

**UNPACKING WHITE SAVIORISM IN STOCKETT'S *THE HELP*: A
SOCIOLOGY OF LITERATURE APPROACH**

Written by:

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THESIS

*Submitted to the Faculty of Cultural Sciences Hasanuddin University in Partial
Fulfilment of Requirements to Obtain Sarjana Degree in English Literature
Study Program*

**ENGLISH LITERATURE STUDY PROGRAM
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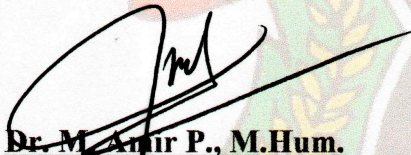
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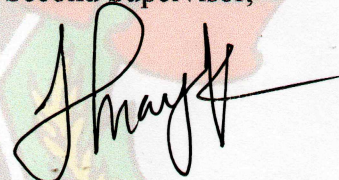
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SOCIOLOGY OF LITERATURE APPROACH**

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and is declared to have fulfilled the requirements.

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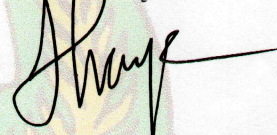
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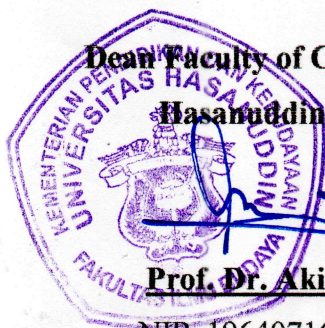
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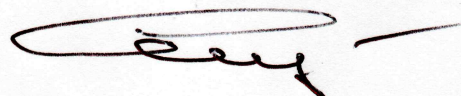


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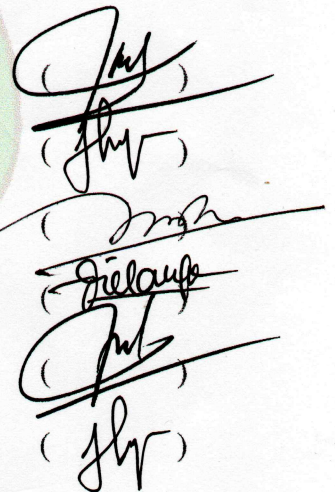
**UNPACKING WHITE SAVIORISM IN STOCKETT'S *THE HELP*: A
SOCIOLOGY OF LITERATURE APPROACH**

Submitted in fulfillment one of the requirements of undergraduate thesis examination to obtain Sarjana Sastra (S.S.) Degree at the English Department, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Hasanuddin University.

Makassar, 3 May 2021

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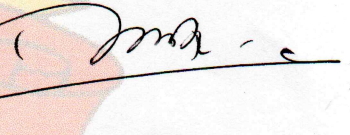
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The thesis of **SHINTA SABRINA KRISSANTI** (Student Number: **F041171315**) entitled, "**UNPACKING WHITE SAVIORISM IN STOCKETT'S *THE HELP: A SOCIOLOGY OF LITERATURE APPROACH***" has been revised as advised during the examination on 3 May 2021 and is approved by the Board of Undergraduate Thesis Examiners:

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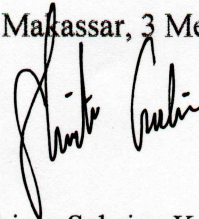
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Firstly, the writer expressed gratitude to Allah SWT for His blessings that the writer can finally finished her thesis. This success, however, would not have been possible without the support, direction, counsel, assistance, and motivation of individuals in the writer's life. Therefore, the writer would like to thank:

1. The writer's family members: mother, father, sisters and brother for their prayers and motivation. Thank you for always believing in the writer's dreams.
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3. The writer's dearest and close friends. Thank you for the unforgettable memories, endless laughter and happiness that they shared with the writer.
4. Lastly, the writer would also like to acknowledge her own self for not giving up and for achieving her goals.

Finally, the writer understands that this thesis is far from perfect and will benefit from multiple improvements; thus, all recommendations and critiques for enhancement would be gratefully accepted. The writer also hopes that this thesis will be of interest to the readers.

Makassar, 3 Mei 2021



Shinta Sabrina Krissanti

ABSTRAK

SHINTA SABRINA KRISSANTI. “*Unpacking White Saviorism in Stockett’s The Help: A Sociological Approach*” dibimbing oleh **M. Amir P. and Andi Inayah Soraya**

Skripsi ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi indikasi white saviorism pada dua karakter dalam novel *The Help*. Penelitian ini juga bertujuan untuk menganalisis refleksi *white saviorism* pada penulis novel tersebut, Kathryn Stockett.

Skripsi ini merupakan penelitian tentang indikasi white saviorism pada dua tokoh dalam novel *The Help* beserta pengarangnya, Kathryn Stockett dengan menggunakan pendekatan sosiologi sesuai dengan teori Alan Swingewood yaitu sastra sebagai dokumentasi sosial dan penggambaran seorang penulis melalui karya sastra mereka. Metode yang digunakan dalam skripsi ini adalah metode kualitatif deskriptif. Objek dan sumber datanya dalam penelitian ini adalah novel *The Help* karya Kathryn Stockett.

