

**DEFENSE MECHANISM AGAINST DISCRIMINATION IN
AMERICA IN *BULAN TERBELAH DI LANGIT AMERIKA* (2015)
AND THE HATE U GIVE (2018)**

A GRADUATING PAPER

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Gaining
the Bachelor's Degree in English Department



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YOGYAKARTA

2024

MOTTO

“For surely after hardship there is ease, surely after hardship there is ease.”

-Q.S Al Insyirah: 5-6-

“You don’t have to climb a mountain to stand on top of the world. Even the ugliest of places can be beautiful, as long as you take the time to look. It’s okay to get lost, as long as you find your way back. There’s beauty in the most unexpected places; there are bright places even in dark times.”

-All The Bright Places Movie-



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DEDICATION

I dedicate this graduation thesis to:

First and foremost to Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala, the Almighty; second, to the Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu 'Alaihi Wasallam; then to my parents and brother for their unwavering prayers; to the lecturers who have imparted valuable knowledge; to my dear best friends; and myself for persevering through every challenge until this moment.



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Nomor : B-139/Un.02/DA/PP.00.9/01/2025

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Atas perhatiannya, kami mengucapkan terima kasih.

Wassalamu'alaikum Wr. Wb

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I certify that this graduate paper is definitely my own work. I am completely responsible for the content of this graduating paper. Other researcher's opinion or finding included in this research is quoted or cited in accordance with ethical standards.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim.

The researcher expresses deep gratitude to Allah SWT, whose grace, guidance, and assistance have made it possible to reach this point and complete this graduation thesis. Heartfelt thanks are also extended to the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Furthermore, the researcher wishes to convey sincere love and appreciation for the support, encouragement, and prayers that have been offered, especially to:

1. Prof. Noorhaidi, S.Ag., M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. as Rector of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta.
2. Ulyati Retno Sari, S.S., M.Hum. as the Head of English Study Program at UIN Sunan Kalijaga.
3. Febriyanti Dwiratna Lestari, S.S., M.A., as the thesis supervisor has provided guidance, encouragement, messages, and inputs that are very helpful for researchers in completing this thesis.
4. All the English Literature Study Program lecturers have generously shared their valuable knowledge; Dr. Danial Hidayatullah, SS., M.Hum, Aninda Aji Siwi, S.Pd., M.Pd., Dr. Witriani, S.S., M.Hum., Dr. Ubaidillah, S.S., M.Hum., Harsiwi Fajar Sari, S.S., M.A., Dr. Ening Herniti, M.Hum., Fuad Arif Fudiyartanto, S.Pd., M.Hum., M.Ed, Dr. Dwi Margo Yuwono, M.Hum., Dr. Arif Budiman, S.S., M.A., Anisah Durrotul Fajri, SS., M.Hum., Bambang Hariyanto, S.S., MA., Ph.D.

5. My beloved Bapak and Ibu, Nanang Totot Prihastoro, and Peni Widyastuti have offered unwavering shelter, support, and endless prayers in every moment and place. Thank you for consistently providing comforting advice and thoughtful guidance that soothes the heart, soul, and mind during moments of struggle, even without being asked. Your efforts and sacrifices are truly irreplaceable.
6. My only big brother, Anandiyas Irham Bagaskara, is always ready to grant my requests, even when I'm being persistent.
7. My dearest best friends, Candra Neiskaranni, Luthfina Wening Arum, Diani Ria Lestari, Rheina Alviera, and Luqman Thursiawan, are always present and ready to share happiness through both joyous and difficult times, no matter where or when. Thank you for being supportive and non-judgmental in every situation and always offering help when needed. May this friendship continue strong into old age.
8. To all my friends from the English Literature 2020 program, especially those from class B, and also to Farah, Bitu, Zidna, Kana, Dimas, Fina, and others whose names I can not mention one by one, it has been a pleasure to meet you and share this journey with you, even if only for a short time. See you on top.
9. To my friends from the KKN group in Sanankerto, Malang, thank you for the brief time we shared. The moments we spent together remain a cherished part of my memories. I wish us all continued success in the future.

