Investigation of real life killings of children by states as compared to
that in the novel "Among the Hidden" by Margaret Peterson Haddix

(EE - English B: Cat 3)

Research Question: To what extent is real life killing of children by states
accurately reflected in the novel Among the Hidden by Margaret Peterson Haddix?
EE- English B: Cat 3

Table of Contents

Introduction 1
Body 1
Conclusion 7
References 8
Introduction

The aim of doing this essay is to study and explore more of the world’s problem, which is overpopulation, that’s expressed through the literature form and comparing it to what actually happened in real life. In the novel "Among The Hidden," Luke, the main character, has to hide his whole life in the attic, due to the fact that he’s a third child, which happens to be illegal in the world he lives in. Investigation of real life killings of children by states as compared to that in the novel” (Haddix, p. 21). Overpopulation is one of the most common problems that are happening around the world. Government from all over the world is having difficulties solving this problem. For example, there’s the Brazilian favela problem, where too many people living in one area, thus causing infrastructural and social damage. One way to solve it so far is to limit the amount of children that a family can have, and this method is already being used by China, and it is working substantially over the past 33 years. Now what we need to find is, what other alternatives are there that governments can use in order to control their population so that problems such as overpopulation won’t occur. According the novel entitled “Among The Hidden” and real life situations that happened in Brazil, there are different ways of solving this problem.

Among the hidden is a story about a boy named Luke Garner, who supposedly does not exist, due to the fact that he is an illegal child. He lives his everyday life in the attic of his house, hiding in the shadows. In his whole life, he never sees the outside world. He even rarely gets to explore his own house. In this novel, having a third child is not allowed, if so the child will immediately be executed.

According to Among the Hidden, their government’s way of controlling the population is to limit the number of children that a family could have. As mentioned before, this method is the same method that is currently being used in the real world.

What the government would do is that every month or so, they will have a population officer come to residences of different families to check on how many people are there in one house. If there are more than four people living under one roof, the family needs to clarify things with the officer, because if the fifth person were an eligible family member as well, then that person would be taken into custody and be processed for execution.

The reason they do this is that the world that they live in is different than the world we live in. According to the novel itself, it sounded like they have limited amount of resources for the people in their world, so they are limiting the amount of resources that each family will get, that’s also the reason why they want to limit the population, due to the fact that they can’t provide enough resources for all the people in their world.

“The Government justifies keeping everyone else in poverty because people seem to work the hardest when they’re right on the edge of survival.” (Haddix, 35)

Due to the very strict policy, “Among the Hidden” main character, Luke Garner, lives his entire life in hiding from the population officer. He practically eats, plays, and sleeps in the attic of his house. Since the day he was born, he only knew a couple of figure in his life. He only knew Harlan Garner, his father Edna Garner, his mother, Mark Garner, his brother, and Matthew Garner, his oldest brother. Not until he notices a child out of the corner of his eye peering from behind one of the windows of the Sports family’s house. He then discovered Jennifer “Jen” Talbot, another illegal third child who lives in the attic in the house across his. When he found out about Jen, he was very astounded by the fact that there is actually other third child out there that are in hiding just like he is.
EE- English B: Cat 3

It’s quite funny how he found out about Jen. At first Luke was unsure of whom he saw peering behind the curtains, it could be one of the two older teens living in the Sports family’s house, but he assures himself that it’s a child. Since then, Luke has had his eyes on the Sports family’s house more often. One day he notices that one of the window blinds flips up and down a couple of times. Another day when the windows were left open he saw the lights flickers on and off by itself, when he knew that everybody in the Sports’ house, that he knew of, was not home. Then the mother came home stomping and put the blinds down before leaving again. Another day he saw lights and the glow of the TV. He finally concluded that someone had to be hiding in that house.²

Luke then courageously went out of the safety of his house, down on all four, crawling and running along the side of the house, the hedges, and the barn. He hesitated and thought of going home, but then he realized that his own house is like a prison, then he hastily ran straight for the screen of the Sports family’s house, but sadly it was locked. Somehow, Luke managed to get into the house by putting his hand through one of the screen and unlocked the door from the inside. Then he heard a cough from inside and found Jen. Since then, they grew closer and closer to each other, sharing stories and teaching each other. Jen then told Luke that the population law was passed to keep people from starving. Luke ended up asking Jen questions about the controversial views about the population law that he read. Luke also found out that the government labeling pregnancy as a negative thing is actually a way of preventing pregnancy. Luke also learned that the population law was passed on to keep people from starving.

Extended essay: Language acquisition example B

EE- English B: Cat 3

Jen told Luke about the website that she created so that she can talk to the other shadow children. Luke and Jen chatted a lot in the computer, talking to other shadow children in hiding and Luke found out that Jen actually has contact with more than 800 shadow children. Jen also asked Luke to come along in the shadow children rally that she planned on April. She also told Luke about the plan, but after it was the day of the rally, Luke coward out and ran home.

