

“OTHER” WORLDS REPRESENTED IN ANGIE THOMAS’S *THE HATE U GIVE*

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ABSTRACT: The Black Lives Matter movement gained momentum in 2020 as the headlines garnered international attention to George Floyd’s murder as a result of police brutality. The heart-breaking reality is that this was not the first case but rather one among the series of black people killed due to excessive force exerted by the police. Angie Thomas in her novel *The Hate U Give* has portrayed the oppression, struggles, and fears of the modern day African-Americans broadening our perspectives on white supremacy and police brutality. The focus on Starr’s personal life as an African-American who lives in a black community but studies amongst a dominant white population tactfully brings out the binary of the black and white communities. The psychological clash in Starr’s mind metaphorically stands for the violent clashes of her two worlds. This paper attempts to study the ‘other’ worlds represented in Angie Thomas’s *The Hate U Give* by analysing the white supremacy, police brutality against black people and the race-related trauma experienced by the black people in the novel.

KEYWORDS: Police brutality, violence, trauma, race, social media, oppression

I. INTRODUCTION

On May 25th 2020, the newspaper headlines reported the killing of George Floyd in police custody and the news made heads turn worldwide as it spread like rapid-fire through social media and the trending #blacklivesmatter. However, this brought to light the fact that the name George Floyd was one among the series of names such as Eric Garner, Akai Gurley, Gabriella Nevarez, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Tanisha Anderson, Tanisha Fonville, Freddie Gray, Philando Castille, Stephon Clark, Breonna Taylor and so many more black Americans killed by the police. Angie Thomas in her novel *The Hate U Give* has portrayed the oppression, struggles, and fears of the modern day African-Americans broadening our perspectives on systemic racism and how both the white and black communities view each other as the ‘other’. The novel is centred on the life of Starr, an African-American teenage girl, and the plot is spun based on the personal and political struggles she faces in her life due to her racial identity. Starr in the novel becomes more of a representative of her African-American community when she realises that racial prejudices, a result of institutionalised racism are fatal when her friend Khalil was shot dead. This paper attempts to study the ‘other’ worlds represented in Angie Thomas’s *The Hate U Give* by analysing the white supremacy, police brutality, against black people and the race-related trauma experienced by the black people in the novel.

Starr lives in Garden Heights, an area chiefly consisting of black people but studies at Williamson Prep where she is the black student surrounded by a predominantly white student population. She along with another boy are the only two black students of the school. She is very aware of the fact that she is living two different lives as the black girl who is not cool enough for her black neighbourhood but on the other hand, she is the black girl who is dope enough for her white friends. She is constantly worried that these two worlds should never clash at any time and therefore pretends to be a different person at school as “normal Starr” who does not give the stink eye or anything of that sort as she does not want to be known as the “angry black girl.” She does not even use slang as she does not want the white kids to think of her as the “hood” (Thomas 50). Through this, we can see that the pressure on Starr is not just because she is a teenage girl but that she is the black kid at a school dominated by white kids. The thoughts of Starr mentioned above show her anxiety of racial inequality as the chances of her being ridiculed by other white students as the “ghetto girl” is high.

Starr lives in Garden Heights and loves her home and family a lot. Despite this, she does not seem very proud of her neighbourhood due to the constant display of violence and the fact that the whites did not consider her neighbourhood a safe place. She admits that she did not invite her white friends for sleepovers as Hailey refused to come and Maya had been so frightened by the gun shots she heard during the night she stayed that she wept for her mother to pick her up from Starr’s house. Starr then realises that the violent noises that she had been hearing every night that it is almost habitual are not common for others. She also explains how unlike her family Uncle Carlos who is a police officer lives in a white neighbourhood which is considered safer than Garden

Heights. The point that has to be noted here is that not all blacks are violent people but due to certain illegal activities such as gang banging taking place within the neighbourhood the entire community is stereotyped as violent people by the white supremacist.

The stereotype that all black men are gangsters is shattered in this novel. It focuses on the other side of the coin that shows how often poor young black boys are lured into gangs just for the economic benefits. Starr on seeing Khalil at Big D's party fears that he had been working for some gang and that is why he is able to afford all the expensive things. Maverick, Starr's father, is an example of how not all black men are stereotypical gang bangers. Even though initially he is involved in illegal activities he later decides to quit and turns a new leaf in his life. Not only does he come out of it but he is also very keen on bringing De Vante out of it so that the young boy could have a better life. Starr does not let her boyfriend Chris know anything about her home as she has the feeling that he may not understand simply because he is a white person. She does feel comfortable with him but is still terrified of introducing him to her family as her father would never approve a white guy to be her boyfriend. This again highlights the fact that both the whites and blacks consider each other as the 'other'. Another instance where the illusion of gangsters being dirty is broken when Starr describes the Cedar Grove King Lords wearing black slacks and white shirt as "Damn, they clean up nice" (Thomas 213).