Penulis mempresentasikan indikasi white saviorism pada dua karakter terpilih yaitu Hilly Holbrook dan Eugenia “Skeeter” Phelan serta refleksi *white saviorism* pada penulisnya, Kathryn Stockett. Skripsi ini menemukan bahwa karakter Hilly Holbrook menunjukkan indikasi *white saviorism* melalui tindakan dan perilakunya, dia percaya bahwa orang Afro-Amerika harus memiliki kamar mandi sendiri untuk menghindari penyakit menyebar, selain itu Hilly juga mendirikan yayasan amal untuk anak-anak Afrika yang kelaparan dan miskin dengan tujuan untuk menonjolkan kemurahan hatinya. Kemudian, karakter Eugenia “Skeeter” Phelan juga menunjukkan indikasi *white saviorism* dengan memanfaatkan cerita para pelayan Afro-Amerika untuk mengembangkan karirnya didalam jurnalisme. Terakhir, penulis novel tersebut menerapkan narasi *white savior* terhadap karya sastranya dan dia juga diduga menggunakan identitas serta kisah hidup seorang perempuan Afro-Amerika pada novelnya tanpa izin.

ABSTRACT

SHINTA SABRINA KRISSANTI. “*Unpacking White Saviorism in Stockett’s The Help: A Sociological Approach*” supervised by **M. Amir P.** and **Andi Inayah Soraya.**

The aim of this thesis is to identify the indication of white saviorism in two characters on the novel *The Help*. This study also aims to analyze the reflection of white saviorism in the author of the novel, Kathryn Stockett.

This thesis is a research about the indication of white saviorism of two characters in the novel *The Help* as well as its’ author, Kathryn Stockett by using a sociological approach in accordance with the theories of Alan Swingewood based on literature as a social documentation and the portrayal of an author through their literary work. The method in this thesis is descriptive qualitative method. The object and its data source of this research is *The Help* novel by Kathryn Stockett.

The writer presented the indication of white saviorism in two selected characters, Hilly Holbrook and Eugenia “Skeeter” Phelan as well as the reflection of white saviorism in the author, Kathryn Stockett. The thesis finds that the character Hilly Holbrook shows the indication of white saviorism through her action and behavior, she believed that African Americans should have their own bathrooms to avoid illness to spread, additionally Hilly also conducts a charity for starving and poor African children in order to highlight her generosity. Moreover, the character Eugenia “Skeeter” Phelan also showed the indication of white saviorism by using the stories of African American maids for her career development in journalism. Furthermore, the author of the novel applied white savior narrative through her literary work and allegedly used an Afro-American woman’s identity and life stories for her novel without any permission.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of background, identification of problem, scope of problem, research questions, objective of problems, significance of study, as well as sequence of writing.

A. Background

The abolition of slavery in United States of America didn't erase the discrimination, prejudice, violence, and oppression against African Americans. Even though African Americans were freed from forced labor, whippings, and sexual assault, they had to go straight to another form of brutality. Poverty, the denial of education, employment, and medical care, as well as inequality in justice system were products of racial segregation designed to make African Americans inferior in society. These racial discrimination practices exist to achieve and maintain certain power for a specific group. Racism is a power possessed by one race that stems from sociopolitical superiority and has resulted in systemic discrimination. As such, in order to be a racist, one must be a member of the dominated group, which in America generally means white people.

In the present, racism and oppression against African Americans in America still persists and will continue to exist for a long time, until white Americans acknowledge their privileges and fight against the white supremacist mentality that created these oppressions and discriminations. McIntosh (1989:10) pointed out that white supremacist was born because white people are encouraged to think of their

lives as morally neutral, normal, ordinary, and thus the ideal. Ultimately, when they tried to help BIPOC (black, indigenous, people of color), it is seen as a work that make others seems more like white people. White privilege, however, is essentially a tendency to have the safest and most convenient atmosphere for themselves and their communities, which have built up systemic racial inequality in an increasingly racialized society. Although white privilege persists in any white-colored human, white supremacy is more of a perception in which white people feel they have more influence and are superior than others. As a result, while white privilege and white supremacy are distinct concepts, they are interconnected by racial dynamics that result in social injustice.

Furthermore, white saviorism also known as *white savior industrial complex* was a term that refers to white people who try to help others but do so in a selfish manner. White saviorism, in general, is another form of white supremacy, as white people liked to believe their race was superior. As such, white involvement is becoming prevalent in the problems of unfortunate communities, in which white people are seeking to help said communities but in a self-serving manner. Throughout history, white saviorism has manifested itself in a variety of forms (books, movies, voluntarism work, etc.)

Kathryn Stockett is an American writer, best known for her fiction novel *The Help*. Stockett was born on 1969 in Jackson, Mississippi. She graduated with a degree in English and creative writing from University of Alabama. After graduating, Stockett then moved to New York to begin her career as professional writer. Furthermore, Stockett worked for a publishing company before publishing

her first literary work. In her afterword, Stockett mentioned her family's maid named Demetrie that had inspired her to write *The Help*.

