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Neoliberalism, Incarceration, and Fracturing the Institution of the African American Family in Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give*

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Abstract

Objectives: This paper aims at highlighting the effect of neoliberalism on African American literature. More specifically, it discusses the concept of the neoliberal novel and its relation to the family in the African American context by studying Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give* (2017).

Methods: The study employs different theorizations of neoliberalism, especially those theorizations that make the intersection between class and race visible such as the ones provided by Spence, Brown, and Harvey. In order to investigate the portrayal of neoliberalism in the novel, the researchers make use of textual analysis.

Results: The study argues that *The Hate U Give* depicts how neoliberalism utilizes moral panic to literally and allegorically incarcerate African Americans and fragment their families through both criminalization and stigmatization. The novel also strategically resists neoliberalism by acknowledging past and present traumas and sufferings, reinforcing a positive collective image of the African American community, and building a community that is based on a culture of difference and resists the negative effects of neoliberalism.

Conclusions: The study concludes that Thomas's novel exposes the destructive effects of neoliberalism on African American communities and families. In so doing, the novel resists the neoliberal discourse, but sometimes with some limitations.

Keywords: *The Hate U Give*, Angie Thomas, Neoliberalism, the African American family, the Neoliberal African American Novel.

النيوليبرالية، والسجن، وهدم الأسرة الأفروأمريكية في رواية آنجي توماس الكراهية التي تسببها

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ملخّص

الأهداف: تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى إلقاء الضوء على أثر النيوليبرالية أو الليبرالية الجديدة على الأدب الأفروأمريكي، وتناقش على وجه الخصوص مفهوم الرواية النيوليبرالية وعلاقتها بالأسرة في السياق الأفروأمريكي من خلال دراسة رواية آنجي توماس **الكراهية التي تسببها** (2017).

المنهجية: تستعين الدراسة بتصورات نظرية مختلفة للنيوليبرالية وخصوصًا تلك التصورات التي تجعل العلاقة بين الطبقة الاجتماعية والعرق واضحة كالتصورات النظرية لكل من سبنس وبروان وهارڤي. كما يستخدم الباحثان التحليل النصي من أجل تفحص وصف الرواية للنيوليبرالية.

النتائج: من أهم نتائج الدراسة أن رواية **الكراهية التي تسببها** تصور كيفية استخدام النيوليبرالية للذعر الأخلاقي من أجل سجن الأفروأمريكيين حرفيًا ومجازيًا وتفتيت أسرهم من خلال التجريم والوصم الاجتماعي. كما أن الرواية توظف استراتيجيات تقاوم النيوليبرالية مثل الاعتراف بوجود صدمات نفسية ماضية وحاضرة والمعاناة الناتجة عنها وتعزيز الصورة الجمعية الإيجابية للمجتمع الأفروأمريكي وبناء مجتمع يتبنى ثقافة الاختلاف على نحو يسهّل مقاومة الآثار السلبية لفكر النيوليبرالية.

الخلاصة: تخلص الدراسة إلى أن رواية توماس تكشف الآثار المدمرة للنيوليبرالية على المجتمعات والعائلات الأفروأمريكية. ومن خلال ذلك، تقاوم الرواية الخطاب النيوليبرالي، وإن كان ذلك يتم أحيانًا على نحو محدود.

الكلمات الدالة: الكراهية التي تسببها، آنجي توماس، النيوليبرالية، العائلة الأفروأمريكية، الرواية الأفروأمريكية النيوليبرالية.

Introduction

Much has been written about neoliberalism and its negative effects on individuals and communities. However, its impact on people of color, especially African Americans, their families, and their literature, is yet to be examined more fully. In fact, little has been written about the novelistic representation of the struggle of African Americans in the face of neoliberalism. Accordingly, this paper explores how the neoliberal African American novel depicts the fracturing of the institution of the African American family due to neoliberal carceral policies. More specifically, it examines the concept of the neoliberal novel in the African American context by studying Angie Thomas's neoliberal African American novel *The Hate U Give* (2017). The researchers would like to show that this novel portrays the destruction that neoliberalism has wrought in the structures of African American families. Moreover, the researchers claim that Thomas's novel fights against such destruction by gesturing towards resistance.

This paper intends to highlight the resistance strategies of neoliberalism as proposed in the novel. These strategies, the novel suggests, include emphasizing the importance of acknowledging the past and contemporary traumas as well as the suffering of African Americans. The novel also indicates that it is vital for African Americans to enhance their collective self-image without internalizing inferiority. Finally, it stresses that resisting neoliberalism is essential to build a better community that is based on difference. These strategic forms of resistance contribute, as Thomas suggests, to opposing the vicious neoliberal wheel that ruins the lives of African Americans, fractures their families, and destroys any attempts at counteracting its racist and essentialist discourse. For these reasons, the researchers argue that Angie Thomas in *The Hate U Give* depicts how neoliberalism deploys moral panic that subjugates African Americans through literal and allegorical incarceration, which eventually results in the disintegration of their families.

