



**The Social Impacts of Poverty in Erika T. Wurth's  
*Crazy Horse's Girlfriend***

**A FINAL PROJECT**  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement  
For S-1 Degree in Literature  
In English Department, Faculty of Humanities  
Diponegoro University

Submitted by:  
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**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
DIPONEGORO UNIVERSITY  
SEMARANG  
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## **PRONOUNCEMENT**

I states truthfully that this project is compiled by me without taking the results from other research in any university, in S-1, S-2, andS-3 degree and in diploma. In addition, I ascertain that I did not take the material from other publication or someone else's work except for the references mentioned in bibliography.

Semarang, 1 August 2019

Kholifatus Sholihah

## **MOTTO AND DEDICATION**

“My success can only come from Allah.” – **Surah Hud 11:88**

“Don’t ever call your vision a dream. Dreams are unattainable wants you see during your sleep. Call it a goal. Cause goal are real.” – **Jae Day6**

“You can be whole and enough on iur Owen.” – **Alex Elle**

*This thesis is dedicated to myself and my parents.*

## **APPROVAL**

The Social Impacts of Poverty in Erika T. Wurth's *Crazy Horse's  
Girlfriend*

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I realize that this thesis is still far from being perfect. I, therefore, will be glad to receive any constructive criticism and recommendation to make this thesis better.

Finally I expect that this thesis will be useful to the reader who wishes to learn something about the social impact of poverty.

Semarang, August 2019

Kholifatus Sholihah

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## ABSTRACT

Erika T. Wurth's *Crazy Horses's Girlfriend* is a novel about the struggles and dreams of a Native American young girl who lives in a depressing town surrounded by hopeless people. In this paper, the writer tries to analyze the main character of the novel, Margaritte. The purpose of this writing is to analyze the social impacts of poverty depicted by the main character of the novel. The writer uses library research to support the data analysis derived from some references such as some related books, journals, and articles. The writer also uses sociological approach to analyze intrinsic and extrinsic elements of the story through the library research. The theory that is used in this paper is General Strain theory. Based on the analysis, the result shows that poverty can turn someone into a criminal. In the novel, poverty triggers Margaritte to commit a crime but in the end she can overcome her problems and become a better person.

Keywords: Teenager, poverty, general strain theory, struggle, dreams.

## INTRODUCTION

In the first quarter of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, United States has faced a lot of economic challenges. The U.S has to pay down debt, fund investments and balance budgets for the future. The United States also has high unemployment that makes a lot of people living in poverty. As seen in society, poverty can lead to crime. According to Anthony Holzman-Escareno (2009:16) stated that crime is the opportunity for the poor to get things they could not afford, poverty causes desire that can increase criminal rate.

One of the contemporary novels, *Crazy Horse's Girlfriend* by Erika T. Wurth shows how poverty can trigger someone to commit a crime. When the number of people who commit crime gradually increasing, society will get used to that action and they will start to consider it as the best way to solve their problem. The novel visualizes the struggle of a teenage girl who lives in poverty. The main character, Margaritte, is tired of living in poverty. She is surrounded by futureless kids and violent parents. She desperately wants to escape from her depressing life. Then, she meets a boy who can be the key to make her dream come true, but the situation gets worse when she finds out that she is pregnant. The conflicts are very interesting to analyze. How the main character is pushed to commit crime by seeing the life of people around her and what factors cause the main character to commit a crime.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. Intrinsic Theory

#### 2.1.1. Character & Characterization

Characters are people who figure in literary works and make the story alive. Abrams (1981: 76) states that characters are people who appear in a literary work which the readers can interpret their moral quality and certain tendency based on how they express what they say and what they do. Meanwhile, Characterization is the way how the author describe their character.

According to Abrams (1981:43) there are two types of methods for characterizing, showing and telling. In showing method, the author describes the character through their speech, action, feelings, inner thought, and responsiveness to events, so the readers can interpret the character's personality themselves. On the other hand, in telling method the author describe the character explicitly.

