

THE CONSTRUCTIONS OF POWER: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ON BLACK AMERICAN WOMEN AS PORTRAYED IN *MAUD MARTHA* AND *THE HATE U GIVE*

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Received: 17-03-2024 Revised: 21-06-2024 Accepted: 01-07-2024 Published: 16-10-2024 Volume: 8 Issue: 2 DOI: https://doi.org/10.33019/lire.v6i2.293	This study is in attempt to present a latent racial and gendered issue repeatedly taking place in American society as depicted by two novels produced within 70 years interval of time. <i>Maud Martha</i> was published in 1953 and <i>The Hate U Give</i> in 2017. Using critical discourse analysis and qualitative research method, this article aims to explicate the causes of unjust construction of Black women power relations and how Black women cope with such unfavorable situations in such very different eras. Critical discourse analysis observes people interactions through language because language is the basic element of life and the way truth and power are produced. In power contestation, discourse plays two opposing roles i.e., maintaining or preserving the system of dominion in one side and in another side fighting against the system of dominion. Seizing discourse means seizing power. The ongoing unjust construction of racial power relations is the major discourse that Maud Martha and Starr Carter have to live in. They exercise power producing discourses of their own as their resistances against the ongoing unfavorable major discourse. The contestation of power leads to hard mass demonstrations in <i>The Hate U Give</i> and solemn understanding of living a peaceful life in <i>Maud Martha</i> .
KEYWORDS <i>Power Constructions, Power Relations, Discourse, Black Women</i>	

1. INTRODUCTION

Even while modern Black American women have greater possibilities to work, learn, live their lives more freely, and negotiate more effectively, many of them still face discrimination simply for being Black women. This highlights the idea that women undergoing persecution simply for just being women across a variety of social strata has not yet come to an end since the era of slavery. Resistance is the subsequent opposing issue that is sparked by this latent issue. The idea of getting a better position and status has been the discourse of power in Black American literary works throughout the long history and discourse contestations between Black women against two parties i.e., White people and Black men in the frame of an unfair racial system and coercive patriarchy.

The two novels discussed and analyzed in this study were written by Black authors and released in 1953 and 2017. The publication dates illustrate two extremely different eras separated by nearly 70 years. This large interval of time allows us to understand the progress, development, and progression of women's issues in America as depicted in the two works. The 1950s saw the



birth of the second wave of feminism leading to the embellishment of women's voices. Though White women have a dominant voice, Black women's contributions to the Civil Rights Movement have had a far-reaching impact. During the 1950s and 1960s, African Americans made a concerted effort to attain equal rights and voting rights, as well as to combat widespread racial discrimination and segregation in Southern America. American government accommodates the movement's demands for equal and suffrage rights, desegregation, fair housing, and practices of employment (Carson, 2024; History.com Editors, 2024), but racial and gender discrimination, coercion, segregation, and subjugation continue to this day.

Many discourses highlight challenges confronted by African-American women authors and all African-American women. These women must navigate the complexities of expressing their experiences, as the realities they imagine may differ from what actually happens. Hence, African-American women keep encountering hefty obstacles in the pursuit of entrepreneurship, education, health care, housing, and employment opportunities. Actual reality and imagined reality seem to be a saddening paradox. The main character in Gwendolyn Brooks' novel *Maud Martha*, named Maud Martha, presents a paradoxical situation. On one hand, she is an educated and strong woman who asserts herself in the social position she believes she deserves in her interactions with the predominantly White neighborhood where she resides. However, when it comes to consoling her daughter at the moment of encountering a racial atmosphere, she exhibits a sense of powerlessness. In one particular incident, Maud Martha is compelled to resort to pleading and even lying to her little daughter when they coincidentally encounter a White Santa Claus who ignores them while gifting White children in a department store. This incident can be perceived as a discourse of the author to highlight the perpetuation of White dominance over Black individuals, despite Martha's lack of intent to convey such a message. Furthermore, the meeting between Martha's daughter and the White Santa Claus underscores the significance of skin color in social power relations, demonstrating that a Black child, like Paulette, is unable to attain the same privilege as her White counterparts. Through this portrayal, Gwendolyn Brooks conveys the enduring impact of slavery's harmful legacy, showing that even a strong Black woman can be deeply affected by the deeply ingrained belief that Blackness is inferior to Whiteness. Thus, it can be argued that mid-20th century Black American literature serves as a vibrant response to the lingering effects of Jim Crow Laws, reflecting the challenges faced by Black women authors who must navigate the complexities of portraying both imagined and lived experiences that often diverge from their expectations.