This paper is divided into four sections: the first discusses different aspects of racial neoliberalism, and the second explores *The Hate U Give* as a neoliberal African American novel. In the last two sections, the researchers focus on allegorical and literal forms of incarceration in the novel.

Neoliberalism, Racial Neoliberalism, and Incarceration

Randolph Hohle (2015) defines neoliberalism as "[a] political project [which is] designed to create the conditions for capital accumulation based on the upward distribution of resources [distribution that favors the wealthy], and an ideological adherence to meritocratic notions of individual success and personal responsibility" (1). Based on Hohle's definition, one concludes that the role of the government in a neoliberal atmosphere is minimal. David Harvey (2007) claims, that the role of the government has been restricted to a market-driven function since the 1970s. Indeed, neoliberalism draws a deceptive utopian picture in which people compete, grow, and flourish in a free-market system. It also claims that it encourages "individual innovation" (Harvey, 16) as "individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market and the trade" (Harvey, 7). These representations conflict with the real ugly face of this capitalistic tendency. Indeed, neoliberalism promotes commodifying every sphere of life (turning life into a market) to fulfill the elites' interests in maximizing their wealth and dominance. To put it differently, neoliberalism remolds "the freedom [and the life] of the masses. . . [to] be restricted in favour of the freedom of the few [the elites]" (Harvey, 70).

The exploitative and classist discourse that neoliberalism popularizes has been maximized in minoritized communities. Neoliberalism harshly exploits minorities and their communities while fulfilling the elite's interests. More specifically, neoliberalism—which Hohle (2015) interprets as an extension and a new form of "Jim Crow" laws (187)—maximizes the interests of the white elites and intensifies the struggles of minorities like African Americans, turning them into victims of racial neoliberalism. Racial neoliberalism, as Lester Spence (2015) argues, is the fact that a few racialized groups are exploited more significantly through neoliberalism than others. In the 1990s, the American neoliberal system portrayed how powerful the grip of racial neoliberalism was as "white male and female job growth came almost solely from the growth in good jobs, while approximately 75% of bad jobs went to African Americans and Latinos. . . . In fact, 3 out of every 5 jobs that were added among black and Latino populations were bad jobs" (Spence, 17). In other words, the American neoliberal system has negatively affected African Americans, Latinos, and even Asian Americans and turned them into puppets that are manipulated by racial neoliberalism.

The manipulation of minorities is particularly visible in the American Criminal Justice System. This system regulates the

relations between different racialized groups living in the United States by imposing punishment, imprisonment, and delivering verdicts. It pursues a "classic retributivist" approach that focuses on the individual's choice and decouples responsibility for "criminal conduct" from the "substandard environment" (Cummings, 2020, 543). Therefore, it relieves governments of the "burden" of collective responsibility and justifies the biased treatment of African Americans, as this "system . . . is inequitable, unfairly administered, and purposely aimed to disempower people of color and the voiceless" (Cumming, 525). Moreover, based on "deterrence, incapacitation, and stigmatization" (543), this system adopts a top-down approach, with those who never experience segregation, voicelessness (which the researchers discuss below by referring to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's insights), poverty, and discrimination judging those who do (Cummings, 2020).

A consequence of such an approach is the intensification of social oppression. Indeed, "neoliberalism and repressive social control would seem to be a package deal, in which the poisonous rhetoric of criminalization and punishment legitimizes states that have reneged on their commitment to the social wage" (Mariani, 2001, 3). Neoliberalism accordingly expands the grip of this racially biased system through the penal state, as this state intensifies the capital of the elites. Philomena Mariani (2001) explains this process succinctly: "conversion of the ruling classes to neoliberal ideology involves a triple operation—erasing the economic state, dismantling the social state, and strengthening the penal state" (2). Thus, the profits of multi-million-dollar companies such as Walmart, Victoria's Secret, and Whole Foods are maximized at the expense of imprisoned minorities; prisoners are exploited by such companies in the U.S., as they are forced to work for them for low or no wages (Ramesh, 2021). Neoliberalism also has a legislative role in labeling and defining crimes that threaten capital. For example, the "recent attempts in the U.S. Congress [intend] to criminalize the strike as a form of extortion under interstate commerce statutes" and to define theft of time as a crime committed by employees against capital by wasting time (Mariani, 4). Eventually, this logic goes beyond the court and becomes part of the daily criminalization that African Americans experience in the neoliberal era, which *The Hate U Give* depicts.

