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Individual Racism Against Muslims and People of Color in Ausma Zehanat Khan's *Blackwater Falls*

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ABSTRACT

This study is about minority Muslim and people of color living in the predominantly white Christianity community undergoing racial discrimination in Ausma Zehanat Khan's novel *Blackwater Falls*. Using hegemony theory as well as descriptive and dramatic approach, close reading and textual evidence, the researcher analyzes the speech and action of the characters and finds that the three characters, that is, Inaya, Razan, and Seikh, cannot express their Islamic belief freely as they are blocked by the white Christianity's sentimental feelings about religion and skin color. Accordingly, it is individual racism they confront. The study also finds that there are two factors leading to the racial discrimination among them, namely, the effect of the 9/11 attack and the powerful influence of Resurrection Church.

Keywords: Racial Discrimination; Hegemony; Muslim Identity; Black Waterfalls

INTRODUCTION

Racism is the unfair treatment to the minor community; originated with colonization (Antia, and Makoni, 2023), Racism refers to the strife for freedom (Kim, 2024) undergone by the people of color (Alvarez, Liang, and Neville, 2016, see also Tatz, 2015), usually under the powerful majority (Linstroth, 2022) referring to the white people (Adebisi, Jivraj, and Tzouvala, 2024, see also Crozier, 2023, also Home, 2021, also Meyer, 2024) who treat the minority structurally unjust (Elias, Mansouri, and Paradies, 2021). Racism can also be viewed from religious point such as experienced by Muslim in the Islamophobia country (Carr, 2016) and Jews in Christianity (Kaplan, 2019). Likewise, racism can be undergone by the

Black people (Thomé, Rabelo, Ramos, Dandara, and Emanuelle, 2022, see also Jones, 2024, also Saul, 2024, also Virasami, 2024, also Moncrieffe, 2024).

Racism is then the effect of culture and language (Kettler, 2020), social (Garza, 2024) as well as political policy (Oliveira, Walthour, & Morrison, 2024). Accordingly, racism develops (Kahn, 2024). From the explanation above, it is confirmed that racism refers to the unjust treatment to the minority such as the people of color as well as the minority of the member of a certain religion living in the majority of other certain religion. It turns out that it is not one single racism found in the experts' writing; Michael Russel (2024) comes up with the kinds of racism as follows: firstly, individual racism refers to views, manners, as well as individual members' movements influenced by racialized dogma producing maltreatment to people (individuals/groups) as the members of non-dominant racialized groups.

Secondly, institutional racism refers to rules as well as practices applied in an association or discriminating specialization field due to racialized classifications in an institution. Thirdly, structural racism refers to social, political, and economic engagements producing racial injustices by the collaboration of official rules as well as practices. Fourthly, systemic racism refers to the connection to the individual, institutional, and structural racism to support as well as develop power for the dominant racial people upon the minor racial ones. As a result, the latter undergo economic, political as well as social unjust.

One of the racisms explained above draws the researcher's interest, that is, individual racism in Ausma Zehanat Khan's *Blackwater Fall*. The three characters, Inaya, Razan, and Seif, have different treatment from the majority due to their religion as well as skin color. Accordingly, it is very important to analyze them from racism, Islamophobia (unjust treatment of Muslim) and hegemony power point of view. As seen in the following previous studies, Islamophobia and hegemony theory are missing, therefore, they become the gap of the study. The researcher then discusses individual racism and factors of racism faced by the three characters mentioned above in this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Related Study

To get the novelty of the study, the researcher refers, first of all, to Maurilla (2015) with her article Racial Discrimination in Kathryn Stockett's *The Help*. She further analyzes the black maids in the white employer undergo discriminative treatments. Using Sociological approach and the theory of Fred L. Pincus' types of racism, the study finds that individual discrimination and institutional one are applied in the study. Second of all, it refers to Sadeq (2016) with his article the Projection of Racism in Richard Wright's *Black Boy* in which he analyzes the inconsistent law applied to the black community that the law of the United States regards everybody has equal rights. However, Jim Crow laws in the Southern America is against the

US law. Consequently, Richard Wright, the black one, undergoes discrimination in his whole life. Last of all, it refers to Bhat (2025) that analyzes the exploration of race, gender, identity, and systemic oppression in mid-20th-century America in his article Unmasking Identity: Analyzing Race, Gender and Societal Issues in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Like the two previous studies above, the black people becomes the victim of the race exploration. Using thematic analysis approach and close readings, the study finds that organized marginalization, the fight for self-definition as well as the resistance power are experienced by the black people.