10. To anime, Spotify, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram Reels, and The Sims 4, thank you for always being my go-to escape and keeping me sane when I need entertainment the most.

11. Lastly, I thank myself for enduring countless moments of sadness, joy, exhaustion, stress, and challenges to reach this point. You have done amazing, and I'm proud of you. Never underestimate your worth again.

I would not have completed my thesis this far without the support of these incredible people. May Allah SWT bless you all for your kindness.

Yogyakarta, 7th December 2024



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

A GRADUATING PAPER	i
MOTTO.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
VALIDATION	iv
NOTA DINAS	v
FINAL PROJECT STATEMENT.....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	x
LIST OF FIGURES	xiii
ABSTRACT	1
ABSTRAK	2
CHAPTER 1.....	3
1.1 Background of Study.....	3
1.2 Research Question.....	7
1.3 Objectives and Significance of the Study.....	8
1.4 Literature Review	8
1.5 Theoretical Framework.....	10
1.5.1 Defense Mechanism.....	10
1.5.2 Film Theory	14
1.6 Research Method	15
1.6.1 Type of Research	15
1.6.2 Data Sources	16
1.6.3 Data Collection Technique	16
1.6.4 Data Analysis Technique.....	17

1.7 Paper Organization.....	17
CHAPTER 2.....	18
2.1 Film Synopsis	18
2.1.1 <i>Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika</i>	18
2.1.2 <i>The Hate U Give</i>	20
2.2 Theme.....	22
2.2.1 Discrimination	23
2.2.2 Human Rights Justice.....	24
2.3 Plot	24
2.3.1 <i>Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika</i>	25
2.3.2 <i>The Hate U Give</i>	28
2.4 Characters and Characterizations.....	31
2.4.1 Major Characters in <i>Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika</i>	32
2.4.2 Minor Characters in <i>Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika</i>	35
2.4.3 Major Characters in <i>The Hate U Give</i>	35
2.4.4 Minor Characters in <i>The Hate U Give</i>	38
2.5 Settings	38
2.5.1 Setting of Place <i>Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika</i>	38
2.5.2 Setting of Time <i>Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika</i>	40
2.5.3 Social Condition <i>Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika</i>	41
2.5.4 Setting of Place <i>The Hate U Give</i>	41
2.5.5 Setting of Time <i>The Hate U Give</i>	43
2.5.6 Social Condition <i>The Hate U Give</i>	44
2.6 Point of View	44
CHAPTER 3.....	45
3.1 Psychological Effect of Discrimination	45
3.1.1 Depression due to Situational	46
3.1.2 Trauma of Grief	50
3.2 Form of Defense Mechanism by The Characters	56

3.2.1 Denial	56
3.2.2 Projection.....	59
3.2.3 Sublimation.....	62
3.2.4 Rationalization.....	64
3.2.5 Identification.....	66
CHAPTER 4.....	71
3.2 Conclusion	71
3.3 Suggestion.....	72
REFERENCES	74
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	80



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LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1: Hanum argued with Rangga because Rangga was very difficult to accompany her to handle important matters regarding her article (Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika, 2015, 57:18).....</i>	32
<i>Figure 2: Julia spoke to Hanum that her neighbor's unkind words to Hanum were an act of discrimination against women who wear the hijab (Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika, 2015, 33:46).....</i>	33
<i>Figure 3: Sarah made a video recording talking about her father, she wanted to know the truth and whereabouts of her father which was then uploaded to the internet (Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika, 2015, 06:42).....</i>	33
<i>Figure 4: Starr dared to do what had to be done in front of the police because she had to defend the truth (The Hate U Give, 2018, 01:13:23).....</i>	34
<i>Figure 5: Maverick approached King to tell him to stay away and not bother his children (The Hate U Give, 2018, 01:11:46).....</i>	36
<i>Figure 6: Hanum and Rangga visit the memorial site of the 9/11 tragedy (Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika, 2015, 16:38).....</i>	37
<i>Figure 7: Hanum visits the home of Julia and Sarah Collins to interview them (Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika, 2015, 37:53).....</i>	Erro
r! Bookmark not defined.	
<i>Figure 8: Starr and her family gather and discuss in their home (The Hate U Give, 2018, 03:00).....</i>	42

