



INJUSTICE IN FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS IN THE NOVEL “AN AMERICAN MARRIAGE” (2018) BY TAYARI JONES

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Abstract

This research explores injustice in family relationships through a psychoanalytic analysis of the novel *An American Marriage* (2018) by Tayari Jones. The research examines the impact of the injustice experienced by the character Roy and how it affects his family relationships. This research uses Freud's theory of psychoanalysis. This research is a content analysis research. The data used are quotations from the novel which are analyzed using elements such as character, and plot (conflict). This research aims to reveal the deeper meaning of injustice in family relationships and its impact on the dynamics of interpersonal life. By examining the novel's depiction of the long-term consequences of injustice, the research provides insights into such injustice. This analysis highlights the importance of addressing and mitigating injustice within a law to encourage a more just and supportive environment.

Key words: Injustice, Theory of psychoanalysis, *An American Marriage*

A. INTRODUCTION

Injustice within family relationships is a complex and multifaceted issue that affects all family members. This injustice can manifest in various form, including unfair treatment and the misuse of authority. The consequences extend beyond the immediate victim, disrupting the entire family dynamic and leading to long-term and far-reaching effects. These effects can include conflict, resentment, and a sense of hopelessness. Family members subjected to such injustice often experience significant distress, which can damage their relationships, erode self-confidence, and destabilize the overall family structure.

Injustice within family relationships affects not only the individuals and families involved but also has a significant impact on social relationships and the broader well-being of society. Such injustice can lead to despair, stress, and even the breakdown of the family unit, particularly for those who feel their rights are

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unfulfilled and unappreciated. This can escalate into greater conflict and deepen existing inequalities within the family. When these inequalities persist across generations, they can hinder social and economic progress. Therefore, it is crucial for society to recognize and address these disparities to foster a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable environment for everyone.

The theme of injustice is often explored in literary works, as seen in the novel *An American Marriage* (2018) by Tayari Jones. In this novel, the main character, Roy, who is the head of his household, faces a profound injustice in the legal system. This experience plunges Roy into despair, as the injustice he endures deeply affects his family relationships.

The character Roy Othaniel Hamilton in Tayari Jones' novel "An American Marriage" experiences many injustices caused by unfounded accusations and wrongful court decisions. These injustices damaged Roy's life personally and his family relationships, and caused deep wounds. The injustice obtained by Roy's character is from the court's accusation. A charge that he did not actually commit was imprisoned for 12 years for the injustice given by the court. The impact of this is that the character's relationship with his family becomes bad. Legal injustice destroy his lives. Wrongful detention leads to the trauma, loss of confidence, and feelings of alienation. The experiences a greater emotional burden due to the loss of independence and the opportunity to lead a normal life and injustice affects his well-being and mental condition.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this research is content analysis. Moleong (2006) defines content analysis is a research technique that involves the systematic and objective description of the manifest content of communication. It is used to analyze qualitative data, particularly textual data, to identify patterns, themes, and meanings within the content. Content analysis should be conducted in an objective and systematic manner to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings (Moleong, 2006).

The data in this research were taken from Novel "An American Marriage". The data used are quotation from novel which are analyzed using fictional devices character and plot (conflict).

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the manifestation and impact of injustice in family relationships depicted in the novel *An American Marriage* (2018) by Tayari Jones. The analysis focuses on fictional elements such as character and plot (conflict) to reveal the theme of injustice, particularly through the experiences of the main character, Roy Othaniel Hamilton.

a. Legal Injustice

Roy's character falls victim to systemic legal injustice, where he is injustice imprisoned for a rape charge he did not commit. His sentence is rooted in racial prejudice and misidentification, exposing flaws in the legal system.

“Why, because I'm in jail? I'm innocent. You know I'm innocent. When that woman was raped, I was with you. So, you know I didn't do it. Don't treat me like a criminal, Celestial. You're the only one who knows for sure. Please don't treat me like I have a disease.” (p. 230)

This quotation shows the deep-seated racial prejudice that led to Roy's unjust imprisonment as well as the tremendous emotional impact on his relationship with Celestial. The disbelief in his innocence, even from those closest to him, exacerbated the trauma he experienced.

b. Emotional and Psychological Injustice

Roy's imprisonment also caused emotional and psychological injustice, especially through the pressure put on his marriage. Celestial, who was initially supportive, eventually moved away and entered into a relationship with Andre, a close friend. This emotional betrayal is depicted in the following quote:

“When I insisted that we were like brothers, Daddy said, ‘No one is your brother but your brother.’ ... Consider Andre. You know who he is. He's already part of the family. Take the easy road for once.” (p. 99)

The emotional burden of Roy's unjust imprisonment erodes his marriage, deepening his sense of loneliness and helplessness.

