



## A Study of Repressive State Apparatuses in Brandon Hobson's *The Removed*

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### ABSTRACT

This study analyzes Brandon Hobson's *The Removed* through the lens of Repressive State Apparatuses presented in Althusser's work *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. Published in 1971, this work is a comprehensive discussion on class conflict in which the bourgeois exercise their repression over the proletariat by means of an ideology. This study explores how RSAs inflict unbearable sufferings on a marginalized Cherokee Indian community in, Quah, Oklahoma. The Indian community is mercilessly tortured and murdered by means of police, army, and courts in order to remove them from their native lands. Consequently, the murder of Tsala's whole family followed by Ray-Ray Echota's killing manifests ideology-oriented repression with a view to promulgate The Indian Removal Act. Besides highlighting the structures of ideology behind RSAs, it explores psychological impact of repression on the entire suffering community, especially the Echotas. By investigating repressive state apparatuses and their psychological issues, this study makes the public know the roots of repression in a capitalist ideology.

**Key Words:** Althusser, RSAs, Brandon Hobson, *The Removed*

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## 1. Introduction

This study intends to analyze Brandon Hobson's *The Removed* in the light of RSAs, a theory presented by a French Marxist theorist, Louis Althusser, in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. Being a structuralist Marxist, he is greatly influenced by Antonio Gramsci, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Niccolo Machiavelli, Baruch Spinoza, Sigmund Freud and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Dealing with the issue of exploitation of the poor at the hands of the capitalist, Althusser unveils the key role of ideology and ideological beliefs in this exploitation of the working class and its impact on social beings' psychology. This ideology is infused with the help of its two components ISAs and RSAs. ISAs comprise of media, religion, culture, education, family, and language etc. ISAs are also known as soft apparatuses because they do not practice physical repression on the proletariat.

On the other hand, Repressive State apparatuses (RSAs) are those apparatuses which are used to impose the ideology of capitalists forcefully. RSAs include the institutions of police, army, jails, judiciary, agencies and establishment etc. When ISAs fail, RSAs are enforced and implemented to suppress the rebellious elements of society. This is how elite class exercises its ideology in the society. Capital class makes the poor class its victims and causes irreparable losses to them, irrespective of their color, caste, creed, culture and religion, with the help of these ideological apparatuses. As this ideology only secures the benefits of the capital class so this class controls the economy of the world, and the poor are always exploited. Althusser observes that whenever a subaltern tries to challenge its implemented rules and regulations or practiced norms and traditions, the capital class controls the subordinate class either through Ideological State Apparatuses or through Repressive State Apparatuses. As a result of these instruments, the victims have to face uncountable sufferings and unbearable loss. There is no compensation for the damage being done as a result of this ideological exploitation. Althusser, through his theory of ideology, wants to make common people aware of their actual victimizers and real exploiters who make their life miserable, through this invisible system of ideology. The positive impact of this theory is that it creates awareness among the exploited social beings who have forgotten



their rights, their position and their identity in society. They feel their subjugation at the hands of capital class.

Brandon Hobson's novel *The Removed* is really an eye opener in this regard. Keeping in mind Althusser's theory of ideology and ideological state apparatuses, one can see the novel as true portrait of exploitation of the proletariat at the hands of the bourgeois. The novel takes its roots in the history of Cherokee Indians who have been forcefully removed from their own lands in the state of Oklahoma during 1940s and afterwards. It is story of an Echota family whose youngest member, Ray-Ray Echota, is killed on mere suspicions, for he belongs to Indian community. Likewise, Tsala, an ancestor from Cherokee Indians, cannot get rid of the memories of his past in which he is brutally killed along with his family. Being a representative of his community, his narration is a mirror to see how repressive state apparatuses come into action against the proletariat Indians in order to support the ideals of the capitalist. Unending torture-some killings leave permanent wounds on the mind of community and make them traumatized.

The novel is about application of The Indian Removal Act of 1830s and subsequent use of repressive institutions against a marginalized community. Tsala, an ancestor from the dead speaks out his experiences as: 'In 1838, the firing squad killed you before they killed me. Your mother adorned us in gold and jewelry and buried us'. As far as the working of RSAs is concerned, the following words express the foundation on which these forces come into action as: 'I refused to migrate on the Trail, and that is why we died. I refused because it was not fair treatment, and I was willing to sacrifice my life for you, our family, and our people.' This is how Tsala, an important figure from the Indian community gives vent to his passion behind his murder along with his family. Maria Echota says, 'I told them about my own family, my Cherokee ancestors who suffered on the Trail of Tears after Andrew Jackson forced thousands to leave their land'.