According to Clark et al. (1999), perceptions of a racially stressful situation may result in the amalgamation of maladaptive feelings of anger, anxiety, paranoia, hopelessness, frustration, resentment and fear (Jones 49). Before being confronted by the cop Starr and Khalil have a very important conversation about the word T-H-U-G-L-I-F-E and how it stands for The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody. This conversation right before the confrontation by the cop shows the anger and frustration underlying within the black people due to the constant prejudice, oppression and above all the inequitable white supremacist hate. Unlike Starr, Khalil defies the cop by talking back and turning around to check on Starr which ironically gives the cop a reason to fire gunshots at Khalil.

The fact that Khalil's death is narrated from Starr's point of view is important because before the gunshot is fired it is not just Khalil at whom the gun is pointed but Starr too. "Race-related trauma is the spiritual, psychological, and physiological devastation African Americans experience following exposure to stressors involving the (a) direct personal experience with, (b) witnessing of, or (...) other threat to one's physical integrity on the basis of their race or skin colour or as a result of the vicious and aggressive encroachment of oppression and White supremacy"(Jones 52). The internalisation of acts such as keeping the hands where they are visible, responding only if directly questioned, noting the badge number of the cop and not talking back reflects the reality of black people, especially parents like Maverick, worrying for the safety of their loved ones as innocent unarmed black people have been shot by cops just on the basis of suspicion without proper reasons or evidence pointing out to illegal activities. A similar representation is seen in the show "Grey's Anatomy" where Dr. Miranda Bailey and her husband Ben, as black parents start talking to their son about such precautionary measures after a 12-year-old black boy is shot in his own house by the police based on mere suspicions. Starr here experiences race-related trauma as even weeks after Khalil's death she wakes up screaming as she has nightmares which is one of the symptoms of race-related trauma.

One of the rebelling mechanisms employed by African Americans is voicing out their opinion through social media by using hashtags like #blacklivesmatter, #sayhername, #nojusticenopeace, #icantbreathe, etc. In the novel, social media plays a significant role as it is through Tumblr that Starr lets the world know about the Khalil that she grew up with in order to shatter the gangster image created through other mediums. She is infuriated that the father of the white cop has the power to influence the public and in turn the jury by fabricating a story where his son is the victim. She is enraged by the fact that people are most likely to believe this fabricated version just because it is the story of a white man. Hailey, one of Starr's closest white friends unfollows Starr on Tumblr after seeing her post on Emmett Till, a black boy who was lynched to death for offending a white woman. Hailey also makes a "fried chicken" comment which pushes Starr over the edge. The terrible reality is that Hailey does not feel any remorse for her white supremacist attitude and even though she misuses her privileged position by passing racist comments she accuses Starr of being sensitive. It was not only Hailey who had Starr concerned but the fact that the whole school decides to bunk classes under the pretence of protesting for Khalil's death shocks Starr.

The most shocking but ironically the most truthful part of the novel is the judgement given by the jury. Despite all the efforts and pieces of evidence produced on behalf of Khalil the white cop is acquitted. This is the most suitable example of institutionalised racism where government entities oppress a particular community based on race. This reminded me of the poem *Power* written by Audre Lorde where the jury acquitted the white cop despite being proved guilty for shooting the ten-year-old black boy. The lines "At his trial this policeman said in his own defense "I didn't notice the size nor nothing else only the color" (lines 24-27) is a punch in the gut to every reader and is a representation of the blatant systemic racism and police brutality which has cost many

black lives. Institutionalised racism is what enables cruelties like police brutality and acquitting a white person despite being proven guilty especially when the murdered is a black person which in turn upholds white supremacy enabling the black and white communities to view each other as the 'other'. Angie Thomas stresses this cycle of abuse of the law by white supremacist and the violence inflicted on black people highlighting the fact that racial discrimination and racial inequality has been a disheartening historical phenomenon that has not changed even now.

II. REFERENCE

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