

BLACK LIVES MATTER: BLACK WRITERS AND ACTIVISM IN PATRISSE KHAN-CULLORS AND ASHA BANDELE'S *WHEN THEY CALL YOU A TERRORIST*

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Abstract

Do Black lives Matter or All lives Matter? This question has triggered numerous debates and conversation across America recently. It is noteworthy to know that all lives matter was created to criticize Black lives matter movement. This thesis tries to analyse and compare the different mode in which certain writers express their grievance at the height of injustice and excessive killings of blacks in America. The purpose of this thesis is to ascertain how institutional racism has dampened the lives of blacks in the society and how it has treated her as an outcast. The method used in this study is qualitative or library research, which implies that all data are texts based and written words. The primary data source of this research are novels while the secondary data are from articles, journals, websites and books that relate with this analysis. The sum up of this research analyses different aspect of civil rights movement and how it promotes the activities of black lives matter movement in the 21st century. The primary texts used are *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, and *When They Call You a Terrorist* by Patrisse Khan-Cullors and Asah Bandele. The agitation against police killings and the acquittal of the murderer of Trayvon Martin spikes the nationwide protest and this experience makes the black people keep fighting to get justice.

Keywords: Racism, Black Lives Matter, Institutional Racism

Introduction

The expression "Black Lives Matter" (BLM) is a civil rights movement which emanated to seek justice for the blacks and also stop the structured killings of blacks in America. "Black Lives Matter" started from the United States of America before spreading across Europe. The skin colour of the black man had hampered the existence of blacks amongst whites which led to racial discrimination and later killing of blacks. It is important to discuss racial discrimination as an effect to blacks dilemma in the United States of America. Racism becomes the justification for the state's murder of others who have become dispensable or who pose a threat, not only to the survival but to the betterment of the race (Alana Lentin, 2004:55).

Racism is the marginalization and or oppression of people of colour based on a socially constructed racial hierarchy that privilege whites people have (adl.org/racism). While Systemic Racism makes an elaborate explanation as a combination of systems, institutions and factors that give advantage to the white people and for people of colour, causes widespread harm and disadvantages in access and opportunity. Systemic Racism is created in the history of laws and institutions which were created on a foundation of white supremacy that exists in the institutions and policies of the whites against the black and takes place in interpersonal communication and behaviour that maintains and supports systemic inequities and systemic racism.

Systemic and structural Racism are forms of racism that are pervasively and deeply embedded in and throughout systems, laws, written or unwritten policies, entrenched practices and established beliefs and attitudes that produce, condone and perpetuate widespread unfair treatment of minoritized people (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). Though they are often used interchangeably along with institutional racism, they refer to distinct concepts. Systemic Racism is a perpetuated discrimination within a system that has

been based on racist principles, practices and focuses on the involvement of a whole systems (Feagin, 2013; Fitzgerald, 2021) and often all systems, for example, political, legal, economic, health care, school and criminal legal systems including the structures that uphold those systems (Feagin and Ducey, 2018). However, Structural Racism describes “cultural values in a society that are so ingrained in daily life that they are seen simply as the way things are” (Fitzgerald, 2021; Lucas, 2008) and it refers to wider political and social disadvantages within society, such as higher rates of poverty for Black and Indigenous communities or high rates of death among minoritized people (Bailey et al., 2021; Bleich and Ard, 2021). Structural Racism shows up as inherited disadvantage and its reciprocal inherited advantage and is evident in the differential distribution of both material conditions and access to power by ‘race’ (Jones, 2000). Institutional Racism denotes policies and practices within and across institutions that, intentionally or not, produce outcomes that chronically favour white people and put individuals from other racial and ethnic groups at a disadvantage (Roundtable on Community Change, 2017).

The civil rights movement emerged as a resistance against oppression and subjugation. The 1960s civil rights movement encompassed social movements in the United States aimed at ending racial segregation and discrimination against blacks and securing legal recognition and federal protection of the citizenship rights enumerated in the Constitution and Federal Law. Suffice to say that the movement was an act of nonviolent protest and civil disobedience which produced crisis situations between activists and government authorities. One prominent way of expressing grievances was through protest or march. The march on Washington was one of the largest political rallies for human rights in U.S history. It demanded civil and economic rights for African Americans with thousands of participants headed to Washington DC on August 27, 1963 (courses.lumenlearning.com). Among numerous protests in the history of America was one of the largest marches against unlawful incarceration of Rosa Louise Parks on December 1, 1955. Rosa Louise Parks, a resident of Montgomery, Alabama refused to obey a bus driver, James Blake's demand that she relinquished her seat to a white man. She was arrested, fingerprinted and incarcerated. When Parks agreed to have her case contested, it became a fight against Jim Crow laws. Her trial for the act of civil disobedience triggered the Montgomery Bus Boycott, one of the largest and most successful mass movements against racial segregation in history and launched Martin Luther King Jr., one of the organizers of the boycott, to the forefront of the civil rights movement that fostered peaceful protest to Jim Crow Laws.