2. Psychological Impact of Injustice on Roy

a. Anger

Roy's anger serves as a defense mechanism against the injustice he faces. His frustration was a response to his unjust imprisonment and the betrayal of those he trusted. For example, when he vents his anger at Andre, his anger is very clear:

“I don't care,” Roy says. “Call the police. Fuck you, fuck Andre, and fuck the police.” (p. 261)

This emotional outburst highlights the deep emotional wounds Roy carries, showing how injustice can surface as anger and cause conflict with others.

b. Helplessness

Roy's feeling of helplessness is a direct consequence of his inability to control his fate. This sense of helplessness is apparent when he faces the possibility of a negative outcome in his trial:

“If this doesn't go our way,” Roy said the day before his trial, “I don't want you to wait for me. Keep making dolls and do what you need to do.” (p. 43)

Here, Roy's resignation to his circumstances illustrates how injustice can lead to feelings of defeat and disconnection from loved ones.

c. Depression

The combination of Roy's legal and emotional injustice experiences led to depression. Even after he was released from prison, he had difficulty adjusting to life on the outside, feeling trapped by the trauma he experienced:

"I haven't even been out of prison a week and already feel caged again... Pulling the soft blanket over my hips, I thought of Walter, my father, Ghetto Yoda, and wondered what he would say about all this." (p. 236)

This quotation reflects the psychological prison Roy still feels, showing that the effects of trauma linger even after the physical shackles are removed.

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D. DISCUSSION

This research finds that Roy, the main character in Tayari Jones' novel *An American Marriage* (2018), experiences various forms of injustice, both systemic and personal. Roy's struggle against injustice is strongly related to his personality and traumatic experiences during his imprisonment. His reaction to this injustice is not only due to his nature, but also reflects the deep psychological and emotional impact of the trauma he experienced. In accordance with Freud's psychoanalytic theory, Roy's anger, feelings of helplessness and depression can be seen as defense mechanisms against the extraordinarily severe situation he faced. This is in line with previous research such as that reviewed by Widi Ambarwati (2019), which examines how prejudice and discrimination appear in characters as a reaction to social pressure. Much like how Roy's repressed emotions trigger intense reactions, Ambarwati highlights how discrimination can provoke characters to act as a form of defense against systemic prejudice. Roy's behavior, including his anger towards the unfair legal system and towards his wife, Celestial, mirrors Sudwintari's (2019) findings in her analysis of *Defending Jacob*. In both cases, the characters' intense emotional responses are linked to experiences of legal injustice. Sudwintari notes that false accusations can lead to a deep sense of betrayal and alienation, which is also seen in Roy's interactions with those around him, as he tries to control the situation in a world that often makes him feel powerless. Furthermore, Roy's feelings of helplessness and depression are exacerbated by the lack of support and understanding from those closest to him, as experienced by the protagonist in Stella Knightley's novel *Girl Behind the Mask* (2019), who suffers under oppressive surveillance. Both of these characters exhibit behaviors that are not only signs of a flawed personality, but also coping

mechanisms in response to deep trauma. In Roy's case, his struggle with the growing distance between himself and Celestial and the resulting emotional turmoil highlights the psychological impact of injustice, as emphasized in Knightley and Jones' work. Moreover, Roy's actions, such as his abusive treatment of Andre, reflect the findings of Salihu et al. (2018), who explored how failed marriages and relationship breakdowns can lead to delinquent behavior and emotional instability. Just as Salihu et al. argue that unresolved conflicts in relationships contribute to destructive actions, Roy's emotional outbursts can be seen as a manifestation of unresolved emotional pain and trauma from unjust imprisonment. Overall, Roy's portrayal in *An American Marriage* is not only a portrait of a man facing injustice, but also a complex exploration of how trauma and injustice can shape one's behavior and relationships. The novel shows that Roy's response to his situation, although sometimes harsh, is deeply rooted in his psychological struggle to overcome the trauma he experienced. This analysis is in line with previous research suggesting that individuals may exhibit unfriendliness or abusive behavior as a way to assert strength and cope with their emotional turmoil, emphasizing the importance of understanding the underlying psychological factors that drive such behavior.

E. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The novel "An American Marriage" (2018) by Tayari Jones explores the theme of injustice in family relationships. The story uses characters and plot (conflicts) to show how injustice affects the main character's life. This analysis applies Sigmund Freud's psychological concepts to understand how the main character, Roy, faces unfair treatment from the legal system, which affects his family relationships and changes his life.

Due to this injustice, Roy experiences unexpected and devastating losses. He tries to protect his family and claim his rights, but his efforts are in vain, leaving him empty-handed. This situation makes Roy feel defeated, hopeless, and emotionally burdened. Despite his maturity in handling these issues, Roy resigns himself to the consequences and withdraws from his wife, Celestial.

In "An American Marriage," the impact of unfair treatment on family relationships is deep and complex. Roy's emotional and psychological struggles create conflict and stress within his family, showing how trauma and injustice can damage relationships. The novel highlights the need for open communication, emotional support, and mental recovery. It also emphasizes the importance of making changes to prevent similar injustices in the future, so that families do not suffer as Roy and Celestial did.

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