<i>Figure 9: Khalil and Starr were stopped on the side of the road by police officers in the Fremont area (The Hate U Give, 2018, 27:04)</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>Figure 10: Protesters held a justice rally in front of City Hall, which was blocked by police (The Hate U Give, 2018, 01:52:19)</i>	<i>43</i>
<i>Figure 11: Julia slammed the door shut after Billy returned the cake given to her and would not speak to people</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Figure 12: Starr did not accept Hailey's words and replied angrily.....</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>Figure 13: Julia Collins scolded journalists who came to her house in a lying way</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>Figure 14: Starr woke up from her sleep and vomited</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>Figure 15: Hailey said that Starr's friend was also killed because he was a drug dealer and carried something similar to a weapon.....</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>Figure 16: Julia told Hanum to leave her house because she did not want to be interviewed.....</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>Figure 17: Starr said that the corpse in the crate was not Khalil.....</i>	<i>58</i>
<i>Figure 18: Starr is angry because Hailey says the life of the police officer who shot Khalil dead is also important</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>Figure 19: Starr who spoke up about justice for Khalil at the mass protest in front of the police.....</i>	<i>63</i>
<i>Figure 20: Julia tells Sarah to accept the fact that her father is a terrorist....</i>	<i>65</i>
<i>Figure 21: Starr, who was angry with Hailey and acted threatening to her by pointing a comb at her as if it were a gun.....</i>	<i>67</i>
<i>Figure 22: Julia said she lost her pride as a Muslim to Hanum.....</i>	<i>69</i>

**DEFENSE MECHANISM AGAINST DISCRIMINATION IN
AMERICA IN *BULAN TERBELAH DI LANGIT AMERIKA* (2015)
AND *THE HATE U GIVE* (2018)**

By: Nadiah Sekar Maharani

ABSTRACT

This research compares *Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika* and *The Hate U Give*, focusing on Julia Collins and Starr Carter, who face identity-based discrimination in different cultural contexts: Islamophobia in the post-9/11 United States and systemic racism against the black community. This study uses Anna Freud's *Defense Mechanism* theory to examine how social pressures and personal experiences shape their defense mechanisms. Julia internalizes her experiences, resulting in isolation, while Starr channels her experiences into activism, gaining strength from community support. This research highlights the psychological impact of discrimination and the role of community and resilience in resisting systemic injustice. By bridging literature, psychology, and social justice, this research offers insights into cultivating empathy and building support systems to address cross-cultural discrimination.

Keywords: Defense Mechanism, Comparative Literature, Discrimination, Psychological Condition

**DEFENSE MECHANISM AGAINST DISCRIMINATION IN
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Oleh: Nadiah Sekar Maharani

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini membandingkan *Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika* dan *The Hate U Give*, dengan fokus pada Julia Collins dan Starr Carter, yang menghadapi diskriminasi berbasis identitas dalam konteks budaya yang berbeda: Islamofobia di Amerika Serikat pasca 9/11 dan rasisme sistemik terhadap komunitas kulit hitam. Dengan menggunakan teori *Mekanisme Pertahanan* Anna Freud, penelitian ini meneliti bagaimana tekanan sosial dan pengalaman pribadi membentuk mekanisme pertahanan mereka. Julia menginternalisasi pengalamannya, yang mengakibatkan isolasi, sementara Starr menyalurkan pengalamannya ke dalam aktivisme, mendapatkan kekuatan dari dukungan masyarakat. Penelitian ini menyoroti dampak psikologis dari diskriminasi dan peran komunitas dan ketahanan dalam melawan ketidakadilan sistemik. Dengan menjembatani literatur, psikologi, dan keadilan sosial, penelitian ini menawarkan wawasan untuk menumbuhkan empati dan membangun sistem dukungan untuk mengatasi diskriminasi lintas budaya.