It is clear from all perspectives that Brandon Hobson's *The Removed* is the most suitable piece of work to explore Althusser's repressive state apparatuses in order to see how, in society's make up, the capitalist government uses RSAs against the proletariat, the Cherokee Indian community in Oklahoma.





## 2. Literature Review

In order to develop background knowledge to Brandon Hobson's *The Removed* and Althusser's RSAs, research articles, journal articles and reviews have been presented. This chapter is devised to give information about the work and the theory under analysis. By giving gist of the previous research works, one can justify the suitability of the present research endeavour and fill in the research gap. Having gone through the existing body of knowledge on the topic, it becomes clear that it is a unique study because Brandon Hobson's novel *The Removed* has not been inspected from the proposed lens. The gist of previous research works is as follows:

In a paper titled as *Louis Althusser: ISA and RSA* Nasrullah Mambrol (2016) inspects that Althusser differentiates between ideologies and ideology. Ideologies are based on historical social construction whereas the ideology is based on structuralism. Both ideology and ideological state apparatus describe the relation between state and its subjects. This theory creates awareness and revolves the obedient subjects to their bourgeois master.

Kashifa Khalid, Usman Javeed Iqbal and Muneeba Laquat (2021) in their article, *Legitimizing Oppression: An Althusserian study of Jamil Ahmed's The Wandering Falcon* explore class conflict, marginalization, oppression and exploitation of the poor at the hands of the rich in Pakistan. The researchers find out contribution of state to legitimate the oppression on the lesser human beings. The bourgeois use judiciary and armed forces to suppress those who attempt to violate the ideology of the elite class. *The Wandering Falcon* presents all functions and the key factors of destitute sufferings such as class inequality, subjugation, objectification oppression and marginalization in tribal areas of Pakistan.

In a review titled as *In an Earle Cherokee novel, the Ghosts and the Grieving have their say* John Domini (2021) points out that the novel *The Removed* is infested with the presence of ghosts, spirits and grief in the lives of Cherokee Indian family. The youngest family member Ray-Ray Echota of this story is shot dead by a police officer. Moreover, this is a pathetic story which defines the grief-stricken Indian family that is fated to face unfortunate death of its beloved mother, Ray-Ray Echota. This leads the fostering scar for as many as fifteen years till the novel ends.



Sarah Rachel Egelman (2021) in a review gives pivotal background information about *The Removed* just to provide readable information to the readers. She inspects that the novel *The Removed* is based on mythical story and the real historical incident of the Indian community that occurs in 1800s USA. This novel portrays the cruelty of the USA government that targets the innocent Indians families, and their killings keep on occurring at a regular pace. On other hand, it sheds light on injustice and the killing of Tsala who was the member of this family in the past. But the main focus of this story is on Echota family and the tragedy of the dead the youngest Ray-Ray Echota. His death shakes the whole family and mourning never comes to an end. Family suffers from disunity. Further, this novel deals with the scattered lives of the family members who live in everlasting pain. This novel also describes the story of love and longing related to genocide of Cherokee Indian community.

Marcela Davison Aviles (2021) in a review titled as *Powerful 'Removed' Walk a Path between Memory and Mourning* elaborates that the story of *The Removed* is an imagined story which is based on lyricism, culture, and beauty. The reviewer tries to explain the cultural ups and downs, injustice and family separation in a land that is run on unequal grounds. Moreover, the strong presence of myth, history, and unforgettable memories of the past is found which belonged to Cherokee. These events bring about irrevocable loss for the family and its members. The family is separated into two paths. First path is based on travel, culture and traditions. The second path is based on traverse that takes the characters away from their culture and traditions. So, the adults are taken to dangerous romantic experiences and the sense of alienation ruptures their lives. The coincidence of Cherokee national holiday related Ray-Ray Echota's death anniversary lead the family whether to be happy or feel pathetic. The interweaving events scatter the guardianship of the state and the head of the Indian family.