The daily criminalization of African Americans is a neoliberal strategy and has long-term goals. Indeed, through criminalization and stigmatization by a "discrediting attribute . . . that makes one morally lower than others" (Kotova, 2020, 2), the neoliberal fracturing of the institution of the African American family is fulfilled. As Wendy Brown (2015) argues, criminalization furthers the implications that neoliberalism has upon the texture of society and familial relationships. One such implication is the dismantling of society, which Margaret Thatcher wanted to normalize: "[There is] no such thing as society, only individual men and women—and . . . their families" (qtd. in Harvey, 2007, 23). Indeed, the criminalization process promotes moral panic by labeling African Americans "as a threat to societal values and interests" (Hunt, 1997, 630). Furthermore, the moral panic provoked by the criminalization process forms an authoritarian consensus rationalizing that a "'silent majority' is won over to the support of increasingly coercive measures on the part of the state, and lends its legitimacy to a 'more than usual' exercise of control" (Hall et al., 1978, 221). Such a consensus forces African American families to experience two forms of incarceration: literal (in jails and prisons) and allegorical (in other social institutions such as schools, hospitals, etc.). Eventually, incarceration breaks the ties binding members of African American families "[since criminalization and] incarceration destabilize . . . the single most important unit of a community, the family" (Ramesh, 2021, 26). It also cyclically reinforces the moral panic that leads to incarceration in the first place. Spreading moral panic manifests itself in *The Hate U Give*.

The Neoliberal Novel, the Neoliberal African American Novel, and *The Hate U Give*

To better discuss the manifestations of moral panic in the novel, the researchers want to briefly delve into the impact of neoliberalism on certain cultural forms as the genre of the novel. The researchers have suggested earlier that neoliberalism imposes its capitalist and commodifying policies on several spheres of life. Indeed, it greatly influences what David Harvey (2007) calls "common sense" (5). In other words, neoliberalism's imposed structures and rationale become inseparable from the society and individuals by emphasizing them in media and different societal institutions like schools, universities, and religious institutions. "Common sense" also depends on how neoliberalism affects superstructures (ideas, beliefs, and arts), i.e. neoliberalism's cultural dimension (Nilges, 2015, 365). Therefore, neoliberalism affects literature in general and the novel in particular, giving rise to the neoliberal novel. Arne De Boever (2019) explains that this subgenre "addresses various aspects of neoliberal history, economic policy, politics, or philosophy" (161) and explores how writers interact within the neoliberal discourse. Although the researchers

accept the timeframe he suggests for the neoliberal novel as "the . . . novel . . . from the late 1970s to the present—and indeed that has often been its exclusive frame of reference," the researchers disagree with the geographical frame he imposes on this genre by emphasizing "[that this novel] would refer to UK/US novels" (De Boever, 157). Indeed, there are novels written in English and are not UK/US novels like Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013), Alan Duff's *Once Were Warriors* (1990), and Teju Cole's *Every Day Is for the Thief* (2007) *The Hate U Give* can be arguably added to this list, as it represents the neoliberal threats that African Americans experience.

However, one can argue that the neoliberal African American novels discuss those threats in different ways. Some African American novels do not emphasize the negative impacts of neoliberalism such as Scott Haskins's *Sasha's Way* (1997) and Omar Tyree's *Single Mom* by (1998). *In contrast, other novels* deliberately educate readers about neoliberal tendencies like Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* (2011), Angie Thomas's *Concrete Rose* (2021), and Percival Everett's *Glyph* (1999) and *Erasure* (2001). Moreover, such novels express the harsh conditions African Americans encounter and propose solutions that help them escape neoliberal dominance. Thus, the researchers explore *The Hate U Give* as an example of the latter group, as it supports calls for holding out against the radical neoliberal changes that promote individualism and deconstruct the African American family as well.

In this paper, the researchers build on Jordan Camp's (2009) understanding of the neoliberal novel that is characterized by its "poetic knowledge" and extend it to the neoliberal African American novel (Camp, 693). Indeed, this type of novel "do[es] not simply produce statistics and narratives of oppression; rather, [it] transport[s] us to another place, compel[s] us to relive horrors and, more importantly, enable[s] us to imagine a new society" (Camp, 693). More specifically, the researchers employ the idea developed by Camp that the neoliberal novel reinvigorates the means of expressing the struggles African Americans have been experiencing. In a nutshell, it connects African Americans' past struggles with their present neoliberal ones in an attempt to visualize the future in the present. This effort that this subgenre makes is backed up by a logic that "challenge[s] the hypervisibility of racialized and gendered poverty, violence, and misery. At the same time, . . . [it] contest[s] the invisibility of . . . a neoliberal racial regime of security"—a regime that takes advantage of criminalizing African Americans, minorities, and people of color (Camp, 694). To put it differently, the neoliberal African American novel the researchers delve into is the one that reflects the highly visible process of racializing and feminizing poverty. It also speaks to the violence and misery that are paralleled with covering up the neoliberal racial regime of security.