#### 2.1.2. Setting

Meyer explained "setting is the context in which the action of a story occurs. The major elements of setting are the time, place, and social environment that frame the characters. These elements establish the world in which the characters act" (1990: 107). Setting can help the readers to understand the characters and their action.

Setting can build atmosphere that will improve the effect of the story. According to Meyer, the important elements of settings are time, location, and social environment, those elements can reveal the mood, meaning, idea, or character's actions in the story.

In particular, setting of time contains information about when the story is happening while setting of place explains where the story take place. Setting of social and culture usually serves description of the social status, the cultural background of society, and the position of the characters in their society circumstances, to show social and cultural conditions in society.

### **2.1.3. Conflict**

Conflict is the heart of the plot. Conflict is the opposition between the characters that create great tension. A conflict happens when the characters have different beliefs, ideas, needs, values or goals. According to Meyer (1990: 45), conflict can be divided into two types, external conflict happens when the protagonist is against another individual, nature or society. In the other hand, internal conflict happens when the protagonist has some moral or psychological issue within themselves. Internal conflict (Man vs Self) happens when the character is opposes an idea within him or herself. On the other hand, external conflict happens when the character opposing the outer elements, such as Man vs. Man, Man vs. Nature, and Man vs. Society.

## **2.2. Extrinsic Elements**

### **2.2.1 The Indian Struggle**

One of the most important parts of American culture is its native tribes, the Indians. Indians have different types which depends on where they live. During the late 18<sup>th</sup> into early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Indians are forced to live in reservations while the government and the immigrants taking over their lands that they have lived for thousands of years. The life in reservations is even worse. According to Native America Aid, the reservation land is far from basic necessities that the tribes are having a hard time finding food, healthcare and jobs. They are not allowed to wear their Indian clothes anymore. Even the Missionaries tried to make them convert their religion into Christian and forget their spiritual beliefs.

*Source:* Retrieved May 4, 2019.

From [http://www.nativepartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=naa\\_res\\_main](http://www.nativepartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=naa_res_main)

### **2.2.2. Poverty and Crime**

Baratz and Grigsby (1971: 120) considered poverty as “a severe lack of physical and mental well-being, closely associated with inadequate economic resources and consumption.” Another expert views poverty as more than lack of material but also lack of social relationships, including gender relations, precarious economic status, lack of security and abuse by those in power; limitations on the ability to participate in society, and on the capabilities of the poor; and issues relating to collective disadvantage, including disempowering institutions, weak community organizations

and of information, education, skills and confidence. Meanwhile, etymologically, the word “crime” has more than one meanings, which are an action or omission that constitutes an offense and is punishable by law, and an action or activity considered to be evil, shameful, or wrong. (OED, 2019). An act that may cause social injury, although it is not illegal can be considered as a crime.

Robert Agnew states that the main idea of general strain theory is that in order to deal with the strain that become distressed, people may commit crime easily. One of the main principle of this theory is the motivator for crime which is emotion. The theory was reformulated to theorize the full kind of sources in society where strain possibly comes from, the theory also emphasizes on the aims for status point of view, expectations and class.

According to Agnew, “one of the distinguishing features of adolescents is that they lack power and are often compelled to remain in situation which they find aversive” (1985: 6). Agnew in his book *Foundation for a General Strain Theory of Crime and Delinquency* mentions 3 major sources of strain that most likely take part to subsequent criminal behavior:

1. Loss of positive stimuli (the death of family or friend)
2. Presentation of negative stimuli (physical and verbal abuses)
3. The inability to reach a desired goal.

Three major sources of strain above shows how a negative relationship with other individuals can trigger someone to commit crime. This negative relationship happens when others are not treating the individual as they would like to be treated.



## RESEARCH METHOD

### 3.1 Method of Data Collection

The writer uses library research in order to collect information needed to support the research. George states that library research “involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or personal/expert opinion on a research question; necessary component of every other research method at some point” (2008: 6). The writer gather information from both printed books and eBooks that are provided in library and internet.