Kata kunci: Mekanisme Pertahanan, Literature Komparatif, Diskriminasi, Kondisi Psikologi

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Discrimination is widespread and can arise anywhere, including in the United States. Despite its status as a developed nation with considerable political and cultural influence, the country continues to grapple with significant cases of discrimination against women. This problem impacts women from all walks of life without exception. The issue stemmed from underlying factors such as, the 9/11 attacks profoundly shaped global perceptions of Muslims, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and fueling Islamophobia, with Muslim women often unfairly labeled as threats (Republika, 2021). Similarly, systemic discrimination against Black Americans persists, rooted in historical inequalities. This is evident in stark disparities: they are three times more likely to be killed by police and 4.5 times more likely to be imprisoned than white individuals (Lenina, 2020).

For instance, in 2018, a Muslim student named Linde McAvoy was expelled from her campus for wearing a hijab. Her choice to cover her hair for religious reasons was deemed a violation of campus rules, which required prior permission for such attire (Wolipop, 2018). In another case, German journalist Katrin Bennhold shared in the International Herald Tribune how wearing a hijab on a 2006 flight from Washington, D.C., to Paris drew negative reactions, even from previously friendly acquaintances (Nizmi, 2001).

An example in the case of black people occurred in 2020, when Breonna Taylor, a female medical technician, was fatally shot by police officers in her apartment. The officers were conducting a drug-related investigation, yet no drugs were found on the premises (BBC, 2020). Another case occurred in 2024, Sonya Massey, a Black woman with paranoid schizophrenia, was fatally shot by police at her Springfield, Illinois, home. She had called the police, believing there was an intruder. The situation escalated when officers asked her to move a pot from the stove. Despite being unarmed and apologizing, one officer, Grayson, shot her three times, resulting in her death (Tirto.id, 2024).

The researcher compares two films from two countries, Indonesia and America, which have the titles *Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika* (2015) and *The Hate U Give* (2018). The researcher compares these two films because both address discrimination against women marginalized by those around them in the U.S. Despite their shared theme, the characters differ in identity: one is a Muslim woman, and the other is a Black woman, both representing minority experiences. The issue of discrimination was made into a movie because it remains a significant and enduring social problem, fueled by prejudice and stereotypes that have persisted for years and continue to affect society today.

Discrimination in the movie *Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika* targets an individual who is Muslim, especially affecting Julia Collins. After 9/11, many Americans associate Muslims with the 9/11 attacks and perceive them as terrorists, which makes Muslims untrustworthy and unable to live a normal life.

In addition, Julia affected by the 9/11 incident felt a loss of direction and pride in her faith, often facing ostracism and ridicule despite her innocence and lack of responsibility for the events. The movie depicts Julia's struggle as a Muslim in America after 9/11 due to the discrimination she encountered.

In *The Hate U Give*, Starr Carter, a Black teenager caught between a poor neighborhood and an elite suburban school, witnesses the shooting of her best friend, Khalil, by a white police officer. Starr feels cornered by the incident involving Khalil. As black individuals, they think justice is not served when it comes to the white police officer who shot Khalil, believing that white people are born with privileges. Starr also feels underestimated by her white schoolmates who often regard her cynically. Due to this, she and her community seek to uphold justice and truth, which should be available to everyone, regardless of skin color.

Each character from the two films defended against injustice by fighting back despite initial hesitation, indecision, and anxiety. In the first film, Julia Collins is portrayed as a mother navigating life as a Muslim tour guide and curator of a museum in America. However, the 9/11 tragedy, which claimed her husband's life, led her to withdraw from society. She changed her name from Azima Hussein to Julia Collins and replaced her hijab with a wig to avoid discrimination. Despite these changes, she struggled to reconnect with her faith as a Muslim and sought to challenge the negative perceptions and stereotypes directed at her religion.