The above-mentioned review of the literature manifests the contribution of various research scholars, critics and reviewers who put in their full effort to contribute to the existing body of knowledge about the work and the theory under study. No doubt, their contribution matters a lot as they have seen various aspects of theory as well as the work under analysis. However, Brandon Hobson's *The Removed* has not yet been seen through the lens of RSAs. Hence, this endeavour bridges the research gap left over by the previous researchers.





### 3. Thesis Statement

Even a bird's eye view of Brandon Hobson's *The Removed* creates a strong impression that this novel is quite suitable for the application of Althusser's Repressive State Apparatuses as presented in his book *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1971) because this novel depicts the State institutions inflicting repression on the deprived Cherokee Indian Community in Oklahoma.

### 4. Research Methodology

The researcher's aim is to apply the French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser's theory which is presented in his essay, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* published in his book, *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essay* (1971). This theory has two components: the first component consists of Ideological State Apparatuses and the second one consists of the Repressive State Apparatuses. Researchers are generally habitual of applying the second component of this theory, RSAs, to Brandon Hobson's novel *The Removed*.

This is qualitative research in which researchers explain an in-depth study of sufferings of less privileged community in Oklahoma. The research is based on how the subjects are subjugated by RSAs and capitalism. Moreover, it is to see why and how the sufferers are helpless in particular situation and what sufferings take place. Further, it is a thematic analysis of the selected text that emphasizes, analyzes, and interprets patterns of meaning within qualitative data. The researchers of the current paper have used two types of sources: primary source and the secondary sources. Primary source is the novel, *The Removed* by Brandon Hobson and the secondary sources are research articles and internet-oriented means of study.

### 5. Research Questions

1. How do the Repressive State Apparatuses exercise their influence on society in Brandon Hobson's *The Removed*?
2. What is psychological impact of RSAs on the suffering community?
3. What role does social structure play in the formation of RSAs in Brandon Hobson's *The Removed*?



## 6. Data Analysis

Brandon Hobson's *The Removed* revolves around the lives of two classes i.e., the bourgeois and the proletariat. The first class consists of government and its supported pillars e.g., police, army, courts and constitutional institutions; whereas the other class consists of marginalized Cherokee Indians who have to undergo immense sufferings at the hands of government and its allied institutions. The worst part of the story is that as per Althusserian concept, it is bourgeois who rule every nook and corner of the society presented in the novel. Being capitalist in nature, the government leaves no stone unturned to fulfill its mean desire of feathering its nest by hook or by crook. So, RSAs come into play in order to make the process of repression smooth and speedy.

As the novel is written in context of The Indian Removal Act 1830, it is enriched with unending history of RSAs being applied against the marginalized Indian Cherokee community in Oklahoma. The characters in the novel present themselves as veterans of creating sufferings throughout the history of Indians who have been subject to unending series of torture, injuries and deaths. The State, in order to accomplish the task of exercising its writ, promulgates certain amendments in the constitution in order to legalize its action. Constitutional institution is used as a weapon in order to provide justification for the atrocities against an already marginalized Indian community. Andrew Jackson, with the help of new act, forces Southern Native Americans to move from Oklahoma to the west of Mississippi. As per fear of resistance from the suffering community, it seeks assistance from army, police and courts to accomplish the task of removing Indians from Oklahoma.

RSAs work as a tool of government machinery in doing away with all those hurdles which may block its path to accomplishing the task. The novel under analysis revolves around the lives of Echota family whose youngest member Ray-Ray Echota is killed by a police officer without having any clue of any crime. The very incident depicts the non-humanitarian approach of the institutions in working for the cause of the powerful elite. Echota family is at the edge of a long line which is witness to the countless killings and the removal of Indians who resist against their removal from their ancestral lands. Hence, innocent people like Ray-Ray Echota and Tsala become victim of institutional barbarity. As per Althusser's theory of RSAs, justice system does





always side with those who have power and money at their disposal. The same happens in the novel in which the justice system supports the culprit who kill an innocent boy on mere suspicion. The inquiry proves to be an eyewash as Calvin Hoff, the police personnel, is given clean chit from the justice system. It is because courts and service tribunals side with those whose goodwill keeps them steady at their seats. On the contrary, the poor and the deprived community fail to get any justice against the powerful uniformed personnel, Calvin Hoff. Thus, the courts come to rescue a killer who stands up as a force to safeguard the interests of the powerful elite.

