

# THE PRACTICE OF IDEOLOGICAL STATE APPARATUSES IN LOIS LOWRY'S *THE GIVER*

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**Abstract:** *This article attempts to portray how a contemporary young adult literature entitled *The Giver* (Lowry, 1993) illustrates the operation of state apparatus in a dystopian setting of time and place. Applying Althusser's theory of state apparatuses, the study particularly focuses on a prominent issue of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) which is operated within the *The Giver's* society. Descriptive qualitative research is applied to interpret the data in the novel. The result of this study reveals that the novel draws ISA as a tool to control and to maintain the dominance in this dystopian community. The ISA operates through training system, particular rule of language used by the community, media censorship, and family's role.*

**Keywords:** *ideological state apparatus (ISA); *The Giver**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is widely known that young adult literature is on the spotlight nowadays. Probably, the celebration of young adult literature in worldwide was started in the 2000s through a famous romance fiction of *Twilight* saga which successfully stole the young adult reader's attention due to its story of a fabulous young rich male vampire who fell in love with a common girl. The shifting sub-genre of young adult literature was marked for about five years later after the *Twilight* saga fever through the dystopian literature of *The Hunger Games* (Setyorini, 2016). This different kind of story brings up a more serious theme which illustrates the agency of young adult characters to avenge an authoritarian order (Virtanen, 2012:4) in a setting of time of post-apocalyptic future society.

This fiction uses the protagonist's perspective to show the readers the negative aspects of the world where the protagonist lives in. The antagonist itself can be seen as a destructive society, as Souza stated that this society usually has internal conflict, political and social issues (2012:3). Those conflicts often occur in a society or widely in a state as an effect of ruling class domination. Not only does it contain political and social conflicts as the characteristics of dystopia, but this genre also has the advanced technology as the center theme of the story. The role of technology in dystopian story is to manipulate and dictate the

lives of people inside the society. The society is controlled by government which uses advanced technology (Wolk, 2015:par.1) to operate the system that they have made.

One of the literary works discussing dystopia is *The Giver* (1993) written by Lois Lowry. This novel has been on the spotlight for the last three years since it was transformed into film in 2014. This novel shows the operation of controlling system, surveillance and punishments. The people in this society are strictly observed through CCTV and employed a loudspeaker to remind people of proper behavior. It means that the society lives without free will and individual thought. Furthermore, technology units are used to control every aspect of their lives: assigning jobs, housing, family unit, sexual desires, and people are “released,” the term that refers to murdering in this society (Lowry, 1993).

To maintain a total control, a council of Elders restrains the community’s lifestyle in detail regulation to prevent them from making the “wrong choices.” The Elder council is responsible to plan and assign every person in the community with a permanent profession based on their unquestionable decision. The power system as an agency of state apparatuses which takes a role in various manner shows the dominance toward society throughout the story (Clark and Dear, 1984:ch.2). Thus, this article attempts to show how the dominant council as state apparatus imposes their ideology to the community to silence them and take them to the repressive control as the way it is, as what Althusser (1971:8) claims that the domination of the ruling class brings the ideology for the agents of exploitation and repression. This is important to reveal the practice of ideological states apparatuses since it is known that social phenomena in real life is somehow being represented in the novel through the depiction of violence, state power, and some other repressive conflicts among the characters through the operation of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA).

There are some writings which take *The Giver* as their focus of research. Tina Virtanen (2012) in *Individual and Societal Control in Lois Lowry’s The Giver* focuses on how individuals and society are controlled embedded in aspects of human life; such as job, family, language, and technology. Caetano (2016) compares *The Giver* with two other movies, *V for Vendetta* and *Oblivion*, by resorting to conceptual tools borrowed from Post-humanism and Transhumanism Studies. He attempts to understand whether, in a world driven by the persistent need to develop, update, upgrade and relentlessly move forward, there is still a place for cultural memory. These two researches are different to this article, particularly in the way this article tries to depict the underlying ideology practiced by the authoritative power in the novel.

## **2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This study employs Althusser's notion of Ideological State Apparatus (ISA). Ideological state apparatus functions primarily through ideology rather than violence, but when necessary these institutions may also use repression, although it is often concealed as socialization, discipline and censorship (Althusser, 1971:145). Althusser writes that they are unified by the ideologies through their particular function. Further he explains about "the religious ISA (the system of the different churches), the educational ISA (the system of the different public and private schools), the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA, the trade union ISA, the communications ISA (press, radio and television etc.), and the cultural ISA (literature, the arts, sports etc.)" (1971:137). Practically, ISA is formed as "a set of doctrine" (Eagleton, 1996:12) for the ruled class to accept the underlying ideology of the authoritative government.