Black women's novels in the mid-20th century are structurally and thematically dominated by struggles to achieve their maximum capacity of complex bicultural identity and to explore racism scorn for freedom from oppression and for the festivity of the unique facets of Black culture (Bell, 2006; Greve, 2016; Moniz, 2015). Black American authors also believe in the Black power concept, which encompasses the dreams and struggles of African-American people for solidarity, racial equality, self-determination, nationhood, liberation, economic empowerment, and political and cultural institutions for Blacks' interests (Archives, 2016; Bell, 2006), or Black cultural nationalism (Andrews, 2024). Because of their decisive contribution and significant roles in the civil rights movement and women's movement, Black American women's literary works obtained a much wider reception in American literature, and it persists until today, the early 21st century. However, the milestone achievement during the mid-20th century does not negate the persevering color segregation and discrimination socially and systemically conducted by both White and Black



people. Toni Morrison's *Sula* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* are a few of many other Black women's literary works in the last half of the 20th century era depicting the persistent struggles of Black women through their endless discourses against persistent patriarchy and bigotry strongly and deeply rooted in American society. Contestations of discourses for fairer power relations between Blacks and Whites do not halt during this era. Alice Walker even launches and amplifies the term womanism to exclude from feminism which she regards mostly only for White women and is ignorant to women of color (Izgarjan & Markov, 2012). In every time of their feminism activities, when push comes to shove, White women choose race over gender (McLarin, 2019) meaning that White women will put White needs as a priority rather than Blacks in the same issue.

The 21st century Black American women's literary works are much influenced by Black Lives Matter. Angie Thomas, through her popular fiction *The Hate U Give*, obviously shows her perspective on racial injustice as she portrays the shooting death of Trayvon Martin in 2012, of Michael Brown and Eric Garner in 2014, and of George Floyd in 2020 that amplify Black Lives Matter movement worldwide. Inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement and the factual murder of a young Black by a White officer, *The Hate U Give* presents the struggles of Starr Carter, a young Black girl against both gender and racial subordination, discrimination, and prejudice. Her status makes her suffer triple jeopardy i.e., as a Black, woman, and teenager. Carter needs great efforts to make her voices heard by other people, especially the Whites. Her love story, moreover, displays that a deeply hidden anxiety between the two races still exists even in this millennium age. She feels a big gap between her and Chris, her boyfriend because she is Black and of an ordinary family, while Chris is White and of a rich family. Thomas uses her novel as a discourse to reverse the discourse of the ongoing unjust construction of power. The current construction placing Black lives as trivial issues must be discontinued and reversed with an opposing discourse positioning Black lives as a significant matter.

When the novel title is abbreviated, it becomes THUG, and the word "thug" means a lawless, violent, or vicious person, especially one who performs criminal actions such as robbery, assault, or murder. As discourse observes spoken and written language within social interaction context and signifies any socio-cultural issues (Foucault, 1981; Foucault, 1980), the word thug, the phrase the hate you give, and Black people stigma as lawless people deserving hatred are correlated. The novel title *The Hate U Give*, thus, can be interpreted in some ways. First, it is the hate to be the foundation of stigmatizing Black people as a lawless race. Second, it becomes a reason that Black people being thugs are because White people hate them. Third, if there is no hate to give, there will be no thugs or violent people. As a discourse, the title designates a message that discrimination, subordination, prejudice, etc. are based on hate, and hate must be swabbed out so that there will be more possibility for equality and justice to be attained. In this stance, a similar atmosphere is shown through *Maud Martha*, when the protagonist tries to soothe her child not to have bad feelings toward Santa Claus for not giving the child a Christmas gift (Brooks, 1953). A glance view seems to exhibit parallel atmospheres within the two novels despite the lengthy interval of time between them. The repeating discourses upon prejudiced constructions of power in the early 20th century, mid-20th century, end of 20th century, and early 21st century are repeatedly encountered with the reversal discourses within those eras by Black women. It produces a cycle of contestations of power through discourses.



This study is not a comparative literature although an atmosphere of comparison cannot be avoided. It has to be comprehended that comparative literature requires literary works of two different languages and cultures. Hence, the emergence of comparison substances cannot lead to a comparative literature study. This writing is intended to observe the power construction that Black women have to undergo during the two eras. This is considered an important study because the time span between the two novels is about 70 years crossing the millennium perimeter. The two eras have extreme differences in almost all aspects of life. However, within these so many differences, the aspect of racial and gender relations seems to slowly change. It can also be stated that the massive signs of progress in technology, education, democracy, economy, humanity, health, and other sectors do not seem to bring significant impacts on racial and gender relations. The vast growth of women movements and Black American feminism during the 70 years is an indicator that the issue is latent, and thus everlastingly very important to discuss.