Besides criticizing and shedding light on the racist and unjust circumstances neoliberalism imposes on African Americans, neoliberal African American novels are also committed to change. Indeed, while connecting the past with the present and visualizing the future, such novels focus "on tapping into the existence of an alternative social order that is already present in the self-activity of ordinary people" (Camp, 2009, 697). In other words, the neoliberal African American novel speaks against neoliberal tropes by proposing "new commons" that call for "the rights to education, health care, public transportation, and housing won during the civil rights movement [that] have been taken away because of neoliberal policies of privatization" (Camp, 709). Creating and recreating these "new commons" oppose the colorblind language and discourse neoliberalism offers (Gomer, 2017, 167). Such new commons rebuild the sense of self-esteem and counter escapism by introducing stories "dealing with emotions, with real problems like growing up and coming to grips with who . . . . [an African American is]" (Gomer, 173). Angie Thomas's novel exemplifies this type of novel. While the researchers find Camp's insights, especially his discussion of moral panic, very instructive, this article develops the terms allegorical and metaphorical incarceration. Using the concept of moral panic, the researchers emphasize these two forms of incarceration and argue that Thomas succeeds in drawing our attention to the two forms in *The Hate U Give* (2017).

The Hate U Give (2017), which occupied #1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list and won the ALA's William C. Morris Debut Award (Thomas, n.d.), tells the coming-of-age story of an African American teenager. It simultaneously reflects how neoliberalism deals with African American communities, neglecting their substandard economic situations. It also portrays "how well crime fiction can help us to make sense of the larger problem of political violence in the contemporary US . . . [since it is] well-placed to offer insight into the problem of race, drugs, poverty [,] and policing" (Pepper, 2017, 1). In the novel, Thomas introduces the story of how Starr Carter, the protagonist and the narrator of her work, with the help of her family members, fully

grasps the struggle of her race in neoliberal times. After the murder of Starr's childhood friend Khalil by a white police officer, Starr and her family start exploring how neoliberalism criminalizes and segregates African Americans. Indeed, the murder of Khalil initiates Starr's contemplation about how racist, biased, and neoliberal policies lead African Americans and their families to stagnation. Moreover, Starr's attempts to comprehend and vocalize Khalil's story deconstruct "white" citizens' moral panic because they render false the gloomy representations of African Americans and their families as gangsters and thugs. Therefore, this novel explores how "thug" life—an acronym for "the hate they ["white" people] give to little infants [African Americans] ruins everybody"—embodies the real story of African Americans and their families in the neoliberal age.

While depicting African Americans' real story, Thomas's work portrays the neoliberal violence, harm, and stagnation African Americans experience. These neoliberal products have been perceived differently and controversially by critics. They "are [also] reproduced and legitimated through the relationships of everyday life, consumption [,] and commodification" (Collins & Rothe, 2019, 2). Moreover, they are iterative since individuals cannot escape the neoliberal cycle that projects itself as hegemonic and totalitarian. Consequently, they are the starting points and raw materials from which disturbance, anger, and minority violence arise.

The novel's representation of such aspects of neoliberalism is a matter of debate. Vincent Haddad's (2018) "Nobody's Protest Novel: Novelistic Strategies of the Black Lives Matter Movement" perceives the novel as a critique that expresses how the Black Lives Matter Movement's protests should be disciplined and how African American communities should be reformed (44). More specifically, Haddad argues that this novel highlights the importance of disciplining protests and African American communities. The latter is fulfilled when King, the leader of the King's Lord Gang, is arrested at the end of the novel for his illegal acts including drug trafficking and domestic abuse; "[King] beat . . . [his wife Iesha]. She ended up in the hospital. . . . She got a concussion and a whole bunch of other stuff" (Thomas, 2017, 440). Haddad, as a result, critiques the novel for its complicity with the neoliberal logic.

In contrast, Gabrielle Owen (2019) reads the novel as a narrative that emphasizes the importance of revolting against the politics of respectability while reflecting the real image of an African American. In her grand tour, Starr breaks free from the politics of respectability and starts rejecting "conformity to the dominant society's norms of manners and morals" (239). (Moreover, Starr realizes that these politics "shift responsibility for racism away from systemic forces and onto black people themselves" (Owen, 239); responsibility in the neoliberal world is shifted away from the collective masses to the individuals, a process that Brown describes as responsibilization. Therefore, the novel, from Owen's perspective, reflects an image portraying how individuals are inseparable from their surroundings and have the right to revolt against them. Additionally, Owen believes that even if this revolutionary act violates the rules, it remains representative of an individualistic mistake, not a stereotypical image of a whole race. In other words, "*The Hate U Give* . . . is suggestive of the social changes of the last twenty years and the work of the Black Lives Matter movement to create more expansive conceptualizations of being human outside hierarchical notions of development" (Owen, 240). The researchers claim that the novel occupies an in-between position. While it is true that the novel reflects how neoliberalism, through criminalizing and stigmatizing African Americans, fractures the African American family and how neoliberalism can be resisted, its resistance is limited as the novel remains incapable of delving into the means of resistance it proposes.