The killings of black people by the vigilantes and the police had happened many times in the United States of America. These killings led to a movement of the black society to resist the acts, called "Black Lives Matter". According to Jelani Cobb in *The Matter of Black Lives* which is published in "The New Yorker magazine" (2016), this movement started when an activist named Alicia Garza posted her thought on Facebook after the acquittal of George Zimmerman who killed a black young boy named Trayvon Martin in 2012. George Zimmerman was a white American who volunteered to watch the neighbourhood Trayvon Martin visited the day of his demise. After the post of Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors responded with a hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. This hashtag became popular with the influence of social media. The #BlackLivesMatter became a movement to support black people until today. There have been killings of blacks before Trayvon Martin but the consciousness and response of Alicia Garza and Patrisse Cullors with the help of Opal Tometi laid the foundation and build-up of "Black Lives Matter". According to the "Black Lives Matter" movement in ABC News (2016), John Crawford was killed by police in Ohio just because he bought a toy gun.

Black lives matter began as #BlackLivesMatter. The hashtag was created in the year 2013 by Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi, California and New York based organizers active in incarceration, immigration and domestic labour campaigns after the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder in Florida of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin. The slogan's deeper significance as the rallying cry for an incipient movement crystallized in 2014 during the Ferguson, Missouri uprising against police brutality (Rockford, 2016:36).

Peniel E. Joseph in his "Why Black Lives Matter Still Matters" (2017:19) states that black lives matter holds complex problems of black identity. The people behind the movement created broad and democratic ways than its predecessors, either the Panthers or civil rights activists ever intended. He further add that BLM has made complete usage of the power and potential of social media. In addition, it also organized local chapters and expressed a broader political agenda. According to (Meyer, 2018) as cited in (Setiawati and Maryani, 2018), literature is a term used to describe written texts characterized by careful use of language, including features such as creative.

According to Wellek and Warren (2010, p. 95) the connection between literature and society is usually discussed by opening with the phrase that literature is an expression of society. Furthermore, Scott (2009, p. 126) states that the relationship between literature and society is mutual. Literature does not only function as the influence of social reasons, but it is also the reason for social influence. So, a literary work expresses human life in society. There is a strong connection between literature and society.

This research will do a comparative study of some selected novels written by black American writers. Comparative literature is a study of the literary texts written in different languages by the most common and simple meaning, such that a study behind linguistic, literary and cultural boundaries. In the word of Rene Wellek, comparative literature is a study of relationship between two or more literature has been interpreted so widely or misinterpreted so much and the term has been changed and developed so fast from early decades of 19th century to the present. (Wellek & Warren, 1949, p. 40). Comparative study is an observation or judgment of similarities or dissimilarities between two or more branches of science or subjects of study such as comparative literature, comparative religion and comparative language and so on. The first-time comparative literature was used in 1848 in an unpublished letter by Matthew Arnold who translated Ampere's use of historic comparative. (Wellek and Warren, Theory of literature, 1949, p. 38). Comparative literature is important in this research because it will analyse the similarities, differences and approaches of the texts in explaining the concept of "Black Lives Matter" and other related of the civil rights movement.

Black Lives Matter and Activism in Patrisse Khan-Cullors and Asah Bandele's When They Call You a Terrorist

Patrisse Khan Cullors shows us the problem of racism in her memoir. She recounts events from her personal life that spurs her to activism on behalf of Black communities. Cullors traces a path from the everyday injustices she endures to her activism as a co-founder of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Though the work focuses on Cullors experiences, therefore, she demystifies the connection between anti-Black policies and their effects on ordinary Black Americans. Her personal experiences of the loss of her father, anguish, injustice and anger spurs Cullors activism with a sense of inevitability. The memoir opens with Cullors description of her childhood neighbourhood, Van Nuys, in California. Cullors community is heavily policed, which is a subject to racial profiling and random arrest of innocent black male children. This constant threat towards black communities explains why Cullors writes that, I carry the memory of living under that terror - the terror of knowing that I, or any member of my family could be killed with impunity- in my blood, in my bones, in every step I take(p.8). For us, law enforcement had nothing to do with protecting and serving, but controlling and containing the movement of children who had been labelled super-predators simply by virtue of who they were born to and where they were born, not because they were actually doing anything predatory(26).

Cullors describes the incarceration of her brother Monte and birth father Gabriel as cruel because of how these institutions inadequately serve Black Americans. Patrisse Cullors identifies these as natural consequences of the American tradition of devaluing and regulating Black bodies, one that authors and academics alike have noted (Coates 2015; Douglas 2017). Monte develops a schizoaffective disorder as young adult(59), as a result of the beating. Monte finds himself incarcerated, following a string of arrests at just 19years old (59). The following year, Cullors slowly learns more about the brutality of Montes treatment in jail, as well as about the systemic torture of prisoners within the L.A. County system(160). This ultimately inspires the formation of an organization called Dignity and power Now that advocates for civilian oversight of county prisons and sheriffs department(165).