As implied by the title, this study is conducted to observe the construction of power in social power relations undergone by Black women and to disclose the causality factors of such a long unjust construction of both racial and gender power. With such objectives, the emerging questions concern on what kind of causality factors determine the power construction in the mid-20th century and early 21st century as portrayed in the two novels, and how Black women cope with it. This study is considered important because of some respects. First, the cultural, psychological, and social efforts of Black female writers represent the cultural atmospheres and the countenance of American history. Second, Black women suffering intersectionality as marginalized and even alienated subalterns confirm the construction of their power as well as their hard journey for self-empowerment and transformation. Third, literary works presenting prejudice, injustice, and discrimination for women of color especially African-American women reflect the real realms of American culture. Moreover, African-American women authors keep writing stories about racial and gender problems reflecting the current situations of the publications. This means that such issues are perceived to be very important for African-American women and society, thus, this accentuates the previous statement that this writing is a subsequently very important discussion in the academic world. Furthermore, this study is also one of the efforts to amplify the world movement demanding equality and justice not only for African-American women in both official legal provisions and everyday life actions but also for all women in the whole world who have been and are encountering similar experiences.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sherianne Kramer (2019) through her book chapter entitled *The power of critical discourse analysis: Investigating female-perpetrated sex abuse victim discourses* in an anthology book titled *Female-Perpetrated Sex Abuse* applies critical discourse to analyze women suffering sexual abuse as the victims. As a social, historical, and cultural principle, discourse is used to conceal and construct power relations. The recent phenomena of increasing sex abuses are in line with the advancement of technology along with the increase of women number in economic workforces, the media representations of female sexuality, and the promotion of female empowerment and gender equity in South Africa. She checks the junctures of power, sexuality, and gender towards FSA (Female-Perpetrated Sex Abuse) victimhood by using discourse analysis. The method used for her analysis is field interviews with women as participants exploring their opinions of



identifying themselves as victims of sex abuse constructions. She interviews them to demonstrate the interactions of sexuality and gender constructions in modern power. The objective of her study is to give information on the practice of critical discourse analysis (CDA) by analyzing the extracts from radio interviews with a former UK prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, and she thinks that CDA is semiotic and linguistic analysis aspects of social problems and processes. By observing and analyzing the words and statements of the participants during their interviews, then considered as discourses, she discovers that South African women believe the following notions: first, there is a gender construction emphasizing male aggression and female passivity; second, women are born for sex and drive men to be aggressive; third, male violence is a physical act while female violence is a mental and emotional form of abuse; and fourth, male violence is normative because only men can abuse women but not vice versa. Explicating and interpreting the statements and words of the participants are the ways she is applying Foucauldian discourse analysis.

Senem Aydin-Düzgit (2014) uses critical discourse analysis to perform a critical study on the prospects and challenges of the foreign policy of the European Union (EU). He uses discourse analysis as the reproduction through empirical analysis of practice realization because there are analytical tools for conducting reproduction in discourse analysis. Aydin counts that studies employing CDA focus mostly on representational practices mainly comprising events and actions rather than emphasizing linguistic aspects such as predicates and metaphors. Only several studies apply the multiple linguistic mechanisms in discourse analysis to observe the constructions of the subject identities. He writes there that in discourse, discursive practices are a very important form of social practice having contributed to constituting the social world including social relations and social identities. He also mentions the discourse-historical approach (DHA) as a major variant of CDA that incorporates the intertextuality concept in the analysis. With this DHA, Aydin begins to analyze the EU in this study entitled *Critical discourse analysis in analysing European Union foreign policy: Prospects and Challenges*. The emphasis of DHA is identity construction, where 'us' and 'them' construction is the basis of discourses of identity and difference so it has been used recently to analyze the construction of European identities. There are three main steps in DHA i.e., discourse topics, discursive strategies, and linguistic means. Applying this DHA method with employing intertextuality and interdiscursivity, Aydin analyzes EU foreign policy texts or discourses comprising parliamentary debates, foreign policy documents, political speeches, and interviews. He finally concludes that the main analytical tools of DHA work successfully to study the EU foreign policy, and thus, he proposes that the methodological tools of DHA can be adopted by poststructuralist studies to discern broader properties of discourse and discursive structures rather than to search for the beliefs, intentions, and perceptions of individual authors and speakers.

