in the same neighborhood as Oswaldo. The sentence "*Yeah, but you know any people who ain't criminals, Oswaldo?!*" means that the character Pop wants Oswaldo to have extensive social relationships. However, it is can be a form of awareness from Pop to Oswaldo that he does not deserve to know better people or other people like white people.

African Americans not only be alienated from their social life, but also in terms of food and drink. It is can be seen in the quotation below:

"Detective O'connor : And I freaking out  
because Walter, he actually slows  
the car down so I could light the  
the guy' cigarette.

Pops : Then the motherfucker asks can we  
stop and grab him a Pepsi.

Detective O'connor : Not Pepsi, beer! Drunk,  
bleeding out, blood everywhere, knife  
in his head, he wants a beer." (p.23)

From this quotation above shows that how White Americans alienated African Americans in terms of food or drink. Character Detective O'Connor is a White African. In this quotation, we see how character Detective O'Connor underestimate African Americans. He thinks that "*Pepsi*" it is not for African Americans. It is because all black that he know always drink a beer. He also think that black it is people who like to get drunk. This causes them alienated African Americans from their social life.

## **1.2 Constant Struggle and Resistance by All Means Available**

This feature become the most important dimension in systemic racism, it is because of their constant resistance to that racism by African Americans and other Americans of color. It means that in this section we can see the struggle of African Americans to get their rights as citizens in the United States. By their resistance, African Americans as well as other Americans of color, have created a long battle for extended social equity and voted based system, a battle proceeding nowadays. The struggle of African Americans can be seen in the quotation below:

“Lieutenant Caro : Your father, Junior, I never  
Did have the pleasure to work with  
him, but everything Audrey tells me  
is nothing but he was one of the great  
ones and I don’t just hear that from

Audrey. And by the way your comment  
before about your father’s take-home  
pay? You oughta keep in mind that  
when your father came up in the  
force in the late ‘70s, being a black  
guy didn’t exactly put on the fast  
track for career advancement, yet  
he served with distinction an valor.  
And to that I say once more: “Salud,  
Mr. Washington!”(p.24)

From this quotation above show the struggle of African American people to survive under the pressure of White Americans. In this quotation, we can see how White Americans feel proud of the achievements obtained by black. We also see that African Americans people it’s hard to get promoted, but the main character a police officer who always served with distinction and valor. He struggles to keep his job even though it is hard because he has to compete with whites.

The other struggle of African Americans also be seen in the quotation below:

“Lieutenant caro: C’mon, you’re gonna lose  
this apartment first off, that’s  
number one.

Detective O’connor: Walter, you’ve been  
with multiple subpoenas already,  
from your landlord, no?

Pops: how you know about that?

Detective O’connor: They’ll toss you out of here, Walter. You’re paying  
fifteen hundred a month for a palatial mansion on Riverside Drive worth  
ten times that you don’t think they want you out of here?

Pops: I got a lease and it’s legal”. (p.29)

From this quotation below we can see how the main character defend their residence. He do not want his apartment taken by the landlord. He convinces the police that the place that he lives in is legal. From this quotation, we also see that the main character who is African Americans not afraid to voice their rights. He thinks that he have the rights to stay in his apartment with his children. The other reason why the main character not afraid is that he is an ex-cop and he knows about the laws.

### 1.3 Related Racial Domination: Discrimination in many aspect.

The White supremacy that causes racial domination to the detriment of non-Whites remains a complex issue that is hard to get rid of. The racial domination and oppression has involved discrimination against women, men, and children of color in many institutional areas besides the economy. According to Oxford Languages (2022) domination is the exercise of control or influence over someone or something, or the state of being so controlled. It means that how White American has control African Americans in the United States. However, in this topic we have to find the unfair treatment that African Americans get from discrimination of White Americans.

This oppression also include education, politics, housing, health care, policing, and public accommodations. In this section we have to see how White supremacy dominated African Americans in United States. The racial domination can be seen in the quotation below:

“Pops: “Do I like myself?” Hell no! Do I drink?