Allegorical Incarceration

The researchers have already established that incarceration, which mostly targets African Americans and other "minorities," is an integral part of neoliberalism. This incarceration and its two forms, allegorical and literal, are experienced by the characters of *The Hate U Give* throughout the several stages of their lives. The novel, the prequel *Concrete Rose*, and the film adapted from Fox 2000 (Thomas, n. d.) portray the various forms of incarceration African Americans undergo, but on different levels of clarity. The novel introduces a clear image of the criminalization process in the contemporary neoliberal time. The prequel emphasizes that criminalization is the companion of African Americans at all times, as Maverick, big Mav, the father of Starr tells the story of being criminalized at the beginning of neoliberalism (the 1970s and 1980s). Although the film reflects the deteriorating state of African Americans, it does not express the idea that neoliberalism is one of the causes of all the struggles it highlights. Therefore,

this section emphasizes that neoliberalism incarcerates African Americans allegorically by referring to the novel, the prequel, and the film.

African Americans in Thomas's view are first imprisoned by neoliberal education. Indeed, they are left without care due to neoliberal educational policies that have a destructive impact on African American communities. Maverick's school which is, ironically, described in the prequel as "named Jefferson Davis High School. . . [after the name of] a slave owner and the president of the Confederate states" (Thomas, 2021, 77-78) is the place that Starr describes as being a "school . . . where you go to get a jump, high, pregnant or killed" (Tillman, 2018, 6:10-6:19). As Maverick claims, African American schools are chaotic, impoverished, and their teachers are old as "Mr. Phillips the history teacher . . . [is] at least seventy-five" (81:00). This state is the mere result of neoliberal policies that have "not addressed such problems as . . . the need for more Black, competent public school teachers and college professors, [and] . . . how to increase the number of Blacks who attend and complete college" (Rich, 1986, 27-28). Such a policy does not differ from the infamous proposal made by the African American leader Booker T. Washington, slave-owners, and other white supremacists.

For these reasons, Starr's father thinks that the education African Americans might be exposed to does not qualify them to be part of the neoliberal world:

Corporate America don't bring jobs to our communities, and they d*** sure ain't quick to hire us. Then, . . . even if you do have a high school diploma, so many of the schools in our neighborhoods don't prepare us well enough. . . . Our schools don't get the resources to equip you like Williamson does. It's easier to find some crack than it is to find a good school around here. (Thomas, 2017, 169)

Big Mav claims that "even if . . . [African Americans] do have a high school diploma" (Thomas, 169), they are not qualified enough to join respectable colleges and have satisfactory jobs. Therefore, neoliberalizing education negatively affects African Americans' vocational/technical training, testing, and dropouts and leads parents to withdraw their children from public schools where the level of education is deteriorating. Indeed, the corrupted state of Garden Heights' school makes Maverick and Lisa enroll Starr, Seven, and Sekani at Williamson (a "white"-majority), a situation that has placed an extra financial strain on the family. Eventually, neoliberalizing education leads to excluding African Americans and their families, stressing these families out, and furthering such stereotypical images of African Americans as uneducated thugs, as the novel successfully shows.

The novel also points to another aspect of the neoliberal carceral project; that is, the health sector. Indeed, Khalil Harris, the murdered victim, and his family his mother Brenda, his brother Cameron, and his grandmother Mrs. Rosalie, are shown as being victims of this privatized system that does not prioritize health care. A consequence of such neoliberalism is that "states with large proportions of blacks . . . to provide less appropriate treatment to all myocardial infarction [heart attack] patients, whether black or not, than states with smaller proportions of blacks" (Bulatao & Anderson, 2004, 98). This process renders hospitals as sites of interest and money. Indeed, Khalil's grandmother, a cancer patient, is the victim of the lack of public insurance, not even the low-quality public insurance like Medicare or Medicaid that the American neoliberal government offers. Thus, she herself bears the financial burden of chemotherapy, which she cannot afford as she has been fired from "[t]he hospital [where she works] . . . 'cause she was sick" and "she wasn't pulling her load on the job" (Thomas, 2017, 18). Brenda, as another case in point, finds no hope in privatized rehab (Thomas, 13). This deteriorating condition further fractures the family, as Brenda's state makes her overlook the fact that "Khalil needed . . . [her] . . . . waited for . . . [her] and cried for . . . [her]" (Thomas, 91). This situation drives Khalil to drug trafficking, as he feels obligated to pay back what his mother has stolen from King due to her addiction. Therefore, neoliberalizing health dissolves this African American family.