## **3. RESEARCH METHODS**

The research applies qualitative descriptive research as the method. Descriptive qualitative research is used to obtain information containing the phenomena and describes what it is involved in the result of data, analysis, and interpretation of conditions in the text. As Denzin and Lincoln stated in Creswell's *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* that qualitative research involves an interpretive world by bringing the phenomena in a detail descriptive explanation (2007:36).

## **4. DISCUSSION OF THE MAIN THEMES**

In his most influential essay, Althusser argues that ideology exists materially as a set of practices within an institution, an Ideological State Apparatus, or simply being called as ISA. Committee as the institution in *The Giver's* community has various ways to maintain its ideology in the community. The unconsciously repressive actions are imposed through the community's daily rules which operate in the community. These operations can be seen through the community training system, the use of particular language in the community, the vital role of censorship, and through the family rules, which are tied in community's regulation. These regulations that have been existing time to time in *The Giver's* community are explained in the followings.

### **4.1 The Practice of ISA Through Training system**

Training system in this community is illustrated to create community members who dedicate themselves for the existence of the community. Here, training system is one of the effective tools to cultivate ideology as Althusser mentions that education is "dominant

(apparatus) or as the number one of ideological state apparatus” (1971:153). Thus, education takes a pivotal position to teach people a particular way of thought or ideology, since they obtain their knowledge and perspective through it.

In *The Giver's* Community, training begins at an early age. It is illustrated through this excerpt, “There are good things each year,” Jonas reminded her. “This year you get to start your volunteer hours. And remember last year, when you became a seven, you were so happy to get your front-buttoned jacket?” (Lowry, 1993:40). Jonas, as the main character of the novel, explains the stages of training system in his community. He reminds his sister that after the age of seven she will have volunteer hours as a higher training stage.

In *The Giver's* community, the children have a number of activities that must be obeyed, such as:

“The Eights always set out on their first volunteer hour a little nervously, giggling and staying in groups of friends. They almost invariably did their hours on Recreation Duty First, helping with the younger ones in a place where they still felt comfortable. But with guidance, as they developed self-confidence and maturity, they moved on to their job, gravitating toward those that would suit their own interest and skills” (Lowry, 1993:26).

This community calls the community members by year's group from one until twelve. The twelve is recognized as an adult and after it, “the age is no longer matter” (Lowry, 1993:51). The committee that has set the environment of the children becomes educational purposes to sustain the community. Following Althusser's statement that: “...an ideology which represents the School as a neutral environment purged of ideology (because it is...lay), where teachers are respectful of the ‘conscience’ and ‘freedom’ of the children who are entrusted to them (in complete confidence)” (1971:156).

In this community, the Elders classify the youngster's assignments based on some categories. Here, the youngster does not have a right to choose their desired job, they only wait for the call from the Elders for their position. Jonas explains that the representative of the Elders “...began to describe this year's group and its variety of personalities, though she singled no one out by name. She mentioned that there was one who had singular skills at caretaking, another who loved new children, one with unusual scientific aptitude, and fourth for whom physical labor was an obvious pleasure” (Lowry, 1993:52).

Indeed, the insertion of ideology in education is so subtle, that makes the inhabitants follow it as a free subjection. The children are trained to be a person who can handle the assignment to support their community. The twelves are assigned to their formal training and they occupy it for the rest of their productive life.

Reproducing skillful trainers that have intelligence is expected from their training, it makes sense that the committee always observes and pays attention to the trainers. The committee's observations are aimed "to assess the conduct of each individual and to calculate its qualities or merits" (Foucault in Virtanen, 2012:41) as people are assigned for job through observation and selection by the Elders since they were children. They believe that the Elders are always right. For more, it is guaranteed that everyone is chosen for the right selection in this community (Lowry, 1993:16).

The people only focus on how to improve their ability in their training to participate in the community as their existence. Here, Althusser claims that "...agents of exploitation will provide domination for the ruling class" (1971:133). In other words, the individuals are systematically trained through task of increasing complexity to prepare them to be a functioning part of community and to be able to effectively contribute to the common good without questioning the classification of job.

#### **4.2 Language Rule as the Committee's Dominance**

The use of language is controlled in this community. The correct use of language is perceived as an acquisition of precise language that is commenced when the children are in three. In language precision, the committee inculcates their own standard of value, particularly the value of moralism. As Althusser states that "the communications apparatus by cramming every "citizen" with daily doses of nationalism, chauvinism, liberalism, moralism, etc." (1971:154). Language precision functions to maintain the dominance of the ruling class in this community, as "... The community can't function smoothly if people don't use precise language" (Lowry, 1993:127). The use of precise language is a sign that language as a tool of communication is under strict control in this community. It is depicted when Jonas needs to find the correct word for his feelings, "But there was a little shudder of nervousness when he thought about it, ... Apprehensive, Jonas decided. That's what I am" (Lowry, 1993:4). He confuses to express his own feelings or even to describe that feelings into a proper word. He tries to trace some expressive words such as "fear", "frightened", "eager" and "excited" before he finally finds a precise word of "apprehensive" to represent his feeling.