### 3.2 Research Approach

The writer also uses sociological approach to analyze the problem that the main character has with poverty and crime. X.J Kennedy and Dana Gioia (2007) in their book *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*, discuss the condition of society in many perspectives, especially in cultural, economic and political perspectives inside a literature.. Sociological approach can be used to develop what the author sees within society, which is delivered in his/her own style. In the novel, the social conflict occurs when poverty turned Margaritte into a criminal. She should do something like other teenage girls do, but she cannot live her life the way she want.

## DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Intrinsic Elements

#### 4.1.1. Character & Characterization

The main character of this novel, Margaritte, is a mixed race Native American sixteen years-old girl. She is a mix of Apache, Chickasaw, Cherokee, and white. Her father is white. Margaritte has dark, straight, and thick hair, her hair is long enough to touch her stab wound that she got during the dealing. She also has dark eyes and brown skin, and she is quite tall. "... helping Mom to get the twins into their car seats and then settling in behind the wheel. I always had to pull the seat back, considering I was near a half a foot taller than her. She called me her baby giraffe." (Wurth, 2014: 146).

Her mother is a teacher and her father is a mechanic, but he drinks all the time and when he gets drunk he will abuse her and her mother. This situation makes her does not like being at home and begin to tell lies to her mother. She would sneak out of her house every night to go to the party with her cousin. Sometimes she tells her mother that she will study in her friend's house but the truth is that she is doing drug-dealing. She would not tell the truth about having a boyfriend and about her being pregnant. "Often I just climb out my window. But this is risky. And time sensitive. So

my other plan is to tell my mom that I'm studying with Julia. My mom loves Julia, because she makes straight As." (Wurth, 2014: 50)

Margaritte is 16 but she knows what she wants to do for her future. And she is working on it, really hard. She does not want to be like most of the girls in her town who struggle as teenage mother. She wants to leave the town so that she can live in better life, but that it is not easy. She is a strong and nice girl, despite all the struggles she has with her friends, family, school and work, she still helps her mother preparing dinner and babysitting her twin sisters, she also helps her friends in need.

In the middle of the novel, Margaritte surprises the readers by having sex with her boyfriend, Mike. She knows better than anyone about wearing protection during sex but things get worse when she finds out that she is pregnant because she trust Mike too much. "I knew it was my fault. Mike had told me that he hated condoms, that he was clean, that he had only slept with one girl before me, his girlfriend in California, and that they had never used a condom and never gotten pregnant." (Wurth, 2014: 77) The thing that she has tried to avoid most her in life has happened to her. She cannot afford to raise her baby and she is afraid to tell her parents. She is sure about doing an abortion even when her boyfriend wanted to keep the baby. But then she surprises the readers again by deciding to keep the baby. She even feels excited to meet her baby. She and Jake also decided to stop selling drugs. "Jake and me had talked about quitting selling after the baby was born, about how we still had a good chunk in the bank and that it was enough to retire" (Wurth, 2014: 170). This

shows that the author describes the main character through her speech, action, feelings, inner thought, and responsiveness to events.

#### **4.1.2. Setting**

The setting of place in this novel is in Idaho Spring, Colorado. It is a place that described as pathetic place with a lot of abandoned buildings and surrounded by the mountains. The abandoned building is often used as a place to do drug dealing and throw parties. The wall is full of random spray paint graffiti. The whole story occurs within two years but the exact time does not mentioned in the novel. While the setting of social environment described as a place full of futureless and hopeless kid because they gave up school to babysit their baby. Teenage pregnancy is not taboo anymore. People use alcohol and drugs as a way of dealing with stress. The living cost is cheap, but the society still struggle to afford a decent life that they have to sell drugs to save money. “There were so many of them in this inbred, bullshit, crazy ass town. For fuck’s sake, forty-five percent of the dumb broads in my grade had gotten pregnant by the end of the last school year.” (Wurth, 2014: 8)

#### **4.1.3. Conflict**

In the novel, Margaritte experiences a lot of struggles that help her grow into a more matured character. These struggles involve the opposition between herself and another individual or society, also the opposition that she has within herself. Margaritte struggles dealing with her abusive parents and she is having a hard time when she saw her bestfriend make out with her boyfriend at the party. When

Margaritte is dealing drug she suddenly get stabbed by her customer but her cousin cannot call 911 because the police will find out that they sell weed and that is a bigger problem.