Another factor that leads to the dissolution of this and many other African American families is the mental prison that the media constructs. Through spreading, implementing, rationalizing, and defending neoliberalism and its agendas, the media plays a significant role in promoting neoliberal devoicing, criminalizing, and exterminating African Americans. Through the media, the "financial logic enters everyday culture through the discourses, regulations, financial instruments[,] and technological devices that compel people to conform at a practical level, by allowing (or even requiring) and disallowing certain actions and subjectivities" (Berry, 2019, 62). The novel's depiction of this process vividly testifies to this process. The narrator tells the readers, "[b]etween a story about a bad car accident on the freeway and a garbage bag of live puppies that was found in a park, there's a short story

about an officer-involved shooting that is being investigated" (Thomas, 2017, 47). It is clear that Khalil's identity is negated, as his murder by a "white" police officer mistaking Khalil's hairbrush for a gun is referred to as an incident. This vague reference to Khalil's death distances Khalil from the masses and normalizes his death, as "the Monday night news. . . added [a title] to . . . Khalil Harris, [by labeling him as] a Suspected Drug Dealer [and] . . . didn't mention that he was unarmed" (Thomas, 104). This labeling also shows how the media has the power to govern Thomas's characters' perceptions and supports the neoliberal criminalization of African Americans.

Media and its agents also distort African Americans' attempts to protest against police brutality. Media outlets represent the protests in Garden Heights after the death of Khalil as violent, destructive, and full of thugs. These images support the view that "the news . . . makes it sound like it's Khalil's fault he died" (Thomas, 2017, 140), as media agencies claim he belongs to a community of "thugs," who are protesting. Moreover, Starr's attempts at vocalizing her friends' and African Americans' stories have been crushed by the media representing those stories as hers, not her people's story. Starr has been offered the chance to recount Khalil's death story in one of the reality shows hosted by Diane Carey. Unfortunately, this reality television show is "as [other reality shows] a response to neoliberal changes to media structures" (Berry, 2019, 63) and a tool of supporting individualism over collectivism—through reassuring that the guests tell their own anecdotes, not their communities'. Therefore, Starr has been represented as the narrator of her own story (not a familiar story to African Americans), and Khalil's story has been introduced as his story.

This logic renders Starr's family and the stories of the community families irrelevant or insignificant at best, a logic that is even reinforced when the characters use neoliberal technologies such as social media platforms to tell their stories. Commenting at her mother's attempts at employing Twitter, Starr says:

She's probably uploading the latest family snapshots on Facebook for our out-of-town relatives. With everything that's going on, what can she say? "Sekani saw cops harass his daddy, but he's doing so well in school. #ProudMom." Or, "Starr saw her best friend die, keep her in your prayers, but my baby made the honor roll again. #Blessed." Or even, "Tanks are rolling by outside, but Seven's been accepted into six colleges so far. #HeIsGoingPlaces." (Thomas, 2017, 204)

Ironically, Lisa, Starr's mother, cannot turn into "#ProudMom" the scene when her youngest son Sekani sees the police arresting his father after arguing loudly with Mr. Lewis because Mr. Lewis tells the police about King's illegal acts. Moreover, she cannot turn the ghost of Khalil's death haunting Starr and her fight to voice his death into "#Blessed," and she cannot turn Seven's acceptance in six colleges regardless of his struggle in the neighborhood into "HeIsGoingPlaces." For her, such forgettable hashtags dehumanize her family members and community. The media imprisons and devoices African Americans, because they experience discrimination, systemic racism, segregation, and criminalization. This process of devoicing recalls Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's significant intervention in her well-known "Can the Subaltern Speak?". In it, she emphasizes that "[t]he subaltern as female cannot be heard or read" (64). In the revised edition of the essay (1999), Spivak suggests that the "silencing of the subaltern" paradoxically continues in the media as a result of "global financialization"; that is, neoliberalism (66).

The media's silencing process also involves interpellating the characters and making them neoliberalized individuals who only care about consumerism. Consumerism obviously transforms Starr's and her peers' desire from a desire of becoming, and changing, into a desire of accumulating products rather than on personal change and growth (Wolff, 2013, 328). Khalil works to buy shoes (accumulate products); he spends a lot of money to buy Jordans—the Three Retros. Starr is also part of this superficial world, in which people are judged and labeled based on their appearance, as she "had about forty shoe boxes stacked in a corner" (Thomas, 2017, 152) in her room. Moreover, Starr forces her father to buy her a MacBook (Thomas, 203). These references to brands all suggest that the novel gestures towards the intersection between racial identity and brands. Neoliberalism emphasizes that "racial identity has even been recoded into a brand" (Wolff, 335). Therefore, DeVante, one of King Lords and another victim of neoliberal criminalization, believes that "[d]ude wearing J's. White boys wear Converse and Vans, not no J's unless they trying to be black" (Thomas, 235).

More specifically, the references to the shoes also reinforce the process of neoliberalism. Unlike Jay Shelat (2019), the researchers do not believe that sneakers are among the symbols that Thomas utilizes to "[confront] the racist institutions that

determine color lines . . . [and to] serve as foils to the racist ideologies and hierarchies at the heart of Starr's community" (70). On the contrary, buying these forty pairs of shoes is part of the desire of owning that neoliberalism promotes. As a result, it is clear that consumerism and commodity fetishism distort the way African Americans see and evaluate themselves. More specifically, consumerism turns "the consumption of objects and services . . . [into] a vehicle for the expression of personal identity and . . . [a part of] the quests for an authentic life for all social classes" (Gauthier, 2017). In other words, African Americans are valued and controlled by what they consume and its amount. Consumerism, then, imprisons African Americans' desires, destroys their families, and eliminates fair trade that "attempts to make visible the social and environmental relations of production and exchange that lie behind the commodity" (Hudson & Hudson, 2003, 413).