In the second movie, Starr Carter is a young woman living in a poor and dangerous neighborhood but attends a prestigious school to escape her environment. However, her life takes a turn when her best friend, Khalil, is fatally shot by a white police officer. At first, Starr hesitates to speak out about the incident. Yet, as the only witness, she feels an obligation to share the truth, despite fearing backlash, particularly from the white students at her school who were already critical of her. Although she makes significant efforts to present the truth in court, justice is not served. Undeterred, Starr continues her pursuit of justice by joining protests and advocating for change.

This research is about the similarities between *Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika* and *The Hate U Give*. It focuses on Julia Collins and Starr Carter, who both face discrimination and try to fight for justice. These two movies are compared because they show struggles against identity-based discrimination in different cultures and societies. One is about Islamophobia after 9/11 in the United States, and the other is about systemic racism toward Black communities.

The study uses Anna Freud's *Defense Mechanism* theory to see how social pressure, cultural background, and personal experiences affect the characters' psychological responses and defense mechanisms. Julia, a Muslim woman, keeps her Islamophobia experiences to herself and becomes isolated because of no support from the community. However, Starr, a Black woman, uses her experience with discrimination to become an activist and gets strength from her supportive and united community.

This research discusses an important issue: discrimination is still a major problem worldwide, but few studies focus on how people from different cultures deal with oppression in their own ways. By examining these two characters, this research tries to show the psychological effects of discrimination and the things that help or hinder people in their fight for justice. The characters also strive to regain their self-esteem and identity, which is often disrupted by their experiences of discrimination, especially as women who are often marginalized and considered vulnerable by society.

This research is important for cultural studies because it connects literature, psychology, and social justice. It gives a deeper understanding of how identity-based oppression happens. The comparison between the two characters is urgent because it helps to build empathy across different cultures and motivates people to support justice by showing the different ways people live and fight discrimination. Also, by comparing Julia's withdrawal and Starr's activism, this research shows how important community and resilience are in fighting against systemic injustice. It gives useful ideas for making support systems that can help people deal with discrimination in different situations.

1.2 Research Question

From the background of the study of the two films above, the research questions are obtained in the form of:

1. What *Defense Mechanisms* do the characters employ to confront discrimination, as explained by Anna Freud's theory?

2. How does discrimination in American society affect the psychology of each character in fighting for equal rights there?
3. Why do the distinct contexts of discrimination influence the defense mechanisms adopted by the main characters in each film?

1.3 Objectives and Significance of the Study

Based on the research questions outlined above, this study intends to illustrate the impact of discrimination on the psychological condition of characters in each film and address how they combat their struggles as victims of targeted discrimination by applying Anna Freud's *Defense Mechanism* theory.

The researcher aims for this study to increase readers' awareness and understanding of defense mechanisms in adverse situations, especially concerning the ongoing issue of discrimination. Additionally, the research seeks to uncover the underlying causes of discrimination that lead to racist attitudes, stereotypes, and biases. By identifying these roots, the study hopes to develop strategies to reduce racial prejudice and discrimination, promote social justice, support legal and policy reforms, and raise public awareness about the harmful effects of discrimination and the necessity of addressing it.

1.4 Literature Review

Several studies also discuss literary works such as films or novels from *The Hate U Give* and *Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika* using the Defense

Mechanisms theory by taking the object of literary works in the form of novels, songs, poems, and films. Some of these studies are as follows:

The first study is a journal owned by Ni Wayan Yunitri and her friends (2019), their research is titled *Racism in The Novel The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas*, The results of this study show about five extrinsic elements using the extrinsic approach Theory by Wellek and Warren found in the novel.

The next study is Aisatul Maghfiroh Birrul Walidain's (2018) entitled *An Analysis of Code-switching in Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika Novel and Its Implications to English Language Teachers' Instruction*. This research uses code-switching theory based on Poplack's theory.

The last research belongs to Iksal Resakatmaja (2019) which has the title *Representation of Racism in the movie The Hate U Give*. In this study, researchers used a qualitative approach and the method that the researcher used was John Fiske's semiotic analysis, the subject of this research was the film *The Hate U Give* by George Tillman Jr. The results of this study indicate the representation of racism in the movie *The Hate U Give* by George Tillman Jr.