Another researcher, Katherine Morton, uses discourse analysis to identify the connections of some aspects in the British Columbia Highway covering up the negotiation of racialized and gendered power imbalances, violence against Indigenous women, questions of colonialism, and critical mobility through the province's constraining of Indigenous mobility. This Highway in British Columbia is remote, underservice, and a critical case of violence against Indigenous women. Morton examines texts on the billboards along the Highway using a critical discourse analysis because she perceives that those billboards target Indigenous women and endeavor to construct hitchhiking as a contentious form of mobility. She implements Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional approach to critical discourse analysis where texts are analyzed at the micro,



mezzo, and macro level. In-depth text analysis covering metaphors, sentence structures, diction, and other language choices is associated with micro-level analysis of CDA. The mezzo-level analysis refers to how a discourse is consumed and how it is presented/ published. The use of billboards as a medium of discourse to analyze complies with this analysis level. The macro level of CDA analyzes the functions of texts in socio-cultural practices. Those three levels of CDA become the basis for analyzing the contents of the billboards comprising the written words and the imagery, to figure out the use of billboards and their implications, and to examine the positions of those billboards in their socio-cultural context in the contemporary Northwestern British Columbia. Based on the analysis results with tight discipline on the implementation of the three levels of Fairclough CDA, the use of billboards in the efforts to thwart violence against Indigenous women is a necessary and useful method to combat violence. However, her analysis using Fairclough CDA also shows that the texts and imagery on billboards present problematic messages to understand by hitchhiking Indigenous women along the Highway of Tears. Morton concludes her discourse analysis that the texts on the billboards bring meaning by suggesting the assent of hitchhiking while unconsciously admitting hitchhiking as the cause of women being victimized. The discourse analysis on billboard texts illustrates racial and gender problems subordinating the status of Native women who hitchhike, declaring them social outsiders and deviants.

The fourth study applying discourse analysis found for this literature review is that by Kyung Hye Kim (2014) entitled *Examining US news media discourses about North Korea: A corpus-based critical discourse analysis*. Kim asserts that news is selected following a set of values and criteria, constructed to support a certain interest. News is not a value-free reflection. Through corpus-based critical discourse analysis, Kim presents the process of North Korea having been constructed by the US news. Corpus-based CDA is an integration of two approaches i.e., corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis. A corpus linguistics approach describes collocational and other recurrent patterns associated with specific lexical items across an entire corpus. Kim refers to some theorists that the integration of the two approaches is aimed to stimulate a dialogue between qualitative and quantitative approaches, and subsequently, his study is to examine how discursive practices of news media contribute to the shaping of social structures. He focuses and limits his discussion on corpus-based discourse analysis although he knows and believes that CDA analysis goes beyond the edge of linguistic features analysis and involves the context into account. Based on this theory, combined with a program software named WordSmith Tools Version 5.0, Kim constructs analyses on CNN a TV broadcast, Newsweek a magazine, and The New York Times a daily newspaper.

Observing the ways the four articles use CDA in their analyses, the authors of this study conclude that the similarity between this study and those four articles is on the basic theory i.e., discourse analysis. The ways of implementing the theory are different even among these five writings. The subjects to analyze also show differences due to the fact that this writing studies literary works. Therefore, it is clear to see the originality of this study despite some emerging similarities.



3. METHODOLOGY

Critical Discourse analysis (CDA) in general puts an eye on the spoken and written language in social contexts. It observes people's interactions through language because language is an inseparable element of social life and is interconnected dialectically with other elements in society (Fairclough, 2003; Foucault, 1980, 1981; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Political decision-making, legislation, social structures, social relations, populism, manipulation, power play, and power relations are determined by the productions of texts and language in the society in that this subsequently results in three indispensable concepts i.e., the concept of history, the concepts of power, and the concept of ideology (Dijk, 2009; Fairclough, 2003; Foucault, 1980; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Language is believed to indicate and express power, and it is also implicated in contending and challenging power, thus, language is used to not only challenge and subvert power but also alter the distributions of power in the short and long-term (Gowhary et al., 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

Social and power relation in critical discourse analysis is recognized by social, cultural, and political constraints. Discourse analysis deals with the way language shapes social identities, social relations, and socio-political world (Berger, 2016) and the way truth and power are produced (Foucault, 1980, 1981). The relationship between society and discourse is very strong, so discourse is socially conditioned as well as socially constitutive (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). It is a complex communicative event that represents a social situation comprising participants and their possessions. In society, the production of discourse is selected, controlled, organized, and distributed by power holders. Discourse on one side is to maintain or preserve the system of dominion and on another side is used by the dominated parties to struggle against the system of dominion (Foucault, 1981). However, when a discourse is judged true, it will not be true without the compliance of the authorities. If a discourse is instituted by authorities and declared true, the discourse must be true. The will to truth in discourses exerts pressures and can be a constraint for other discourses. The will to truth and the true discourse are based on the power and will of the authorized system otherwise they cannot be accepted (Foucault, 1981), and any texts as contesting discourses must have power against hegemony though they may subsequently turn to become other hegemonic subjects.