Sub-plot of the story revolves around the narration of Tsala, a representative of Cherokee Indian community from the world of the dead. Though being a dead person, he is witness to countless atrocities of police against his family as well as other members of his community. As an ubiquitous character, his narration sheds light on the fact how RSAs work for the cause of metropolitan in power. Tsala and community witness genocide as police and as its supporting institutions are moved by the government against a helpless community. Consequently, hundreds of Indians along with Tsala are massacred. RSAs show no empathy towards the working class as no one from the police department condoles to the bereaved Echota family who have been left as a traumatized family, having no way to get justice or take revenge against the brutality of the law enforcing departments. Here, the role of law is to support the cause of the powerful elite in government. Contrarily, Cherokee Indians are forced to be removed. The poor have no refuge against the brutality of police whose reins are in the hands of capitalists in the government. The unfortunate condition of Echota family shows how RSAs work against the proletariat Indians and bring about immense sufferings for common people who have no stake in the economy of the State.

RSAs leave the whole community in panic as they have produced tragedy throughout generations. Physical injuries leave long lasting wounds on the psyche of all who are witness to the crimes imposed through police, courts and army. The mental wounds are deeper and fiercer than the physical wounds borne by the living individuals as well as groups. The suffering community fails to get rid of the scars which the sufferings have inflicted on them. The memory is pressing on all the remaining individuals and groups alike. Earnest Echota, his wife Maria





Echota and their children Edgar Echota and Sonja Echota keep on feeling the psychic wound throughout their life. A single catastrophic event casts serious psychological impact on the whole Echota family. The whole family fails to come out of this impact for as many as fifteen years. The family loses unity and lives scattered and wayward live in future. For ten years, they are unable to get out of the shock. Past becomes an unbearable reality. It makes all of them neurotic. Normality goes out of existence. Nostalgia for irrecoverable past becomes so pressing that it disturbs their present. Though the parents live under the same roof yet RSAs have made them too abnormal to live a harmonious life. Likewise, their children keep the wounds of their brothers killing alive in their minds.

Long history of repressive state apparatuses makes the whole community in panic. Fear runs through the blood of each and every individual of the community. Even the ancestors of Cherokee Indians foresee the arrival of forces in order to remove them from their own places. The same fear travels to the present Echota family whose member, Ray-Ray Echota, is shot dead by a police officer. The fear makes people irrational, dogmatic and superstitious. Common sense and logic are replaced by visions of soldiers and resulting bloodshed. Hence, RSAs force people to live amidst fear of upcoming deaths and removal. RSAs, in the novel, bring about adverse impact on the psyche of the elder as well as younger characters. Constant deaths and threats weaken their minds. Sense of good memory is replaced by forgetfulness and hallucinations. The resulting frustration shakes the persons such as Earnest Echota as: 'He grew frustrated easily. He would forget the things like why he'd walked into a room. Whenever he did this, he would look down at the floor, and struggle to understand.' This worsening condition is evidence to the fact that the repression committed by forces gives irreparable loss of mental working of the suffering community. The same abnormality prevails in the lives of all other characters who are marginalized by an oppressive regime.

Acts of cruelty have never been soothing for anybody, whatsoever. Brandon Hobson's *The Removed* provides plenty of examples in which repressive incidents have depressing impact on the psyche of all the members who have gone through painful experience. Tsala's whole family is shot dead. It is not easy for him to come out of the shock which follows him to his grave. From the world of the dead, he rises as a representative of his family and community to





share his painful experience with the readers. The catastrophic past follows at his heels. Recounting of his family tragedy indicates eternal mental wounds he suffered long time ago. Likewise, Echota family fails to get rid of the flashbacks pertaining to unfortunate death of their members at the hands of police, a vibrant institution of the capitalist regime.