This research differs from previous studies by using a comparative method to examine discrimination in two films, focusing on the psychological perspective of Anna Freud's *Defense Mechanism* theory. It explores the characters' struggles with discrimination in America, while previous studies typically analyzed a single film using semiotic, code-switching, and extrinsic approach theories.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

The researcher employed two types of theories to describe and analyze this study.

1.5.1 Defense Mechanism

The theoretical framework used in this research is the *Defense Mechanism* by Anna Freud. Defense mechanisms are psychological tactics employed without conscious awareness to shield an individual from anxiety triggered by thoughts or emotions deemed unacceptable. According to Freudian theory, these mechanisms distort reality to enhance our capacity to manage challenging situations (Mcleod, 2024). Freud, Anna, defines defense mechanisms as ‘unconscious resources used by the ego’ to decrease internal stress, conflict, and other unpleasant emotional experiences. As far as Freudian theory goes, employing defense mechanisms involves a distortion of reality to some capacity, allowing us to better cope with situations (Hounslow, n.d.)

Defense mechanisms are unconscious psychological responses that protect people from threats and things they do not want to think about or deal with. The term originated in psychoanalytic therapy but has slowly become everyday language. Defense mechanisms protect the mind from feelings and thoughts that are too difficult for the conscious mind to cope with. In some cases, defense mechanisms are thought to keep inappropriate or unwanted thoughts and impulses from entering the conscious mind (Cherry, 2022).

Defense mechanisms have several types of levels, including the following: (Anshori, 2011)

a. Repression

It is the most common defense mechanism and the basis of Freud's theories. In repression, undesired information is put away to the unconscious. Repression is truly a form of forgetting. A person may repress his or her thoughts somehow in order not to face the painful feeling or memory. A person can forget his or her experience after a traumatic event. His or her conscious efforts to remember his or her expertise give no result. This repression happens to an emotional problem and trauma that is caused by external occurrences such as war. Repression acts to keep information out of conscious awareness.

b. Denial

Denial is probably one of the best-known defense mechanisms, used often to describe situations where people seem unable to face reality or admit an obvious truth (i.e. 'He's in denial'). Denial is an outright refusal to admit or recognize that something has occurred or is currently occurring. In denial, a person does not want to accept his or her real situation. Sometimes, denial can be accepted as a short-term defense. In some cases, denial can endanger a person when he or she never sufficiently faces the real situation. Denial functions to protect the ego from things that the individual cannot cope with.

c. Regression

When confronted by stressful events, people sometimes abandon coping strategies and revert to patterns of behavior used earlier in development. Anna Freud called this defense mechanism regression, suggesting that people act out behaviors from the stage of psychosexual development in which they are fixated. For example, an individual fixated at an earlier developmental stage might cry or sulk upon hearing unpleasant news. In regression, the person comes back to the earlier stage and attitude of his development where he feels secure and comfortable. Regression commonly happens to children but it also happens to adults. Sometimes, adults fall into a bad regression after experiencing a bad trauma. They act childishly. Sometimes, when they face problems, they bend over their body like a fetus in the mother's uterus.

d. Displacement

Displacement is a defense mechanism often triggered by repression, where an individual cannot express emotions like anger directly. Instead, these feelings are redirected towards unrelated persons, animals, or objects. This process involves venting frustrations, emotions, and impulses onto less threatening targets. Displaced aggression exemplifies this mechanism, where anger is redirected away from potentially risky situations, like arguing with a superior, towards individuals or items lacking any connection to the source of frustration, such as family members, pets, or objects. This phenomenon is known as the projection.

e. Projection

This defense mechanism is akin to a blend of denial and displacement. It arises from repression, leading individuals to overlook the reality of their behavior. As a result, a forbidden motive or error is projected onto external parties, such as others. Projection is the process of attributing our undesirable traits or emotions to others. It operates by enabling the expression of desires or impulses in a manner that the ego fails to acknowledge, thereby alleviating anxiety.