“We were almost to the stairs when I heard a scuffling sound, like that of a giant, dying roach, and then a weight. And then a piercing pain in my side. Then the weight was lifted off me, and I turned around to see why there was pain. And that’s when I saw the blood rapidly expanding on my old, white sweatshirt, right over one of the faded blue unicorns that were scattered all over it.” (Wurth, 2014: 11)

Margaritte also experience the opposition within herself, when she finds out that she is pregnant and she has to face the problem alone, she realizes that her future plan is screwed. She thinks a lot about what she is going to do with the fetus, about her education, about how she want to live a peaceful life as a good girl but her situations do not let her.

## **4.2. Extrinsic Element**

### **4.2.1 The Indian Struggle**

Margaritte is a mixed race Native American. She lives in Idaho Springs along with other Indians. Indians have been struggling with poverty since long time ago. People in Idaho Springs are also struggling financially. It is hard to get decent job and earn decent money. Even after having sex education, some girls complained about condoms being too expensive that they cannot afford one. So when they know they are pregnant, most of the teenage mothers have to go on welfare to survive. Not only struggling financially, Indians also dealing with the discrimination from other race. When Margaritte drives to Denver with her friends she feels intimidated by white

people who are staring at them. The other time is when her friend is drunk and some white people will laugh at them cynically.

“We got him in between us and dragged him out. Thin, hip white people outside looking on, one of them rolling his eyes. I could see the guy mouth, “Drunk Indian,” and another one nodding, laughing. I looked over them with an angry-ass expression and they looked away.” (Wurth, 2014: 122)

## **4.2.2 The Social Impact of Poverty**

### **4.2.2.1 Crime**

#### **4.2.2.1.1 Loss of Positive Stimuli**

Margaritte and her cousin, Jake, have been doing illegal thing to save money. She knows that it is a crime, but she and her cousin do not have other options. There are times when Jake has to responsible for the crime they both did. Since they are still underage, the Officers send Jake to a special place. Jake has stayed in Juvie— jail for teenager—a couple of times. Jake is the only one that protects her and someone she can rely on, Margaritte considers Jake as the only one who does not hurt her. But then the police caught Jake again and he might be sent to the real jail because of his bad records. Margaritte also found out that her boyfriend, Mike has drug problem. That is when she begin to experience loss of positive stimuli. “Your cousin is going to jail this time. Real jail. What he did to that boy... it’s called aggravated assault. And his record is long.” (Wurth, 2014: 111)

#### **4.2.2.1.2 Presentation of Negative Stimuli**

Margaritte’s parents are not only fighting all the time, but they are also abusive. Her father would hit her and her mother when he is drunk, making her sisters cry in their

room. Margaritte is tired seeing her parents wrestling in front of her. Christine, Margaritte's mother, was actually her age when she had her and Margaritte does not want to live her mother's life. Her father is almost to kill the whole family several times. During a family trip, he once gets drunk and hits her mother while driving in a rainstorm that they end up in a ditch. Parents should protect their children instead of hurting them physically or verbally. Margaritte begins to smoke weed and drink alcohol that she got using fake ID. Margaritte's parents are the negative stimuli that triggers her to commit crime.

#### **4.2.2.1.3 The Inability to Reach Desired Goal**

Margaritte's goal is to move from Idaho Spring to a better place and spend the rest of her life peacefully. The only key to get out of the pathetic town is by going to college. But not everyone can afford sending their kids to college, some people are not smart enough to go to college, and others can't go because of the baby. "I know. Why do you think me and Jake starting selling? There's no way out, unless you're smart and go to college, or find a way to make money. And we found a way." (Wurth, 2014: 91). From the quotation, Margaritte has no other choice but to earn a lot of money since she is not quite doing a good job in school that college is not her thing so she starts selling drugs to save money. Things get worse when she found out that she is pregnant. Now that her nightmare come true, she do not know what to do about her school, her future, how can she raise the baby properly and she knew that her parents will not like it if they know that she is pregnant. She will never be able to go to

college with the baby inside her womb and she might use the money that she saved for her baby. These situations make her goals even harder to reach.