Discourse constructs issue, produces and defines knowledge, and manages the way an issue is conversed meaningfully. Not only does a discourse examine the structures of text and language and see institutions, organizations, and people (Gowhary et al., 2015), but it also represents socio-cultural issues because discourse represents, signifies, constitutes, and constructs the world through the social practices of verbal contacts (Foucault, 1981; Gowhary et al., 2015). Power, knowledge, and power relations are intently connected with discourse (Foucault, 1981), even both power and knowledge are joined in discourses (Foucault, 1978). When a discourse is accepted, it produces power, and thus, it can consecutively be stated that a discourse is power. Seizing discourse means seizing power.

This study applies a qualitative method in analyzing the novels to reveal the construction of Black women power. In this qualitative method, the above theory of discourse analysis will be the basis or a frame of thought in explicating the two novels and making analyses upon the topic proposed through the title. This kind of method explores library research in which the data to gather for the topic are collected from virtual libraries, meaning internet sites. The qualitative



method is flexible to data or information alteration for the enrichment of the data as long as it is in line with the overall coherent methodology (Creswell, 2009). The author gathers, evaluates, examines, interprets, and analyzes various data comprising primary and secondary data. The primary data are from the two novels, and the secondary data are from various sources related to the topic in the form of theories, criticisms, and essays about the novels and the authors.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Seen in a wide scope, the two novels by two Black women can be perceived as discourse representing the general idea of how Black women challenge authoritative discourses deeply rooted in American society. The stories composed in these novels confirm the ongoing unjust social and political constructions of power and Black women's conducts in dealing with them. Gwendolyn Brooks and Angie Thomas share common senses and ideas through their novels that accentuate the living reality of Black women having less power than both Black men and White people. Black women's literary works mostly present racially imbalanced social constructions of power that the characters in the novels must go through. To a certain extent, power contestations are conducted by the characters, and this in turn leads to power reconstructions or preservation of the prevailing power relations between Black women and others. The 70-year span of time between the two novels seems to confirm that despite the efforts and struggles done with power reconstruction achieved, similar construction of unjust power keeps persisting from time to time. It means the change is not strong enough to exist. Transformations, conversions, changes, variations, alterations, etc. in constructions and reconstructions are like wind coming and going constantly.

4.1 *Maud Martha*

Gwendolyn Brooks through her novel, *Maud Martha*, recites the ordinary life of a young Black woman living in an apartment where the residents are mostly White. Brooks narrates the upsetting air of the neighborhood Maud Martha and her husband shall live in. They undergo different positions, privileges, and status. As a discourse, it shows binary stereotypes of opposition comprising Black and White, privileged and unprivileged, dominant and dominated, powerful and powerless, and superior and inferior. Gwendolyn Brooks once said that her novel is about a woman "wrestling with the threads of her milieu" (Ahern, 2014). This statement is a discourse bringing forward the meaning of a difficult life to run. Brooks intentionally operates the phrase "wrestling with threads". Wrestling with threads proposes an image of someone getting tangled by threads and getting even more tangled because of the wrestling efforts made. It means that, referring to African-American women, the problems trap the bearers to plunge into more problems. Brooks' discourse through her phrase provides an imagination of the really hard life Black women must live on. Hence, *Maud Martha* is a discourse representing how Black women are wrestling with thread when living in White neighborhoods.

Because discourse represents, constitutes, and constructs the social entity and relations of people as social subjects (Fairclough, 1996), the meeting between Martha and Santa Claus preceding the dialog between Martha and her little daughter confirms their difference in social position and status.

'Why didn't Santa Claus like me?'

'Baby, of course he liked you.'



'He didn't like me. Why didn't he like me?'
'It maybe seemed that way to you. He has a lot on his mind, of course.'
'He liked the other children. He smiled at them and shook their hands.'
'He maybe got tired of smiling. Sometimes even I get-'.
'He didn't look at me, he didn't shake my hand.'
(Brooks, 1953, p. 124)

This quotation as a discourse describes how Gwendolyn Brooks portrays the powerlessness of Blacks before Whites. Santa Claus is perceived as a pious and child-loving man, but he ignores Martha's little girl, Paulette, while gifting other White children. Martha's replies to her daughter sound like endeavoring to find any excuses for Santa Claus to be correct in his deed. Brooks seems to show that segregation, coercion, and discrimination are enforced by Black women's deeds or Black people in general positioning them as lower than White so that any wrong deeds of Whites to Blacks are correct. Black women are depicted as undergoing a state of psychological oppression (Cudd & Andreasen, 2007) or hegemonic ideology (Herzfeld in Tzanelli, 2007), a realm in which women are designated as self-oppressive through the internalization of inferiority. "You'll never get a boyfriend," said Helen, fluffing on her Golden Peacock powder, "if you don't stop reading those books" (Brooks, 1953, p. 31) is another discourse meaning that being Black is ugly and even being smart (through reading books) is not important, indicating a belief that Black people are stupid and prefer stupid beautiful girls. Because this idea is deeply internalized, it can be inferred that Black people either consciously or unconsciously support the social constructions of bigotry, segregated, and discriminating power relations.