Indeed, Thomas's work expresses how "the structures of neoliberalism and the market not only further disrupt social continuity and erode the cohesiveness of basic social units but also result in individual psychoses and cultural dilution and disintegration" (Wrenn, 2014, 506). Neoliberalism has reshaped the three different parts of identity: the personal, which is "self-ascribed," the collective social, which is "other-assigned," and the "relational social," which is about "voluntary self-identification with social groups, both formal and informal" (Wrenn, 504). In the neoliberal world, cultural dilution and disintegration have resulted in the formation of hyperindividualized people and the demolition of collective and relational social identities. Therefore, Starr's personal identity is celebrated, promoted, and redefined with neoliberal standards, as economic prosperity means personal success, and not belonging to the other two identities is vital in defining its core. Consequently, Starr's personal identity collides with her collective social identity and the relational social one.

Starr suffers from an internal conflict between living out her real personal identity, which interacts with its African American collective social identity and makes the best out of its relational social identity, and the neoliberal discourse defining her. Thus, Starr feels that she does not belong to her African American people at parties—she feels she is not enough, denies acknowledging that she knows Khalil in front of her white friends, and finds herself inferior to her rich white boyfriend Chris. Furthermore, she is imprisoned allegorically by being defined by Graden Height's residents using her collective social identity—represented by race and gender—as "Big Mav's daughter who work[s] in the store" (Thomas, 2017, 235) while ignoring the name that carries her personal identity and "act[ing] like that's the name on . . . [her] birth certificate" (Thomas, 9). Such self-doubt forces her to follow Hailey, her "white" friend and white supremacist, and forget her real personal and collective social identities.

The other characters' personal identities are also displaced from their relational social identities represented in a balance between the personal identity and the collective social one. This displacement is the result of "the neoliberal . . . [rejection of] any idea of responsibility—of one individual toward others, of the State toward individuals, and even of individuals toward themselves" (Pendenza & Lamattina, 2019, 100). Because of neoliberal perceptions, individuals question their responsibility for their communities and sometimes encourage blaming the collective identity for the neoliberal cruelties that communities face. Starr struggles between being responsible for her community, vocalizing Khalil's voice, and remaining silent (a paradox that Spivak discusses in the revised edition of "Can the Subaltern Speak?", as the researchers have explained above). Moreover, Big Mav goes through the same experience when he seeks to keep balance between his family's interests, moving out of the neighborhood, and his responsibility for his community, staying there and being part of the reform. While thinking about their responsibility for their community, both Mr. Lewis and Uncle Carlos fall into the neoliberal trap and reject their collective identity. Mr. Lewis blames the people in Garden Heights for King's acts, and Uncle Carlos blames Khalil and his race for Khalil's death. Such a clash showshow African American communities are fragmented, families are worn out, and accept the tenets of neoliberalism. This state of the community—brought about by neoliberal forces, let us recall—facilitates transforming African Americans into victims of literal incarceration.

Literal Incarceration

The Hate U Give shows how incarceration, whether allegorical or literal, is made to be African Americans' rite of passage (Cummings, 2020, 541). African Americans are meant to be incarcerated, and neoliberalism furthers this process. After allegorically incarcerating African Americans, neoliberalism—supported by the American Criminal Justice System—intends to privatize policing. Thomas demonstrates the way through which neoliberalism legitimizes police brutality and turns prisons into

an industry—leading Starr and the people of Garden Heights to be the future prisoners and the poor victims of its ever-looping wheel. Indeed, Thomas explains how neoliberalizing policing reinstalls a kind of policing that excludes the disadvantaged and poor from decent spatial spaces and moves them away into segregated and poor areas like Garden Heights. Therefore, in Thomas's novel, police brutality is legitimized and prisons are turned into investments.

Privatizing policing and police brutality horrify African American families. Neoliberalism follows a risk-based policing strategy that arrests people before committing any crimes suspecting that they might be a threat. Indeed, "out of the over 575,000 individuals stopped and frisked by . . . [the New York Police Department] in 2009, nearly ninety percent were innocent of any crime" (Lyman, 2012, 179). Moreover, such a strategy is racially biased since "black men are about 2.5 times more likely to be killed by police over the life course than are white men" (Edwards et al., 2019, 16796). As a result, African Americans fear being humiliated, imprisoned, and killed. Maverick teaches Starr "about what to do if a cop stopped . . . [her]" since he claims that "[she] wasn't too young to get arrested or shot" (Thomas, 2017, 20). In addition, she and her race's members get introduced to how they should not "fear the police, [but] just to be smart around them" (Thomas, 23) from an early age. This fear multiplies as the police fabricate Khalil's death story: "the cops rummage through Khalil's car . . . [before they even] cover his body…., close his eyes. . . [, and] close his mouth" (25) looking for proof of the "innocence" of One Fifteen's, the police officer who kills Khalil. Furthermore, during the investigation, the two detectives try "twist[ing] . . . [Starr's] words around" (Thomas, 2017, 53) to justify their brutality. Such brutality explains why the U.S. police in the real world "kill far more people than do police in other advanced industrial democracies" (Edwards et al., 16793).