“Sure you can be a coward and hope someone else changes the world for you. You can hide up in that attic of yours until someone knocks on the door and says, ‘Oh, hey, they freed the hidden. Want to come out?’ Is that what you want?” Luke didn’t answer. “You’ve got to come, Luke, or you'll hate yourself the rest of your life. When you don’t have to hide anymore, even years from now, there’ll always be some small part of you whispering ‘I don't deserve this. I didn’t fight for it. I’m not worth it.’ And you are, Luke, you are. You're smart and funny and nice, and you should be living life, instead of being buried alive in that old house of yours” (Haddix, p.46).

That was actually the last time Luke saw Jen. Days after that Luke found out that all the shadow children that participated in the rally have been killed by the government, including Jen.

“I want to Live! Not Die, Not Hide, LIVE!” (Haddix, p.57). Readers might think that the things that they did in this novel won’t actually happen in real life, but it’s assured that mass killings of people due to overpopulation actually do happens. In Among the Hidden, the illegal children that went on the strike was the one that got killed, and the other children that didn’t went on the strike kept hiding, just like Luke did, until he was offered a fake ID by Jen’s dad, who’s actually one of the population
officers. We can deduce that the government will kill illegal children that uncover themselves indiscriminately.

There’s a case in the Brazilian favela in March 2005, about brutal killings of innocent people and sleeping children, where the Rio state Secretary for Public Security has issued a statement that the killings were done by the military police, otherwise known as the Brazilian death squads. It was said that the killings were done to minimize gang activity distribution of drugs in the area and also to lower the crime rate as well. Ironically the death squads themselves was said to have connections with the authorities, and was actually a part of Rio military force, the very individuals, paid, trained and equipped by the government to protect the society from crime and violence. Twelve years before that massacre, there was actually a famous case that involved the killings of innocent child sleeping in front of a church in Candelaria and Vigario Geral done by the military police. It has become clear that police’s sadistic actions haven’t changed from then on.

As mentioned before, there was a mass slaughter of children in front of Rio De Janeiro’s famous church Candelaria, which happened in July 23, 1993. The church itself is famous, because at night the church is used as a makeshift home for the homeless children. Those children aren’t just regular children; the children that live in that area are usually children that are involved in criminal activities, such as illegal drug dealing and prostitution that’s connected with the gangs, due to that the children that grew up in that area become more hostile. The children then began stealing from people that come up and down the church, which causes people to feel uneasy and call the authority. Due to the high level of hostility of the children, they even taunt the police by throwing rocks at their car, which irritates the police. The police themselves

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usually only gave the children a warning for what they did, but this time it’s different. Right around midnight sounds of screeching tires were heard near the church, followed by a chain of shots and screams of children.

Honestly, the actions that are taken by the individuals that night were actually unnecessary due to the fact that they’re only children, but in relation to the novel “Among the Hidden,” actions such as this are considered as normal, because there’s a law regarding it. Ethically speaking, it is wrong to kill anyone, especially children, without actually enquiring what they did wrong. In the throwing rocks incident to begin with were only child play, the police weren’t supposed to be provoked by childish actions such as that.

There was another killing followed not long after the Candelaria massacre, which was the Vigario Geral massacre that happened in the Vigario Geral favela. The massacre happened at August 23, 1993. Allegedly, the police squad was taking revenge on their fellow associate that got killed recently by the drug traffickers at the Vigario Geral favela. Instead of killing the actual drug trafficker, they retaliate by indiscriminately killing people that live in the Vigario Geral favela.\(^4\) Armed with automatic guns, the shooting went on for hours, they don’t have a particular target, so they just randomly kill the local resident.

As we can see from the events that happened in Brazil, and the things that were mentioned in the novel “Among the Hidden,” sometimes the government can go to certain heights when it comes to people breaking the rules. We can also see that the things that Luke experienced in the novel actually happened in real life, the different is only that Luke is an illegal child in hiding, and in the real world the children are not

in hiding but are doing illegal things. The government also takes imminent actions in both the novel and the real life, and they each have their own purpose in taking actions. In “Among the Hidden,” the government enforced the policy due to the fact that in their world there’s inadequate amount of resources for everybody, and like in Brazil, there’s too much people living in one cramped up area, creating infrastructural and social damage.

Conclusion

All in all, there will always be an intervention done by the government in order to sustain peace in their country, no matter how extreme it is. In the case of “Among the Hidden,” government are very rigid in enforcing their rules and toleration doesn’t come easy. The government gave a green light in killing the children at the shadow children rally, because they think that they are doing the right thing, which is to enforce the rule and kill all the illegal children. Meanwhile in Brazil, low education, corruption, and low paid jobs, are actually the cause of the massacre that’s happened. Most of the massacre that happened in Brazil is because the police themselves aren’t able to handle their emotion, and with gun in their hand they can do possibly everything with it. With the increasing number of population that’s under the influence of gang violence, Brazilian government takes matter into their own hand by giving a green light and supporting the police killings as an essential part of crime control.
References