In connection with Foucault's idea stating discourse represents power, the conversation between Martha and her daughter verifies the reality that Blacks have less power than Whites in their relations. The questions of Paulette yield biased treatment and colors segregation, and Martha's effort to relieve her approves her understanding of the bigotry between the two colors. Despite Brooks's belief in equality as she once said, "Don't let anyone call you a minority if you're black or Hispanic or belong to some other ethnic group. You're not less than anybody else" (IPL, n.d.), she cannot negate the reality that sometimes being Black means admitting unjust behaviors, and it must be taught to children.

Poverty brings forward powerlessness or at least reduces power to be less than those who are regarded to possess more wealth. When Maud Martha is a teenage girl and begins working as a file clerk, she is paid a weekly ten-dollar salary. Through this relatively low status, Brooks exposes the suppression Maud Martha has to suffer in obtaining privileges that other individuals with higher status may not have, "Even now, at seventeen-high school graduate, mistress of her fate, and a ten-dollar-a-week file clerk in the very Forty-seventh Street lawyer's office where Helen was a fifteen-dollar-a-week typist [...]" (Brooks, 1953, p. 27). Maud Martha works at the house of Mrs. Burns-Cooper, a White lady. Mrs. Burn-Cooper's domineering statement "but after this time always use the back entrance" (Brooks, 1953, p. 113) proves the imbalance power relation due to differences on wealth possession and race. Brooks intends to exhibit an unpleasant image of White and Black power contestations in America in regard to the wealth possession issue.

Power relations according to Foucault (1982) cannot exist without insubordination. Means, procedures, and manners versus privileges and exercise versus resist statutory authority increase the accumulation of profits, exert the function of social position and status, and display feelings of



pride. "It was while Maud Martha was peeling potatoes for dinner that Mrs. Burns-Cooper laid herself out to prove that she was not a snob. Then it was that Mrs. Burns-Cooper came out to the kitchen and, sitting, talked and talked at Maud Martha" (Brooks, 1953, pp. 113, 115) exposes a discourse on how manners are used to reinforce the status of Mrs. Burns-Cooper that she has more power than Maud Martha. Her commands to Martha to settle various routine house chores accentuate her higher position in power relations.

Degrees of rationalization of power exercises emerge in various ways depending on the strategy and behavior of the responding individuals, thus marking interpersonal control within individuals involved in power relations (Hamilton & Sharma, 1996) because possessing more power may ruin the exercise of reason. In other words, the more they have power, the less they use rationality. Gwendolyn Brooks understands that many Whites are still attached to the past atmosphere of slavery. Through the character of Mrs. Burns-Cooper, Brooks displays a White lady addressing in a despising tone to a Black woman i.e., Maud Martha. Her attitude also looks despising, and Martha has to endure this racist behavior. This discourse demonstrates how Mrs. Burns-Cooper makes what is called by Foucault the degree of rationalization that emphasizes the construction of power relations.

In *Maud Martha*, not only does Maud Martha suffer prejudice from Whites due to her being Black, but she also suffers bias from lighter-skinned Blacks. Beauty is set based on Whites and by Whites. Thus, power construction can be formed based on physical appearance. This novel exposes the shallowness of the popular idea of determining White people as beautiful or lighter Black more beautiful than dark Black. "I am not a pretty woman," said Maud Martha. "If you married a pretty woman, you could be the father of pretty children. Envied by people. The father of beautiful children" (Brooks, 1953, p. 42). This statement is a discourse asserting the ongoing idea of beauty so that a lot of Black women with dark skin cannot feel as beautiful as those with lighter skin let alone White women. Being ugly means being unseen, unimportant, and unheard, and it also means that "other people define us before we get to define ourselves" (Smith, 2022). Thus, being a Black woman with dark skin leads to being assumed as ugly and being defined, which in turn, such a realm defines the degree of power relations. This can be related to a children's verse often sung in Black communities "Now if you're white you're all right, if you brown, stick around, but if you're black, git back, git back! git back!" (Collins, 2002). However, Maud Martha accepts her life the best she can and resists if she must. She dreams of having beauty around since she stays in ugliness.