The committee also replaces certain words with some euphemism words which conceal the true nature of the acts and maintain the innocent image of the committee in the community. The word "release" is implemented to replace the act of murdering people who disobey the rules and unable to be accepted in the community. Another example is the word

“stirrings” to remove the knowledge of sexual reproduction or even intercourse. They also have the word “Elsewhere” to explain the community outside their world.

The precise words are chosen by the Elders to control the community’s way of thought toward some particular concept of words since they consider some words are threatening to their ideal concept of society in the community. The precise words are appropriate for an image of “Good Government” that never makes any mistakes to the community and the people just accept it as the common rule. According to Althusser, the limitation of language is recognized as “censorship in cultural ideological state apparatus” (1971:14), the community’s vocabularies are limited to the safe words, the words that do not ruin the establishment of the community system. For example, the word “love” has been removed from this community as seen when Jonas tries to ask their parents: “Do you love me?” There was an awkward silence for a moment. Then Father gave a little chuckle. “Jonas. You, of all people. Precision of language, Please!” (Lowry, 1993:127).

The word “love” is forbidden to be used since the people in this community are not allowed to be in an intimate relationship. Their relationship must not be based on feeling, but it must be created based on their social position in the community. The conversation draws Jonas’ feeling that he cannot accept the removing of word “love” in this community since he knows from his training as the keeper that the feeling of “love” does not seem dangerous to the community. In fact, the reason of eliminating the word “love” is simply because their concept of family is not created based on this feeling but it is more about the involvement of reproductive technology to arrange people based on their similar characteristics into a group and name them as a family.

In other cases, the meaning of a certain word has been changed and replaced with another precise word. They use the word “animal” without knowing what it actually means. They know that animal is “often used to describe someone uneducated or clumsy, someone who didn’t fit in” (Lowry, 1993:5). They do not know the name of animal since they do not have animal in the community. This community does not understand the concept of color as Jonas “could not adequately understand the apple had changed” (Lowry, 1993:24). He has seen the color of red, the apple’s true color, but the only word that he can think to describe the situation is “changed.” He cannot explain the names of color since the people’s brain in this community is stimulated to only recognize the color of the world into two main colors which are white and black. Thus, the language precision designed for the community is one of the control systems. It is employed by the committee since the language is a tool which conveys an expression of human being.

### 4.3 Media Censorship as ISA in *The Giver's* Community

Media is a common definition for radio, television, internet, newspapers, and so on which serve for mass communication. It is explained that communication in ISA which emphasizes through media can be a great power to control the inhabitants (Althusser, 1993:250). As reflected in *The Giver's* society, the people of the community only know some particular sources of written texts. It is illustrated that they do not know the word of newspapers or libraries in the community. It can be seen from Jonas' feeling of surprise when he visits *The Giver's* dwelling for the first time. He says:

“But the most conspicuous difference was the books. In his dwelling, there were the necessary reference volumes that each household contained: a dictionary, and the thick community volume which contains descriptions of every office, factory, building, and committee. And the book of rules, of course. The books in his own dwelling were the only books that Jonas had ever seen. He had ever known that other books existed” (Lowry, 1993:74).

Information restriction in this community is perfectly effective to tie the ideology of the people. The committee controls the distribution of information. The people in the community only get selected books for their reading sources. For sure, the Elders have embedded their ideology throughout the book that legally can be read by their people. Sevgi and Ozgokceler state about communication ISA that:

“As ISA imposes the ideas by using the ideology, it is defined that Communication ISA as a system that the people use to impose the ideology by the media with the huge integration of the media in daily life upon the advancements in the information and communication (2016:17-18).”

The limitation of mass media in *The Giver's* community helps the committee to restrict their people to get information from Elsewhere (a place out of community). The restriction is aimed to bind the ideology that has been trusted by the people in this society. The Elsewhere recognizes by the inhabitants as a dangerous place where they cannot survive in it. Indeed, the information about Elsewhere which the inhabitants have in this community is limited. There are no sources that describe Elsewhere and why it must be prohibited. Actually, the committee hides the fact that they have been manipulating the society in their every life aspects. The committee filters the knowledge or information properly, as it is necessary to maintain the domination. As it is illustrated in this conversation between the giver and Jonas as the keeper: “...because the books are forbidden to citizens. You and I are the only ones with access to the books ... So if I have spouse, and maybe children, I will have to hide the books from them?” The giver nodded. “I wasn't permitted to share the books with my spouse, that's correct” (Lowry, 1993:102).