From the previous studies above, it is clear that the researcher's study has the novelty since all the marginalized characters above refer to the black, whilst, the researcher's issue refers to the certain religious member and skin color though the researcher's racism is the same as one of the articles, that is, individual racism. As to the theory found in the previous studies, they only refer to the definition of the racism, whilst, the researcher refers to hegemony theory, in spite of the fact that few studies discuss the intersection of racism, Muslim identity, religious hostility, and community power in *Blackwater falls*. Accordingly, on one hand, the researcher discusses religiously based racism as well as skin color-based racism and the factors influencing racism, through which the researcher is easy to do the analysis. On the other hand, this study has a great significance to conduct to develop the study of racism in literary study.

Hegemony Theory and Individual Racism

In this study, the researcher counts on the hegemony theory referring to a dominating superior group over an inferior one (Gramsci, 1971), in that the majority group do against the minority ones though they have to break the rule of humanity with the former belonging to the white Christianity and the latter belonging to the skin color as well as the Muslim community. Individual racism refers to persons (not representing their group) with their views, manners, and individual members' movements triggered by racialized doctrine creating ill-treatment to people (individuals/groups) as the members of non-dominant racialized groups. Thus, the dominating people play important roles in applying their ideology against the minority, therefore, hegemony power and individual racism cannot be separated with the result of white Christianity dominating the people of color and the Muslims.

METHOD

Design and Data Source

Since the researcher conducts much reading to understand the novel, therefore, the researcher uses close reading method in that the researcher has to understand the text or the passage (Pickering, 2019) of the novel by finding individual racism and its factors in the novel itself. In other words, the researcher conducts the novel analysis purely within the novel itself without going out of it such as analyzing the author's life as well as the society in which the author lives. Besides, since the data

collected are in the form of word description and characters' speech and action, therefore, the researcher refers to descriptive and dramatic method which is the kind of collected as well as the criteria of the textual data selected. Thus, through descriptive and dramatic method, the researcher easily describes the characters' words, speech and action related to the individual racism they undergo in Ausma Zehanat Khan's *Blackwater Falls* series 1.

Instrument and Procedure

The researcher herself becomes the instrument because the study belongs to a literary study. In the data collection, the researcher put them in two tables, the first one is with the individual racism and the second one is with the factors of the individual racism in Ausma Zehanat Khan's *Blackwater Falls*, because of which the researcher easily does the analysis of the individual racism using hegemony theory and its factors with its tables being presented in the analysis.

Data Analysis

Firstly, the researcher elaborates individual racism, how the skin color and the people of a certain religion are controlled unfairly by the dominating one as well as the factors of the individual racism, all of which from the novel itself. The character's description as well as dialogue dealing with individual racism become the researcher's focus of analysis that have been put in the aforesaid two tables. The analytical steps of the data analysis is as follows: reading the novel, identifying relevant quotations, classifying the forms of individual racism, interpreting the data using hegemony theory, and relating the finding to the previous studies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Individual Racism

As explained above that this racism study refers to the skin color and religion, therefore, the characters undergo discriminating treatment from the white as well as the Christianity majority since they are the minority Asian Muslims. The Asian Muslims characters experiencing discrimination are as follows: Inaya Rahman, Razan, and Seif. Different from Aibileen and Minny, black people maids, African-American blood experiencing discrimination from their masters, the white people (Maurilla, 2015), Inaya is a brown skin and Muslim police officer in the United States, yet, she faces discrimination in her workplace though in the recruitment seems to have no problem. The researcher calls this individual racism since it does not involve her institution to put her down. In other words, her co-workers discriminate her by breaking the law of the states that put people in equality.

As minority Muslim officer in the majority of white Christianity, Inaya is regarded as a traitor because she is not loyal to her own country, Pakistan, as Inaya is from Pakistan. Thus, this is a form of discrimination leading to racism as Inaya refers to the different race and religion from her co-workers in the police department. Whilst,

it does not happen to Aibileen and Minny mentioned above that in spite of the fact that they are black in the majority people, they have no good position in their working area like Inaya. Again, this is the novelty of the study. Thus, hegemony power plays a very important role in the characters' marginalization; Inaya's racism threat seems to have spread outside her workplace. Her family life as well as the mosque, the Muslim sacred place are not an exception.

> "Pornographic emails. Headlights blazing through her parents' house, a pig's head left on their doorstep. A flyer sent to her parents' mosque with her picture blown up in the center, Inaya in uniform, under the words, "Does Officer Rahman represent you?" (Khan, 2022:106).

The quotation shows that the individual racism based on religious sentiment is in progress towards Inaya. The mosque as the symbol of Muslim in unity within as well as the pig as the symbol of the forbidden animal to consume by Muslim is an indication that the Christianity majority lures to drag Muslim's anger. This is again the novelty of this study that usually racism falls on the black people like Aibileen and Minny above, on the black people due to Jim Crow laws, an institutional racism (Sadeq, 2016), and on the black people' struggle for identity (Bhatt, 2025) but now it is about skin color and religion whose victim is an intelligent.

