



SOCIAL ELEMENTS THAT CAUSING TRAUMA TO THE CHARACTERS IN *THE NICKEL BOYS* (2019) BY COLSON WHITEHEAD

Sisla Rahmi¹, Delvi Wahyuni²
English Department
Faculty of Languages and Arts
Universitas Negeri Padang
email: sislarahmi1806@gmail.com

Abstract

This thesis is used psychoanalysis theory from the novel entitled *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead (2019) this thesis focus on what factors or elements causes trauma to the characters in *The Nickel Boys* (2019) by Colson Whitehead. The analysis is used psychoanalysis theory by Sigmund Freud. This thesis also find the defense mechanism the characters used to deal with trauma caused by social elements.

Key words: Trauma, Defense Mechanism, Nickel Academy

A. INTRODUCTION

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.

This novel explains trauma and the defense mechanism that the unconscious uses to protect the person that caused trauma and handle problems

¹ English ELLSP of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang graduated on March 2023

² Lecturer of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang



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.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This research used the qualitative method in the novel entitled “*The Nickel Boys* (2019) by Colson Whitehead. According to Mason (2002), qualitative method research is used to explore various dimensions of the social world, experiences, understanding, explanation, and arguments. This source of data is used for this research in the form of quotations, sentences, and phrases in the novel that related to issues factors that causing of trauma and how to del with trauma using defense mechanism. Psychoanalysis literary theory used to analyze this novel. The object of the research is the novel written by Colson Whitehead in 2019 entitled “*The Nickel Boys*”.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The factors that causing of trauma

1.1. Physical abuse

According to Engel (2005:27), physical abuse consists of physical scar caused by physical harm, beating, bites, burn, and other physical injury. In this novel the students of nickel academy get physical abuse from academy.

Elwood caught sight of a football field where some boys scrimmaged and yelled [...] Elwood tried not to stare at the marks on the others boys' body as they dressed. Both of them had a long lumpy line scars and what looked like burns marks. He never saw Franklin and Bill after that day. The school had more than six hundred students; the white boy went down the hill and black boy went up the hill [...] “They walked to the colored housing. Elwood's posture unscrewed. He was scared of place that was run by men like Spencer and what that meant for his time there to be under the eyes of men who like to threats and relished the effect of their threats on people but perhaps the black staff looked after their own [...] where Spencer was severe and intimidating.” (p.40)

This quotation show a white house located in the center of nickel academy, a white house which not means white as a holy but the opposite white house where the nickel students got abuse and beaten “beating

room had a bloody mattress” this show this place inhumanity activity in this place. “The beating room” is the room where the students get violence from the houseman.

Another quotation of physical abuse that show in this novel. In the nickel academy there is a building name the white house, this is a place where the students taken to be beaten and punishment from Spencer or the houseman

The white boys bruised differently that the black boys and called it the Ice Cream Factory because you came out with bruises of every color. [...] the white house delivered the law and everybody obeyed [...] The beating entrance, the boys called it [...] The roar began: an even gale. [...] Spencer and Earl took Black Mike in firs. Spencer said, “thought you’d be done after last time[...] Elwood’s chair vibrated with energy. He couldn’t figure out what it was some machine, but it was loud enough to cover Black Mike’s scream and the smack of the strap [...] he counted up to twenty-eight before beating stopped and they dragged Black Mike out to one of the cars” .Elwood held on to the top of the bed and bit into the pillow but he passed out before they were done, so when people asked later how many licks he got, he didn’t know” (p.55)

This quotation shows how the student get beating “the white boys bruised differently that the black boys of every color” This is show the students get physical abuse. The word “bruised, the scream, the roar, beating and dragged” show how the housemen treat the students. Elwood after get physical abuse “he passed out before they were done”. And “when people asked later how many licks he got, he didn’t know” this is show there is so many licks that he got, so he did not know how many licks that he got.

1.2. Verbal abuse

According to Evans (2012), verbal abuse has impacts on humanity, ridiculous, and deletion of the mind and becomes deleting unconsciousness. This novel describes verbal abuse from the white students to the black students

“On the first day of the school year, the students of Lincoln High School received their new secondhand textbooks from the white high school across away. Knowing where the textbooks were headed, the white students left inscriptions for the next owners: Choke, Nigger! You Smell. Eat shit [...] turn to the page on the digestive system and be confronted with Drop dead Nigger (p. 36)

This quotation shows Elwood get verbal abuse from the white high school, Elwood’s school gets new secondhand textbook from the white high school and students of the white high school left inscriptions in the books with bad words and used word “*Choke, Nigger! You Smell. Eat shit*” this

is show the black students get verbal abuse from the secondhand textbook from the white high school.