The state has an active role as an evaluator of the Communication ISA that concerns to articulate the ideological intention of the state. Since the media functions as an ISA, it leaves inhabitants vulnerable to the state's manipulation on their knowledge.

#### **4.4 Family as ISA**

In Jonas' Community, inhabitants live by the principle of sameness. This means that everything is tightly controlled, and rules are extremely strict under a uniformity. One of these rules is that all family units are created for the sole purpose of raising children. There is no love. No one gets married and has a child the old-fashioned way. The adults all take drugs to prevent urges that might lead to children, which they call Stirrings (Lowry, 1993:39).

Instead, children are created by some genetic engineering process that is not clearly described or defined. They are not delivered through a normal biological process. What they know is that babies are born to Birthmothers which involve the use of advanced reproduction technology, raised by Nurturers in the Nurturing Centers until they reach the community age of one, and then appointed to a family that has been applied for them. Family units are made of one man and one woman (Lowry, 1993:22), formed by the committee of elders based on their capability for the sole purpose of raising children. Once the children are gone from the home, the family unit disbands and the members have basically no relationship with one another. Jonas explains this. "As long as they're still working and contributing to the community, they'll go and live with the other Childless Adults. And they won't be part of my life anymore. ...And after that, when the time comes, they'll go to the House of the Old" (Lowry, 1993:124).

However, he still has a mother and a father. They do provide him with guidance when he has a problem, discipline him when he needs it, and celebrate his victories. They care about him, even though they do not love him. They do not have love in their world. It is not one of their concepts. In their own way, they are parents. They treat their children more in the way a teacher or foster parent would. Loving a child would be inappropriate. They do raise him, in their house, from the time he is a baby until the time he leaves home.

Family, as Althusser said that being an ISA also has another important function. It contributes to the reproduction of labor (1971:77). His parents contribute to maintain the ideas of job selections that begin since the youngsters in the society are in the age of twelve:

"Were any of the elevens disappointed, your year? Jonas asked. Unlike his father, he had no idea what his Assignment would be. But He knew that some would disappoint him. Though he respected his father's work, Nurturer would not be his wish. And he didn't envy Laborers at all. His father thought, "No, I don't think so. Of course the

Elders are so careful in their observations and selections.” “I think it’s probably the most important job in our community,” his mother commented” (Lowry, 1993:16).

Continuing that statement, Althusser explains the function of family through reproduction of labor. He says,

“..the family system, takes on a political meaning, given that the school (and the school-family couple) constitutes the dominant Ideological State Apparatus, the apparatus playing a determinant part in the reproduction of the relations of production of a mode of production threatened in its existence by the world class struggle” (1993:253).

Jonas’ mother who has prominent position at the Department of Justice has a power to judge someone who breaks the community’s rule. She has double roles in her society, as the member of Department of Justice and a mother for her family. It is her duty to warn her family about the community’s rules. As a mother, she shared her feelings: “I feel frightened too, for whom,” she confessed, “You know that there’s no third chance. The rules say that if there’s a third transgression, he simply has to be released” (Lowry, 1993:9).

It shows that Jonas’ mother is very firm about the rules. The depiction of family roles in Jonas’ community is also to strengthen the committee’s dominance: “His father thought, “No, I don’t think so. Of course the Elders are so careful in their observations and selections”, I think it’s probably the most important job in our community,” his mother commented” (Lowry, 1993:16).

The parents have an obligation to keep the positive image of the Elders. Through this “good image,” they can control their children to obey the rules. As Goldstein stated “ideology is a system belonging to its logic and proper representations; images, myths, ideas, or concepts related to the case through existence of a given society” (in Barry 2002:110). Furthermore, ideology for Althusser is a system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group (1971:158). The way Jonas’ parents direct their children’s mind to be obedient persons in society can be said as the goals of ideology in family ISA.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

In *The Giver*’s society, the training system is depicted as a tool to impose the ideology which the community should get since they are in early age. The ISA is also operated through the precise use of language and media censorship. The aims are to control the community’s way of thought to particular concept of words and to limit the knowledge of the inhabitants, particularly to the limitation of the information of the Elsewhere. Community’s rule that has been existing in *The Giver*’s community aims to manipulate the dominance. Family also plays

a significant role as ISA to maintain the committee's dominance over the rules that must be obeyed by the community. This article only conveys the operation and form of ISA in the novel. Thus, for further research, it will be more comprehensive if there is a study conducted to examine the operation of the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA), another state apparatus concept of Althusser, in the novel.

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