f. Rationalization

Rationalization is a defense mechanism where an individual justifies unacceptable behavior or emotions with logical or reasonable explanations, avoiding the true causes of those actions. For instance, someone rejected for a date might rationalize it by claiming they were not attracted to the other person, or a student might blame a poor exam result on the instructor rather than their lack of preparation. Rationalization helps reduce anxiety and can also protect self-esteem and self-image. When faced with success or failure, people often attribute their achievements to their abilities and skills, while blaming failures on others or external factors.

There are many aspects to this defense mechanism, which serves as a psychological strategy individuals use to shield themselves from emotional distress, anxiety, and uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. When discussing

defense mechanisms for discrimination it is essential to clarify that discrimination itself is not a defense mechanism, but a social issue stemming from systemic prejudice, discrimination, and inequality. Nonetheless, individuals may employ defense mechanisms to cope with their racist attitudes or behaviors or to justify or deny the reality of discrimination. In this context, some people use these mechanisms to alleviate guilt and discomfort associated with their beliefs or attitudes.

1.5.2 Film Theory

In this research, film is the primary focus, prompting the researcher to use film theory for analysis. Specifically, the term ‘mise-en-scene’ is employed. Sikov (2010:16) defines mise-en-scene as the fundamental aspect of cinematic representation, essential for understanding how a film conveys and creates meaning. Mise-en-scene encompasses everything visible on screen: settings, props, lighting, costumes, makeup, and the behavior of figures (the actor’s gestures and facial expressions).

It also includes the camera angle and cinematography, referring to motion picture photography. According to Barsam (2010:156), a film's mise-en-scene subtly affects our mood as we watch, with elements like décor, lighting, scents, and sounds influencing our emotional reaction, similar to how they would in a real-life setting. According to Sikov (2010), there are several framing techniques:

- a. Extreme Close-Up (ECU): Isolates an object at a very close distance in the image, such as a person's eyes or nose.
- b. Close-Up (CU): Features an isolated object in the image, like a person's face.
- c. Medium Close-Up (MCU): Captures the subject from the chest up.
- d. Medium Shot (MS): Frames the human body from the waist up.
- e. Long Shot (LS): Shows the object from a long distance.
- f. Extreme Long Shot (ELS): Displays the object at a wide distance, surrounded by a significant amount of surrounding space.
- g. Three-quarter Shot or Medium Long Shot (MLS): Captures the object from just below the knees.
- h. Full Shot (FS): Takes a picture of the entire human body.

1.6 Research Method

The researcher wants to describe the type of research, data sources, data collection techniques, and data analysis techniques used in this study.

1.6.1 Type of Research

According to Moleong (2010: 6), descriptive qualitative research is a study that explains the phenomenon of the subject of research, behavior, perception, motivation, action, etc., holistically, and the way of describing the result in words and sentences. Thus, in conducting a deeper analysis, the researcher uses qualitative descriptive research methods to analyze problems, assisted by describing data obtained from

books, websites, journals, and documents related to the theory applied to the film objects used in this study.

1.6.2 Data Sources

Two categories of data were collected: primary and secondary. Primary data encompassed all pertinent elements extracted directly from each film, *Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika* (2015) and *The Hate U Give* (2018), including scenes, characters, dialogue, and plot. Secondary data were derived from various journals, articles, and websites about the subject matter, enhancing the clarity of the research content.

1.6.3 Data Collection Technique

In this study, the researcher gathers diverse existing data by initially exploring journals and websites to identify and comprehend the theories for analyzing literary works, sourced from specialized research platforms. Following this, the researcher viewed both films that will be examined to determine their suitability for application following the previously identified theories across various film platforms on the website. Subsequently, the researcher compiled the database using a suitable software application, documented the relevant scenes from the movie through screenshots, and provided comprehensive explanations for each scene. Lastly, all the collected data were integrated into the study.