Mr. Hill handed out black markers and told his students that the first order of business was to strike out all the bad words in the textbooks “that always burned me up” he said “seeing that stuff. You all trying to get an education no need to caught up with what those fool say [...] then they dug in with their markers. Elwood got giddy. His heart sped: this escapade. Why hadn’t anyone told them to do this before? ‘make sure you don’t miss anything, Mr. Hill said. “you know those kid are wily” while the students struck out the curses and cusses”(Page 25)

This quotation supports when Lincoln High School always get verbal abuse from the white student’s high school from their secondhand book that send to Lincoln High School, this is made traumatized by the bad word that the white students write in their secondhand book, and Mr. Hill makes Elwood realize “why hadn’t anyone told them to do this before” why no one asked to dug in all the bad word with marker and the Lincoln High School no need to hold and accept all the bad words when their open the secondhand books from the white student’s high school

1.3. Segregation

According to Bruch (2008:2) segregation is issuance people with different group in social position, social and physical distance. This novel explains the civil rights acts of 1950. Black people are separated from white people by law, public facilities, and schools by color. Segregation occurs the 18th century until the 19th century.

“The big match was split up over two nights. On the first, the white campus and black campus settled who send to the main event [...] when the bell sounded for the last time, the two Nickel boys in the ring were entwined, bloody and slick, propping each other up like a human tepee[...] getting hit in the head like that can make you addle-minded and confused[.]

This quotation shows the match between black and white students. This is shows the racism because why they have to separate between white and black students. the nickel academy tells how segregation occur between black students and white students. This quotation shows why should the academy separated between black and white students, why they have to separated through their skin color or race. This is implicate show segregation between black and white student occur in this academy.

They came for Griff that night and he never returned. The story spread that he was too proud to take dive[...] when the state of Florida dug him up fifty years later, the forensic examiner noted the fractures in the wrists and speculated that he’d been restrained before he died, in addition to the other violence attested by the broken bones.

This quotation show after the match and Griff was missing and the forensic told that he died and he got broken bones and violence. This is

show Griff died after that match. This is show because of Griff win in this match and, Griff is black students. This novel explain how segregation occur, segregation between white and black people,

1.4. Racism

Another social elements that cause of trauma in this novel is racism. According to Nurhadi (2019:) racism is belief or ideology of group specific. In the hospital Elwood and the others black students het unfair treat from the nurse of the hospital, the nurse was kind to the white students meanwhile she always grunt, hale when she serve the black students.

“Elwood spent his stay on his stomach. For obvious reason. The hospital inducted him into its rhythms. Nurse Wilma grunted around most days, hale and brusque, slamming drawers and cabinets [...] she reminded Elwood oh a haunted doll come to hideous life, something out of horror comics. The crypt of terror, the vault of horror. [...] Nurse Wilma was almost sweet to the white boys who came in with their abrasions and ailments, a second mother. Nary a kind word for the black boys.

This quotation shows how the nurse treat Elwood different with the white boys. He grunted around most days, hale and brusque, slamming drawers and cabinets. Meanwhile she was almost sweet to the white boys, and she looks like second mother to the white boys. This quotation also can explain segregation in this academy between black and white students. How academy treat the white and black students differently. This quotation also occur segregation. According to Legeby (2010:11), segregation is physical separation and activities separation between social groups. This novel explains the civil rights acts of 1950. Black people are separated from white people by law, public facilities, and schools by color. Segregation occurs the 18th century until the 19th century.

2. Defense mechanism that used to deal with trauma

According to Cloninger (2004:45), identification is a type of defense mechanism, identification is a process of borrowing or adopting someone else identity instead. In this novel, the characters used defense mechanisms to deal with their trauma.

“Flying to Tallahassee.”Turner said.“Last name Curtis. “Identification?”. When the owner of the diner asked him his name, two weeks out of Nickel, he said, “Elwood Curtis.” The first thing that popped into his head. It felt right. He used the name then on when nobody asked, to honor his friend, to live for him.

This quotation shows how Turner deal with their trauma in the nickel academy, and how he deals with trauma about Elwood died in that academy, Turner used defense mechanism identification to force his

trauma, adopting Elwood identity to honor with his friend and to force his trauma.

“When the owner of diner asked him his name, two weeks out of Nickel, he said Elwood Curtis. First thing that popped into his head [...] he used the name from then on when anybody asked, to honor his friend. To live for him”

This quotation support the quotation before after leaving the academy Turner used Elwood name to honor his friend and to deal with trauma in the nickel academy.

E. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This thesis from the discussion in can be conclude the elements that causing trauma to the characters in the nickel academy. There are some factors that causing trauma in this academy. The factors can harm the characters, and it can be impact to physical and mental of the nickel’s students.

The students of nickel academy got physical abuse, verbal abuse, segregation and racism from the houseman of the nickel academy. The factor that causing trauma it can be impact to mental and physical. That how the characters need to used defense mechanism to force to avoid and to deal social elements that causing trauma

In conclusion abuse occur in two type in this academy, such as physical and mental abuse. Racism also find in this academy, how the academy treats black and white students differently, and also the segregation between white and black students also find in this academy. That how the characters need to used defense mechanism to force to avoid and to deal with multiple factors that causing trauma.

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