#### **4.2.2.2 Lack of Education**

Most of the teenagers in Idaho Spring do not go to college, instead they go to army, work in stores, restaurants or some career in the dental assistantship. Margaritte hates going to school. When she is at school, she reads Stephen King's book under her desk instead of paying attention to her teacher. Her grades are bad but her cousin's is worse. She will sneak out of her house to attend parties instead of doing her homework. She also uses 'doing homework with her friend' as an excuse to get permission from her mother to go outside.

"I'd been trying to do my homework, too. I was just bad at it. I'd go home from school, and I was just so tired, and then Mom would need help with dinner and the twins, and you never know what kind of mood Dad was gonna be in, which was draining. ... So most times I rushed through it, if I even did it at all." (Wurth, 2014: 49)

From the quotation above, it is indicated that she is having a hard time doing her homework at home because of her parents. The circumstances in her house does not allow her to finish her homework peacefully.

#### **4.2.2.3 Teenage Pregnancy**

Most of the girls in Idaho Spring struggles with teenage pregnancy. Margaritte has seen girls around her age holding a baby and she does not see a single happiness in their face. She does not want to live her mother's life, having baby at an early age and married to a man who is drunk all the time. She also saw some young mothers who

are trying to survive relying on the money and food from the government. Now that she has a baby inside her, she cannot help but think about those bad situations that might happen to her as well.

“My stomach turned. This was my nightmare. I saw those women at the grocery store. Fat, tired, their children reaching up at them, yelling. The women buying the cheap, shitty food the government allotted them. Either commodity or food stamp. I had spent my whole life knowing that I didn’t want that. No matter what.” (Wurth, 2014: 93)

When Margaritte has found out when she has his baby inside her, her boyfriend suddenly disappear and she has to face this problem alone. Mike comes from a wealthy family and he is spoiled by his parents. Mike lies to Margaritte about the reason why his family moves to Idaho Springs. He lies that he has drug problem. Margaritte decides to make an appointment to do an abortion. It was hard enough dealing with her father who got drunk and hold the whole family at gunpoint. He is almost kill the whole family again. While waiting for the appointment coming up, Margaritte keeps drinking alcohol and smoking weed, thinking that she will get rid of the fetus anyway.

At the end of the story, she decides to keep the baby even when her parents are against it. She moves in to Megan’s house and raise the baby there. Her mother came occasionally. Few months later she receives a letter from Mike, saying that he is staying at rehabilitation for a while. He tells her that he wants to stop consuming Cocaine and asks her to move to San Francisco with him when he gets out.

Margaritte lives in a condition in which she is lack of money, lack of social relationships, precarious economic status, lack of security and abuse by those in power; limitations on the capabilities of the poor; and issues relating to collective disadvantage, including disempowering institutions, weak community organizations and of information, education, skills and confidence. Her parents do not give all the love that she need, instead they give excessive discipline that puts Margaritte in a lot of pressure. Poverty has turned her into a criminal. If she was born from a wealthy family and lives in a safe and nice neighborhood, she would not have to sell drugs to earn money. She would stay in school, gets good grades and proper sex education so she won't end up getting pregnant when she is mentally not ready for it. Her parents will fight less, they will probably show more affection to each other and their kids.

## CONCLUSION

Margaritte as the main character of the *Crazy Horse's Girlfriend* has the most important role for the entirety of the story. She comes up with conflicts that show her misery, her hardship and how strong she was dealing with all of her problems. At first she is so stubborn and full of anxiety but at the end she changes into more matured character.

Her major problem is poverty. She lives in a town with hopeless society. She lives in a situation that triggers her to commit crime. Her cousin, the only one she can trust and lean on, leaves her alone a couple of times because he has to stay in Juvie. Her abusive parents who hurt her physically and mentally makes her never experience what peace feels like. Dangerous and futureless neighborhood she is living in makes her want to leave the town as soon as possible. She become a drug dealer and even want to kill her baby. Fortunately, she learns about her mistakes and finally can escape from her abusive parents, stop selling drugs and live a peaceful life with her baby.

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