1.6.4 Data Analysis Technique

The researcher analyzes the material objects with a comparative literature approach and adopts Anna Freud's *Defense Mechanisms* theory. This research focuses on comparing the two films and finding some similarities between them with each character experiencing 'problems' that offend a race and religion in social life or called acts of discrimination.

From there, the two material objects are seen from the psychological side of each character who experiences depression, and mental distress because of an 'incident' that happened to the closest person they care about and to themselves. Applying Freud's theory to material objects can dissect why the characters in the movie experience things that disturb their mentality, which is triggered by the emergence of anxiety that can occur because personality conflicts cause them.

1.7 Paper Organization

This research is divided into four chapters. The first chapter is the introduction which includes general research information such as the background of the study, research questions, the objectives and significance of the study, literature review, theoretical approach, research method, and paper organization. The second chapter contains the content of each film in the form of synopsis and intrinsic elements. The third chapter contains findings and a discussion about what has been analyzed and explained from the film. The last chapter is the conclusion and suggestion of the whole research discussion.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

3.2 Conclusion

Based on the findings of the previously described analysis, these findings highlight the persistent existence of discrimination over more than two decades, affecting vulnerable groups such as women, regardless of their identities. Additionally, the characters rely on psychological defense mechanisms to manage the trauma and depression due to the loss of loved ones, which leaves them in a state of psychological distress, resulting from unjust and discriminatory experiences leading the characters to internalize these responses and project them onto themselves and others.

Julia Collins in *Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika* experiences discrimination primarily as a Muslim woman, which is often associated with stereotypes and prejudice against her religious identity. Societal pressures to conform and avoid conflict may lead her to internalize her struggles, using defense mechanisms that prioritize self-protection over outward confrontation. Julia's neighborhood may not have a strong community support system to empower her to confront discrimination openly, leaving her isolated and prone to withdrawal.

Julia's response reflects a more internalized coping mechanism, shaped by feelings of powerlessness and fear of retaliation. Her reluctance to step out of her comfort zone may stem from limited access to opportunities

or fear of further alienation. The portrayal of Julia's struggle is influenced by the post-9/11 rise of Islamophobia in Western societies, which often leads to a particular type of discrimination characterized by suspicion and exclusion.

Starr in *The Hate U Give* faces systemic racial discrimination as a black woman, which is deeply embedded in her community's history and struggle for justice and equality. The culture of resistance in her environment likely shaped her response to channel her trauma into activism. On the other hand, Starr grew up in a close-knit yet marginalized community that encouraged solidarity and activism. This collective support boosted her confidence to confront social injustice and advocate for change.

Starr's resilience was fueled by her childhood in an environment where speaking out against injustice was seen as a form of survival. Her strength is further bolstered by her ability to connect her struggles to broader social issues, which empowers her to act. Starr's challenges are embedded in the history of systemic racism in the US, where activism and social movements, such as Black Lives Matter, provide a framework for transforming personal trauma into collective advocacy.

In conclusion, the characters face different phenomena due to their unique cultural, social, and personal contexts, which shape their experiences of discrimination and psychological responses. These differences underscore the complex interplay between identity, environment, and the availability of resources to navigate and resist oppression.

3.3 Suggestion

This study suggests that future researchers could utilize Feminism theory to delve deeper into character analyses and the underlying causes of discrimination. This might involve exploring the societal stigmas directed at minority groups, particularly women, examining the role of differences, or investigating the search for self-identity in the context of their racial backgrounds.

Additionally, this research encourages readers and the broader community to increase awareness of discrimination against minority groups. It emphasizes the importance of understanding how social and cultural contexts shape individuals' lives, taking into account factors such as cultural heritage, personal experiences, social environments, and habitual behaviors that influence responses to discrimination. Recognizing various defense mechanisms is essential, as they play a significant role in shaping mental and emotional well-being. Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of assessing the effectiveness of support systems designed to help individuals navigate and overcome discrimination. With strong community support, individuals can mitigate negative behaviors and emotional struggles, adopting more positive and constructive approaches in the face of adversity.

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