Likewise, individual racism can be seen in the education system. It happens to Razan, another girl from Pakistan, people of color as well as a Muslim. "As a matter of interest, how many students of color attend your academy?" (Khan 2022:184). This is a racial based question that should not be advanced in the education world indicating that there are gaps between the service to the majority and minority. It turns out that the school, Blackwater Academy, is in cooperation with the Resurrection Church with its intolerance of its religious ideology intimidating the immigrants. "We are affiliated with the church. The pastor conducts our chapel services" (Khan, 2022:184), due to which the school policies put aside the existence of the immigrants (the people of color) in that the immigrants have difficulty to enter the academy as its access is quite limited to them.

Razan also undergoes religious racism in the academy. Known as a Muslim through her scarf, Razan is harassed by her friend Matt. Matt impolitely removes Razan's headscarf as a whip. "He was panting above her, her hair flying everywhere, when Campbell leaned in with his phone. Matt grinned into the camera and called her something foul, her curls gathered in his hand….. "No ragheads in America. Score one for the USA." (Khan, 2022:94). Commonly speaking, headscarf is a symbol of an identity of a Muslim female. When her headscarf is considered as toy by somebody, it is a sort of religious humiliation and such humiliation happens in a non-Muslim country that the researcher calls it as a racism.

The last character undergoing racism is Seif. Like Inaya and Razan, Seif is a Muslim female demanding a Muslim graveyard and house of worship (a mosque) but her demand has a negative response. It is because Muslim as well as the immigrants are considered as a threat to the majority existence.

> "These people don't know how to adapt. Rather than picking up our ways and being, they expect us to accommodate a whole host of things that make people in this county uncomfortable. You know we passed the first anti-Sharia law in the country here in Blackwater." (Khan, 2022: 245)

The quotation shows an intolerable attitude towards the new comers who have color skin as well as difference in religion. Though they confront no physical assault, however, their inability to express their religious belief due to the majority policy is a kind of another racial discrimination. It is again caused by the majority's misunderstanding about the Sharia law led by the pastors (the church leaders) with full of hatred of the Muslim community. In fact, the pastors spread the hatred of Muslim to the majority Christianity on reason that Muslims will destroy their culture and belief. "We need to protect ourselves, our culture, our country, and our church," he was saying. "Sharia is now in effect in some American cities where the Muslims have high numbers and outvote regular Americans" (Khan, 2022:48). These explanations also show other evidence of the novelty of the study that the previous studies above do not discuss about racism in matters of religion and skin color. They zero in on the black people discrimination, instead. All in all, what Inaya, Razan, and Seif has undergone is categorized as individual racism though it happens in their work area because the discrimination does not involve the rule of the institution. It is just merely the individuals who are against the minority. To make clear understanding about the individual racism with its forms, the researcher puts in the table as follows:

Table 1
Forms of Individual Racism

Religious Sentiments	**Skin Color**
"Pornographic emails. Headlights blazing through her parents' house, a pig's head left on their doorstep. A flyer sent to her parents' mosque with her picture blown up in the center, Inaya in uniform, under the words, "Does Officer Rahman represent you?" (Khan, 2022:106).	. "As a matter of interest, how many students of color attend your academy?" (Khan 2022:184).
"We are affiliated with the church. The pastor conducts our chapel services" (Khan, 2022:184),	

Religious Sentiments	Skin Color
"He was panting above her, her hair flying everywhere, when Campbell leaned in with his phone. Matt grinned into the camera and called her something fo ul, her curls gathered in his hand….. "No ragheads in America. Score one for the USA." (Khan, 2022:94).	
"These people don't know how to adapt. Rather than picking up our ways and being, they expect us to accommodate a whole host of things that make people in this county uncomfortable. You know we passed the first anti-Sharia law in the country here in Blackwater." (Khan, 2022: 245)	
"We need to protect ourselves, our culture, our country, and our church," he was saying. "Sharia is now in effect in some American cities where the Muslims have high numbers and outvote regular Americans" (Khan, 2022:48)	

The table gives the researcher more understanding that the individual racism mostly falls on the religious sentiment compared to the skin color that can be caused by the tragedy of the twin towers mentioned above. That explains why Inaya's discrimination appears most compared to Razan.

Factors of Individual Racism

There are two factors causing individual racism having been experienced by Inaya, Razan, and Seikh, that is to say, the 9/11 attack in the US and the powerful influence of the resurrection Church. The former refers to the anti-Muslim sentiment strengthening as the Blackwater city leaders regularly denote back to the September 11, 2001 attacks, well-known as the 9/11 attacks. As a result, the United States squeezes its supervision of Muslims and immigrants. The attacks are originated with the complaint of the groups of terrorist against the United States because of its foreign policy giving advantages to the Israel. Accordingly, the whole country of the United States becomes gradually anti-Muslim, considering all Muslims as terrorists.