4.2 *The Hate U Give*

Starr Carter's family is middle-low class and lives in Garden Height, a deprived Black neighborhood. In the neighborhood, many youths frequently get involved in crimes. Starr Carter is sent to study in a majority White school. Most students are White and perceived as richer than her, and she, a young poor Black girl makes friends with them. Many Black girls have to withstand discriminatory treatment during their school times because of their gender and race (Butler-Barnes et al., 2022). Some smart Black girls even experience sexism and racism that make them feel alone and isolated. In schools, Black teenage girls are frequently ignored because they have the complexities of multiple intersectional identities including race and sex (Joseph et al., 2016). Institutional racism, white supremacy, white privilege, negative stereotypes such as Angry Black Women and negative Black girls labeling such as talkative, disrespectful, deviant, loud, and



threatening are daily experiences of Black female teenagers' lives in schools (Burnett et al., 2022; Butler-Barnes et al., 2022; Joseph et al., 2016; Leath et al., 2019; Lepper, 2022). In high schools, differences in privilege and status occur due to different skin color. Hence, with such social constructions and living realities, it can be understood that Carter feels inferior, insecure, and subordinated in her school in spite of her good intelligence.

'Funny how it works with white kids though. It's dope to be black until it's hard to be black.'

'That's the hate they're giving us, baby, a system designed against us. That's Thug Life.'

'I've seen it happen over and over again: a black person gets killed just for being black, and all hell breaks loose. [...] Now I am that person, and I'm too afraid to speak.'

(Thomas, 2017, pp. 11, 101, 25)

The author of the novel, Angie Thomas worsens this feeling in the early stage by making Christ, a White boy, as Carter's boyfriend. Starr Carter knows a big space between her and him because of their differences in skin color and wealth. "Everything! You're White, I'm Black. You're rich, I'm not" (Thomas, 2017, p. 96). Therefore, in their early time, she frequently feels inferior in dating Chris. She feels like she plays two identities of her life.

Being two different people is so exhausting. [...] I've taught myself to speak with two different voices and only say certain things around certain people. [...] I don't have to choose which Starr I am with Chris, [...] Part of me feels like I can't exist around people like him.

(Thomas, 2017, p. 175)

Furthermore, her father does not support her when she is dating a White boy. "The hell, Starr?" Daddy says. "You dating a White boy?" "You got a problem with Black boys?" (Thomas, 2017, pp. 135, 157). His asking tone depresses her.

A murder case is another way of Angie Thomas presenting her discourse on the current unjust social construction of power. As the only eyewitness of a murder by a White police officer of a Black boy, Starr Carter receives many coercions, terrors, and suspicions about her telling the truth. She is a Black, girl, very young, and poor. This undeniably is a perfect condition for her to suffer intersectionality. *The Washinton Post* broadcasting Cyntoia Brown's statement, "Who cares when it's a little black girl?" (Emba, 2019) accentuates an uneasy position Starr Carter has to hold. She has to struggle with her mind and heart to decide whether or not to give legal testimony.

Families play an important role in power construction. They preserve the common social code of the segregation of skin colors even in love affairs that Blacks must not have romantic affairs with Whites. That is why segregation and discrimination of skin color are continued, and struggles for equality suffer uncountable challenges and hindrances. Hence, it is obvious that the ongoing constructions of power relations however put intersectionality as something hampering Black women. The disagreement of Carter's father towards her love relationship with a White boy is in line with the belief of most Black people experiencing the remains of a long history of horrific slavery that Black people cannot meddle in love with White people even in today's millennium era. This social and cultural construction is about to be breached by Starr Carter, and that makes her seem to have inner jeopardy. Denoting Foucauldian discourse, Carter is a reversal and



discontinuity discourse because she reverses and discontinues the existing construction as the running discourse in her life.

Angie Thomas highlights the oppression encountered by Blacks, which leads to Starr Carter feeling a lack of satisfaction in her school environment, as she is one of few Black students amidst a predominantly White student body. Socially and psychologically, Starr Carter experiences a sense of alienation and less power due to her skin color.

‘There are just some places where it’s not enough to be me.’

‘Black people, minorities, poor people. Everybody at the bottom in society. The oppressed,’ says Daddy.

(Thomas, 2017, pp. 7, 100)

Angie Thomas’s decision to feature a 16-year-old teenage girl as the protagonist can be seen as a discourse that carefully attempts to challenge the stereotypical portrayal of African-American girls in American society, particularly in the Southern region. African-American girls are often perceived and treated as women, while their White counterparts are allowed to retain their girlhood. This discrepancy denies African-American girls the opportunity to experience the innocence and privileges associated with girlhood. This asserts the fact that Black women from very early are constructed as subordinated and thus lead to less power. However, as happens to Maud Martha, resistance emerges in Starr Carter’s heart against the injustice she is undergoing.