Police brutality, which is part of the process of criminalization and stigmatization that African Americans endure in a neoliberal society, is the starting step of the literal neoliberal carceral project. Incarceration in the U.S is a prosperous industry that shows the cooperation between the elites' interests and the public sector within the biased and exploitive American Criminal Justice System, which sanctions mass incarceration that, as Michelle Alexander (2010) puts it, "emerged as a stunningly comprehensive and well-disguised system of racialized social control that functions in a manner strikingly similar to Jim Crow" (4). According to Starr's father, mass incarceration is: a "billion-dollar industry" that is nurtured and fed by another "multibillion-dollar industry" (drug trafficking); "[t]he Brendas can't get jobs unless they're clean, and they can't pay for rehab unless they got jobs. . . [,so] they either spend most of their life in prison, . . . [a] billion-dollar industry, or they have a hard time getting a real job and probably start selling drugs again" (Thomas, 2017, 170). This complicated relationship between the prison industry and the drug industry leaves African Americans desperate while facing the expansion and privatization of prisons. Indeed, due to the neoliberal policies in "2008, 2.5 million human beings—1 percent of the population—were immobilized in U.S. prisons and jails. In the same period[,] 7 million adults were subject to state-supervised surveillance" (Dillon, 2018, 6). Moreover, "in a typical year roughly 14 million people pass through the gates of a prison or the bars of a jail . . . roughly 70 percent of the people behind bars were, and continue to be, people of color" (Dillon, 6). Therefore, incarceration is the nightmare that haunts African Americans and prophesies their destruction and loss.

In the African American case, being imprisoned means being demonized, and the prisoners' families are stigmatized by their relatives' incarceration. They are under extra pressure and live unbearable humiliation. Those families, like Starr's nuclear and extended family, face the cruel stigmatization that is called "secondary prisonisation" and "include[s] financial difficulties, practical challenges associated with visiting and otherwise maintaining contact, stigma and coping with grief-like emotions" (Kotova, 2020, 2). Big Mav has suffered from the carceral institution twice. The first is his suffering as a result of charging his father with drug trafficking and people's belief that he should continue his father's legacy, and the second is him being imprisoned. His imprisonment results in the loss of the father figure in Starr's early childhood. Thus, she replaces Big Mav (the father figure) with Uncle Carlos. This substitute father figure places strains on the relationship between Starr and her father. Financially speaking, although Big Mav was lucky to find a job, unlike other prisoners, after imprisonment, he faces fiscal issues after his release. He used to take Starr and Seven to Taco Bell and watch them eat while not eating. Such a neoliberal policy makes it almost impossible for African Americans and their families to prosper and stay intact and reinforces the moral panic that is typically associated with African Americans.

Conclusion

Away from depicting the gloomy picture that neoliberalism intends to draw about of African American communities, *The Hate U Give* insists on the importance of community building and fighting moral panic. Indeed, the story of Starr tells how it is significant to realize that neoliberalism manipulates the cultural, racial, and economic American scenes. If one reaches this understanding, resisting the neoliberal creed starts. This resistance, in which Starr is very active, is carried out by understanding her "race's" dilemma and story. She realizes the destructive and racist logic of the American Criminal Justice System. She also investigates the core of the neoliberal project, which revolves around deconstructing the notions of community and culture, incarcerating African Americans and emphasizing the essentialist discourse of Us vs. Them. Thomas shows how revisiting the biased discourse of neoliberalism and ending self-blame as well as identity rejection are vital means of resistance.

The different means of resistance provoke two questions in the readers' minds. The first: Should African Americans and other minorities call for decarceration as part of resisting racial neoliberalism? and the second: Should prisons be reformed? Should the carceral system be replaced by "demilitarization of schools, revitalization of education at all levels, a health system that provides free physical and mental care to all, and a justice system based on reparation and reconciliation rather than retribution and vengeance" (Davis, 2003, p. 107)? These questions help us claim that despite its exposure of the risks of adherence to neoliberal "branding" (the pun is intended), Thomas's novel falls short of proposing effective means of resisting it and accepts it as a fact of life (e.g. Starr's obsession with shoes and Twitter). While the novel does not proffer thorough answers to such questions and is sometimes complicit with the logic of neoliberalism (hence the limitations of its resistance and contribution to silencing the subaltern, to use Spivak), it helps provoke them in readers' minds in effective ways.

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