Hell yes! Thirty years, I gave everything to the job, and you got the nerve to come at me with: “ whose fault is that really, Walter” that white rookie opened fire on me, Audrey! And he called me “nigger” while he did it. Six shot N.I.G.G.E.R that’s what that was! He shot everything black in the whole joint and somehow didn’t hit anything white. Now how the fuck is that possible and don’t I have the same right a anybody else to sip on a damn margarita and not get shot the fuck up in the process?”. (p.34)

From this quotation above we can see that how African Americans get the discrimination from White Americans, it is shown by retired black police officer. The setting in this text refers to discrimination toward the situation of black that discriminated by white. In this quotation, we can see that the ex-police was getting shot six times eight years ago. It forces him to retire of being a police at the time. It is because the main character get shot by white cop whose position is below the main character. At the time of the incident, he was not wearing the attributes of a policeman. This caused that makes the main character felt that there is injustice experienced as a black policeman. He felt that the discrimination that White Americans do to African Americans give a bad impact. For example, the main character loses her job and ruins his life.



The discrimination that experienced by African Americans also can be seen in the quotation below:

“Detective O’connor : Walter, do you honestly  
Believe I could ever be engaged to  
a man ho would ever think like you  
described much less speak like that?”

Pops : I don’t know, Audrey, it’s been a while  
And you wrong, Dave: it is about being  
black. Always has been, always will be and  
who the fuck are you to try and tell a black  
man otherwise?” (p.32)

From this quotation, we can see the other discrimination experienced by African Americans. The statement “*it is about being black. Always has been, always be..*” shows feeling of despair that felt by African Americans that was caused by White Americans. They thought that they cannot be brave against White Americans. It is because they have no power or acceptance from other groups. Besides that, this discrimination also makes African American life be under pressure of White Americans.

There is the other quotation about discrimination that experienced by African Americans below:

“Lieutenant Caro: No one’s saying you aren’t black.  
Who’s saying you’re not black? No one’s  
saying anything about any- thing except to  
offer you a settlement You should’ve  
taken eight years ago. We’re all cops here,  
Walter, right? No Black, no white just  
blue.

Pops: This ain’t about no black, white or blue,  
this is about the green, Jack and I was  
white, they woulda given me my five  
million years ago.” (p.31)

From this quotation above we can see that there are many colors become representative of the discriminative itself. There is external conflict between White American and African American. Before that, we have to know what is the meaning of color that has been inside the quotation.

First, white means a group of people who have a power to control all around them. Second, black means a group of people who always get discrimination from white. Third, blue can be seen as a neutral color because blue represents the sky and the sea. It also means that blue be in the middle because it can be above and below. Fourth, green is soothing, and the colors found in these leaves are beneficial for reducing stress. It means that green is outside of white and black. From the sentence “*Jack and I was white, they woulda given me my five million years ago*” it means that African Americans get injustice from White Americans. African Americans cannot get their rights because they are black people.

The discrimination experienced by African American also can be seen in quotation above:

“Detective Connor: The night you got shot, Walter  
you were off duty, you never ID’d  
yourself as a police officer, and your  
blood alcohol level was one for the record  
books!

Pops: So I got good and stinkin’ drunk on my own  
dime, on my own time, and then the white  
rookie comes, opens fire on me and that’s my  
fault?” (p.33)

From this quotation we can see that when the main character got shot, he not ready or he not on duty. There is external conflict between White American and African American. So, it is can be a chance to white to conquer the black one. It is happened because the main character do not used his ID card that make white police do not know who is he. White police also see that the main character get drunk, it is make white police think that the main character is ordinary black people. However, because this incident the main character feels blamed and very harmed.