4.3 Women Power

As both Black and women, Starr Carter and Maud Martha must deal with and overcome diverse challenges emerging in all aspects of their lives. They must have strong determination when facing any level of difficulty, and they must bear with resilience and strength. Starr Carter tries to resolve her inner vagueness with men and White folks, while Maud Martha must withstand firmly against her being despised by Whites. There is no easy way for Black women to reach their dreams. Encountering coercive situations repeatedly builds up feelings of courage leading to power, and this occurs to Starr Carter and Maud Martha. They subsequently attain power by undergoing conflicts, confrontations, struggles, and resistance (Foucault, 2001).

Facing coercive and unjust treatment from their environment, they attempt to defy. It is the only way they have to do in coping with the not benefitting constructions of power relations. Maud Martha learns much through reading to understand many things and consecutively she has knowledge giving her more power. Brooks writes in various pages that her main character is an intense reader and learner despite her attentions to many other things. Meanwhile, Thomas makes her main character learn from people around her such as her White boyfriend, family, and friends. There emerges a power transformation in these two main characters of the novels. Resistance runs as a catalyst not only to reveal power relations but to also locate the position and figure out the points of application and methods used (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Foucault, 2001).

Courage and power are close to each other. Without courage, power will not show since people must constitute actions relationally in some way or another through the exercises of power in social contexts (Avelino, 2021) to seize power. Parallel events suppressing repeatedly are supportive surrounding systems enabling people to develop and exercise power and subsequently construct courage that leads to power as occurs to Maud Martha and Starr Carter. “But all those people outside are praying for me. My parents are watching me. Khalil needs me” (Thomas, 2017,



p. 194) build up courage in her heart and mind, and this begins to construct power in Carter. She is forced to dare speak before the court jurors: “It doesn’t make any sense that I’m so nervous. [...] I straighten up and allow the tiny brave part of me to speak. “Yes, ma’am” (Thomas, 2017, p. 194). With this power, Carter speaks up both in the court and before the massive Black demonstration: “My name is Starr. I’m the one who saw what happened to Khalil [...]. And it wasn’t right” (Thomas, 2017, p. 238). Unlike Thomas who uses out loud verbal discourses through her teenage character, Brooks poses more subtle actions through her main character. Maud Martha questions herself of people’s willingness to stain their dignity and grace on stage entertainments only for cash and ovation for she thinks it is stupid and self-disgrace, “exhibit their precious private identities; shake themselves about; be very foolish for a thousand eyes” (Brooks, 1953, p. 18). She also presents silent and tough power in resisting her White female employer. Maud Martha does not intend to confront her boss in an open verbal contestation because she cannot rumple in a White neighborhood, “I’ll never come back, Maud Martha assured herself, when she hung up her apron at eight in the evening. She knew Mrs. Burns-Cooper would be puzzled. The wages were very good” (Brooks, 1953, p. 116).

Angie Thomas and Gwendolyn Brooks present their characters struggling to assemble pressure, vigor, and spirits to exercise their power in their power contestations and relations. Justice, freedom, and dignity are the values for Black women to fight for. In the same meaning but different tones and spirit, perhaps due to the different eras, *The Hate U Give* ends up in a blistering discourse, “[...] your voices matter, your dreams matter, your lives matter. Be roses that grow in the concrete” (Thomas, 2017, 260), while *Maud Martha* closes in a solemn way, “And was not this something to be thankful for? [...] they would be grand, would be glorious and brave, would have nimble hearts that would beat and beat” (Brooks, 1953, p. 127). Both authors come from far different eras with many different ways of life and thinking, and display somewhat similar realms of different skin color’s power relations where colored people mainly women are in the subordinated positions with less power. As discourse means power, they also employ literary works as their discourses to amplify their dreams of a better future for Blacks.

5. CONCLUSION

The constructions of Black women's power derive from several factors as elucidated in the previous part. History is very important in bequeathing tradition of thinking and belief to both races creating hegemonic ideology and psychological oppression. Wealth or possession is also significant in constructing power relations where the poorer will have less power and hence be dominated by the richer. Patriarchy and intersectionality are also obviously one of the factors enforcing the biased construction of Black women's power.

The two authors do not plan to give up on the bigotry of race and gender power relations that have existed since the slavery era and become the main discourse in American society. To reverse this big discourse, they offer struggles in their ways that can be different from one to another Black female authors but have one common great goal i.e., equality, dignity, and liberty. That is why in coping with the constructions, they bring forward resistance either in hard ways or soft ways.



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