Passivity, silence and long hours' mediation grip the community that has always been treated as a marginalized entity by those who have power and resources at their disposal. Continuous gaze and purposeless staring become routine of the whole Echota family who have failed to cope with the tragedy caused by police. Lack of justice and compensation makes the whole family depressed, dejected and demoralized. Earnest Echota, his wife Maria Echota and their children Edgar Echota and Sonja Echota give way to speechlessness and are driven to usual gaze at certain things which their eyes meet. Edgar keeps on counting tiles of the ceiling. Sonja's gaze does also reflect her frustration. Earnest Echota's eyes stick to his surroundings. State's repression has wider impact on the mental cum social working of Echota family. It brings about psychic disorder in their lives. A disordered family fails to realize the worth of safety in unity. Instead of forming a unifying force, the whole family gets disintegrated mentally as well as socially. Wound of the unfortunate death is too grave to bring about stability in their behavior. It disturbs social fabric of their life. They fail to reconcile to the circumstances. For as many as ten years, there is no death anniversary of Ray-Ray Echota because RSAs have made them collectively traumatized. Hence, collective mental agony deprives them of social sense which is usually observed among intact communities.

RSAs are, basically, an outcome of social structure which is based on economy. Economic standard divides society into haves and have-nots i.e., the rich and the poor working class. The division becomes deep and prevalent. This is how classism comes into being. This classism keeps the capitalist in center, whereas the working class remains at the margin. The former uses resources to get power which is used to create more and more sources of getting capital in hand. Hence, army, police, courts and law enforcing agencies come under the control of those who are with heavy pockets. On the contrary, the latter remains at the mercy of the powerful elite and its supporting institutions. The former class does everything to safeguard its interests. As a result, the proletariat bears the brunt of the status quo. The same takes place in





*The Removed* where the government is supported by army, police and courts whereas the Indian community lives a helpless life. Brandon Hobson's *The Removed* creates a social structure in Oklahoma where society is divided on the basis of money and consequent power. It is power relation between the government and a cornered Indian community. The power is not shared; rather it is grabbed at the cost of repressing the lesser human beings in order to keep up the status quo in society. As capitalism demands from its managers to increase their capital at the cost of others' sufferings, the novel depicts sufferings of Cherokee Indians who have been forced to leave the place. As police, army, courts and law enforcing agencies are in control of the people in power, they form as repressive state apparatuses in order to stand by the capitalistic government.

As per Althusser, a capitalist regime is based on classism which comes into being as conflicting entities. The novel under study revolves around conflict between the bourgeois government and the proletariat Cherokee Indians. All the institutions stand by the heavy pocketed because it is capitalists who is the source of bread and butter for the working class. The novel under study portrays conflict between ideology of the bourgeois and the proletariat. The upper class lacks in humanitarian approach towards the lower one, the Indians. In this centuries old conflict, the government keeps on using repressive state apparatuses against the less privileged class. Tsala, the ancestor of Indian community, recalls this conflict in which he and his family are killed by the soldiers in order to pave a way for government's attempt of Indians' removal. This study is a fruitful research endeavour. There is a strong impact of RSAs in the lives of the suffering Echota family. The resulting repression gives rise to physical, psychological and social problems for the entire community.

## 7. Conclusion

The study on Brandon Hobson's *The Removed* proves that RSAs play negative role in personal as well as social lives of the characters belonging to the marginalized Cherokee Indians who have to face unbearable sufferings at the hands of courts, police and other law enforcing agencies. Police and supporting institutions work as mercenaries in order to fulfill the wishful desires of the capitalists at the centre. Echota family in particular and the whole Cherokee Indian community in general face the consequences of The Indian Removal Act 1838 which is promulgated in order to force the whole community from their lands in Oklahoma. On their





refusal, they are faced with torture, injuries, deaths and removal. Tsala's murder along with his whole family is an eye opener from the past whereas Ray-Ray Echota's unfortunate murder shows its impact in the present-day Oklahoma. RSAs bring about adverse impact on the psyche of the affected community as the sufferers develop mental and physical disorders from individual and social perspective. These sufferings make them a traumatized community. They all give way to day dreaming, hallucinations and visions which bring in further deterioration in their lives. Nobody compensates for their loss. Echota family gets deteriorated. Basically, society in Oklahoma is constructed in such a way as to create divide into haves and haves-not: the bourgeois and the proletariat. The upper class uses RSAs in order to expand their capitalist trends by removing Cherokee Indians from the State of Oklahoma. The study is much important as it highlights major issue which is faced by all the societies throughout the world.

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