#### **D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

Between Riverside and Crazy by Stephen Adly Guirgis (2015) reflects the issues about Systemic racial. This play shows about police officers’ life in America. The dramatics elements such as character, plot (conflict), setting and stage direction contribute in uncovering the meaning beyond the play. Text-based and context-based interpretation also have the important rule in discovering the issue Systemic Racial. The play also shows the differences legal treatment between white and black characters. Systemic Racial inequality reflects the gap between White an African American. White privileges is the main factor of exploitation and discrimination of African American.

This analysis used Oppression Approaches by Joe R. Feagin assist theoretical approach to analyze White’s racism and oppression towards African American in the United States. According to Joe R. Feagin, there are six forms of systemic racial inequality, but in this analysis will be consist of three forms such as Alienated Social Relations, Constant struggle and Resistance but All means available and Related racial domination: Discrimination in many aspects.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Cooley, Erin., Brown-Iannuzzi, Jazmin., Cottrell, D'Jonita. (2019). *Liberals perceive more racism than conservative when police shoot Black men but, reading about whitr privilege increase perceived racism, and shifts attributions of guilt, regardless of political ideology.* <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2019.103885>
- Croojiman, Julia. (2018). “*Between Riverside and Crazy*” takes on police violence, class and race. Retrieved on March 8th, 2020. <https://huntnewsnu.com/54513/lifestyle/reviews/between-riverside-and-crazy-takes-on-police-violence-class-and-race/>
- De Angeline, Joseph., Kupchik, Aaron. (2009). *Juornal of Criminal Justice: Ethnicity, trust, and acceptance of authority among police officers.* 0047-2352. Doi:10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2009.04.007
- Feagin, Joe. R (2006). *Systemic Racism : A Theory of Oppression*, New York: Routledge.
- G Jr, Fryer. Roland. (2011). Racial inequality in the 21st century: The declining significance of discrimination. In *Handbook of labor economics* (Vol. 4, pp. 855-971). Elsevier.
- Guirgis, S. A. (2016). *Between riverside and crazy*. Dramatists Play Service, Inc..
- Harris, Nathan. (2006). *Reintegrative Shaming, Shame, and Criminal Justice*. Retrieved on February 22th, 2020. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227509365\\_Reintegrative\\_Shaming\\_Shame\\_and\\_Criminal\\_Justice](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227509365_Reintegrative_Shaming_Shame_and_Criminal_Justice)
- Joseph, Crish. (2017). *GableStage’s Between Riverside and Crazy Follows a Black Cop Grappling with Racism*. Retrieved on March 20th, 2020. <https://www.miaminewtimes.com/arts/gablestages-between-riverside-and-crazy-follows-a-black-cop-grappling-with-racism-9068637>
- Kerbo, Harold, R. (1983). *Social stratification and inequality: class conflict in the United States*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

“Calling in Black” to “Calling for Antiracism Resources”: the need for systemic resources to address systemic racism. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*.

Macpherson, Sir William. (1999). *'Intitutional racism':20 years since Stephen Lawrence inquiry*. Retrieved on Mai 10th, 2022.

Ostertag, S. F., & Armaline, W. T. (2011). Image isn't everything: Contemporary systemic racism and antiracism in the age of Obama. *Humanity & Society*, 35(3), 261-289.

Tourse, R. W., Hamilton-Mason, J., & Wewiorski, N. J. (2018). *Systemic racism in the United States*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International. Book.

Yance-Bragg, N'dea. (2021). *What is systemic racism? Here's hat it means and how you can help dismantle it*. Retrieved on June 20th, 2021.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/06/15/systemic->

McCluney, C. L., King, D. D., Bryant, C. M., & Ali, A. A. (2020). From [racism-what-does-mean/5343549002/](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/06/15/systemic-racism-what-does-mean/5343549002/)

“Definition of Racism”. (2022). Oxford Learners Dictionary. Retrieved on Juli,10th, 2022.

“Definition of Domination”. (2022). Oxford Language. Retrieved on August 8th, 2022.