Although, Gabriel struggles with drug addiction which brings about his incarceration for substance use and dealing, but Patrisse only seems to have interest to portray her father as a good man rather than a drug addict. She captures her father's vibrancy and his penchant for bringing people together. She uses his struggle to expose the war on drugs as a deliberate attempt to erase a generation of black people. Through writing about her father's life and death, she illustrates the torments Blacks face despite their services and commitment to United State. Gabriel dies a forgotten veteran of wars he never knew had been declared on his one thin brown body that in the end would succumb to a heart that was broken(107). Describing the causes of death, Cullors makes plain the systemic barriers and burdens that Black and brown individual face. Patrisse asserts that the actions of whites towards the blacks is a deliberate craft to cause Black Americans to stumble.

The author's life experience exposes her to different community organizing and sit in which later translate to the formation of #BlackLivesMatter. She partners with two other women to protest police brutality(180). Patrisse Khan Cullors, Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi transformed the conventional idea of activism in the United State of America with the formation of Black Lives Matter. Though the support BLM garners so far are encouraging, Cullors reminds readers that a significant amount of work remains. Though the memoir is attentive to racial profiling and identities, Cullors identifies herself as a queer Black woman and speaks about how these identities have on her intimate and community relationships. Drawing from her own life experience, Cullors reveals the strong grip of white supremacy and anti-Blackness in America, emphasizing the need for individual and collective combativeness to force a release from their vice (Motley,60).

Conclusion

This research on the role of blacks activism towards oppression and incarceration. The fate of Black Americans is far more likely to be the victims of terrorism particularly at the hands of the state actors than perpetrators of terrorism. It is shocking that the state and government institutions calls both activists in the book review a terrorist simply for advocating for racial justice and equity. The racism that includes it systematically and involves an institution is known as institutionalized racism. However, institutionalized racism more refers to the racial systems that is inferred into the practice of a government policy, law, and other related to an institution (Urrestarazu 2020). Furthermore, the threats and killings of blacks is a deliberate action to suppress and reduce their influences in the community. The presence of Black Lives Matter and its nationwide activism brings about a new influx that major black activists use to defend themselves from the institutions that sees them as threat.

Current institutionalized racism retains many of the basic features that perpetrate more racial views, decent, actions, and intentions than previous generations of white people (Feagin 2006, 9). Feagin also said that this system of white oppression against blacks was not a historical accident but was deliberately created by white Americans who had the privilege. This kind of oppression is not only a surface level feature of United States society but encompasses and connects major social groups, networks and institution throughout society (Feagin 2006, 10).

When They Call You A Terrorist by Patrisse Khan Cullors and Asah Bandele is not only a biography of the author's life, its also a memoir of sorts for all people of colour who have lost their lives unjustly in their host country, as she hopes to be a voice for them. The memoir proves to subjugate the existence of blacks in America.

It is not far-fetch to say that the role of activism has being widely recognize. Both writers in the text reveal the role of systemic racism and their negative impact in the lives of black and their communities. Patrisse Khan Cullors revealed the effectiveness of women towards liberation and freedom in a hostile environment. Black women have consistently been at the forefront of almost every civil, political, and cultural activist movement in America (Berry & Gross, 2020; Jones, 2020). However, African women most recent in Nigeria during the #ENDSARS protest have also lend their voices against police brutality and unlawful incarceration of youths. Black women take the perspective from experiencing multiple forms of oppression to develop multidimensional structures to promote the human and civil rights of all

marginalized people (Harvell, 2010). Within the past two decades, Black women have created movements such as the Black Lives Matter (BLM), Say Her Name, the Black Youth Project 100, the Black Alliance for Just Immigration, and Blacks Girls Vote (Brown et al., 2017; Guzman, 2017) in response to various struggle for justice and equity that continue to affect their communities.

Social Media has help improve activism and makes it more effective as it promotes widespread participation of individuals and even women involvement to stop oppression. Social media elevates the consciousness of people to what is happening around them, however, educating and sensitizing them on social activities in their community. Social media refers to a web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection; and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Boyd, Ellison, 2008:210). Social media have become a realm of existence for civil society organizations where every individual display certain description, pictures and a message board. Therefore, online social network becomes a useful platform for politically and socially engaged organizations in order to reach a larger audience (Kueber, 2011). In this sense, popular social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter are seen as the available platforms by these groups or organization (Kueber, 2011). Patrisse and her co-author use Facebook, which is one of the biggest social networking site and Twitter to spread their messages, and also gather people with a common goal to fight against the problem peculiar to blacks and brown. Therefore, internet activism is a prompt response activism that permits faster communication of information to a large audience. Social media activism is apparently the most important initiator of the democratic transformation in the whole world. However, activism in the Black community generally refers to the efforts one engages in to advance and promote changes in the lives of African American people. The literature suggests that there are three main forms of activism: political, economic, and social activism (Livingston et al., 2017). This study focuses on the social activism that involves the states institutions and blacks oppression and suppression.

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