> ""But we have to ask ourselves about these police. Are they part of our community? Are they loyal to America—we know that eighty-two percent of them are not. They're not willing to fight and die for America. Does that sound like loyalty to you?" (Khan, 2022:284).

The quotation is about Pastor Wayne's speech about anti-Muslim sentiment. He further strengthens that Muslim police officer (i.e. Inaya) is not fully loyal to the US government. Muslims are regarded as belonging to threaten the state, instead. Even, when Razan, the Muslim female, dies from violence, anti-Muslim sentiment becomes the cause of it "if you try to control the culture of America through Sharia law, could it be Christ the Redeemer answered?" (Khan, 2022: 285). Pastor Wayne considers that the existence of the immigrant Muslim in the US is to change the law of the state with Sharia law so that by the death of a Muslim female, it means that it is a condemnation from Christianity's God that Muslim is not to be here in the US. In other words it can be said that after the 11/9 attack, Muslims are regarded as terrorists that when a Muslim has a disaster, it is considered of the victory of Christianity. The latter refers to the powerful influence of Resurrection Church. It turns out that Muslim's demand of building a mosque is blocked by the members of the church.

> "Even if you raise the money for a mosque, you know you have to get a zoning permit." "So?" She sighed. "Who do you think is in charge of those permits?" "Town council, probably." "Most of whom are members of the Resurrection Church. They voted the application down. The appeal gets decided by the Sheriff, who said a mosque would cause traffic congestion" (Khan, 2022:135).

It is understandable that it is quite difficult to build a mosque for the Muslim community in the city of Blackwater. Seif and Areesha are stuck together to discuss about seeking permit to the mosque building. Though it is irrelevant to the recent situation of the death of their friend, Razan, however, those issuing the permit are mostly the members of the Resurrection Church. To make a clearcut understanding, the researcher puts in the table as follows:

Table 2
Factors of the Individual Racism

Anti Muslim Sentiment	**The Powerful Influence of Resurrection Church**
""But we have to ask ourselves about these police. Are they part of our community? Are they loyal to America—we know that eighty-two percent of them are not. They're not willing to fight and die for America. Does that sound like loyalty to you?" (Khan, 2022:284).	"Even if you raise the money for a mosque, you know you have to get a zoning permit." "So?" She sighed. "Who do you think is in charge of those permits?" "Town council, probably." "Most of whom are members of the Resurrection Church. They voted the application down. The appeal gets decided by the Sheriff, who said a mosque would cause traffic congestion" (Khan, 2022:135).

Anti Muslim Sentiment	The Powerful Influence of Resurrection Church
"if you try to control the culture of America through Sharia law, could it be Christ the Redeemer answered?" (Khan, 2022: 285).	

The table shows that religion-based racism still dominates the factors of racism that again explains the discrimination of Muslim appears most compared to skin color.

In this sub-title, the researcher comes to discuss the importance of the use of hegemony theory and the previous studies. In the first place, the researcher hesitates whether or not the theory is applicable in the study since there are kinds of racism beside individual one. Reading closely to the novel to understand the data deeply, the researcher then finds that the problem is the minority is treated unfairly by the majority like anti Muslim sentiment after the tragedy of the twin towers and the Resurrection Church with its majority power to control the minority, for example, blocking a mosque building by Muslims. Therefore, hegemony theory is worthy of an application.

In the second place, the researcher's decision of the use of hegemony theory comes into fruit. As explained above that Maurilla's discussion about the black maid under the white employer undergo unfair treatment using sociology approach, Sadeq, with the discussion of unfair application of law with the black people as the victims, and Bhat with the black one becoming the victim under the white majority by using thematic approach, all of which convinces the researcher to use hegemony theory with two reasons: firstly, the hegemony theory develops the religious identity as well as the skin color compared to the previous studies that use theory beyond hegemony theory and secondly, the theory develops the study of literature.

CONCLUSION

From the result and discussion, the researcher comes to conclude that, firstly, powerful hegemony truly influences the life of a community with the victim referring to the minority. secondly, the individual racism spread in the community of the Blackwater belong to the skin color and religion, both of which are with the Asian immigrant Muslim in the US. They experience individual racism by being suspected not to be loyal to the US Government, on one hand. On the other hand, they are regarded as being the terrorists dating back to the 9/11 twin tower bombing. Besides, the religious passion of Christianity against Islamic influence is one of the factors causing the racial discrimination. Lastly, the researcher hopes so much that there are researchers discussing the same topic with different literary works or the same literary work with different theory, i.e. using institutional racism as the issue, in order that the study of literature develops in a considerable rapidity.

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