The Help (2009) is a fiction novel centered around three main characters. Two African American maids, Aibileen Clark and Minny Jackson, employed in white households and a young white woman and a twenty-two-year-old Eugenia "Skeeter" Phelan. The novel is set in racially segregated Jackson, Mississippi in the early 1960s. Skeeter or *Miss Skeeter* as Aibileen and Minny called her, is a typical white girl in the 60s who just finished her education in college and expected to go back home and find a suited husband. However, she wanted different things for herself, instead of following the path of her peers—getting married and having children—she desired a job, to be a professional journalist. After her first attempt of being a journalist were turned down by a literary publisher agent, Skeeter found a job of weekly writing about cleaning advice column in a local newspaper. With the help of Aibileen, Skeeter who has no experience in cleaning whatsoever, successfully fulfilled her responsibility each week.

Eventually, Skeeter realized another opportunity to write another book is right in front of her eyes, so she decided to write about the life of African American maids working in white household, of course with the help of Aibileen once again. Other character named Hilly Holbrook, which is one of Skeeter's close friends and the head of the Junior League, is the antagonist of the novel. She arranged an auction for her group's charity, "The Poor Starving Children of Africa". Yet, Mrs. Holbrook fabricated "illness" that African Americans carried and initiated a

separated bathroom for *the help* (the maids) for every house in white neighborhood as to prevent those “illnesses” to spread.

On the other hand, the novel itself had received a lot of negative reviews. Since its’ release, a number of people read it to enhance their comprehension of racial history in the United States. In addition, Stockett was also accused of mocking African American’s lives by stereotyping Afro-American maids. One of those resulted in a lawsuit brought by her own brother's maid, Ablene Cooper, alleging that one of the characters is based on Cooper’s life story that Stockett used against her will. The litigation says that the fictitious character is insulting to Cooper, referencing in particular lines in which *Aibileen* contrasts her own black skin tone to a cockroach.

Racism is still a major problem in the United States of America. It is profoundly crucial to acknowledge and raise awareness of the social injustices against African Americans that still exist in this modern world. White saviorism, itself, is another albeit subtle form of racism. To dismantle and abolish racial discrimination completely, however, people need to understand and recognize any form of racial prejudice. *The Help* offered many topics to discuss and analyze, but white saviorism that are affected by racial history is very notable and crucial to amplify. Furthermore, due to a lack of knowledge, researches on white saviorism is also still limited. This thesis also applied sociology of literature approach accordance to Swingewood’s theory in which literature is used as social documentation as well as the author’s reflection on their literary works. Based on the explanation given above, to increase comprehension regarding white saviorism,

the writer has formulated this undergraduate thesis entitled “Unpacking White Saviorism in Stockett’s *The Help*: A Sociology of Literature Approach.”

B. Identification of Problem

The Help represents the social condition in Southern America on Civil Rights Era, one of the most important periods in America’s history. Upon reading *The Help*, the writer become more conscious about issues regarding racism and racial segregation, in addition the writer listed some problems below:

1. There was a major issue regarding gender stereotypes between men and women in the 1960s.
2. There was an overriding issue of social rank and class among rich white women in Southern America in the 1960s.
3. There was a big problem with the white saviorism as portrayed by the novel’s characters and author.

C. Scope of Problems

As already mentioned, there are various problems that can be analyze in this novel. However, this thesis does not concentrate on the 1st and 2nd problems; rather, it focuses on the 3rd problem, which is discussing the big problem with white saviorism as portrayed by the novel’s characters and author.

D. Research Questions

1. What are the indications of white saviorism in Hilly Holbrook and Eugenia “Skeeter” Phelan characters of *The Help*?
2. How is the white saviorism in *The Help* reflected in the author, Kathryn Stockett?

E. Objective of Problems

1. Identifying the indication of white saviorism in Hilly Holbrook and Eugenia “Skeeter” Phelan characters as seen in *The Help*.
2. Analyzing the reflection of white saviorism to the author, Kathryn Stockett.

F. Significance of Study

The results expected from this thesis are as follows:

1. Theoretical

This thesis is intended to make a contribution to literary works related to racism, social injustice, Jim Crow era, white savior complex and Kathryn Stockett’s *The Help*.

2. Practical

The practical benefits of this thesis are divided into two parts, general benefit and academic benefit. The general benefit is to enhance the understanding and education on racism, oppression, and the injustice that African American community experiences. The academic benefit is to

fulfill the requirement in completing my Sarjana Degree in English Department, Faculty of Cultural Sciences in Hasanuddin University.

G. Sequence of Writing

In writing the thesis, the writer divides it into five chapters. Chapter one consists of background of the study, identification of problem, scope of problems, research questions, significance of study, and sequence of writing. Chapter two contains of previous studies, sociology of literature, white saviorism, the racial history of United States, and the biography of the author. Next, chapter three explains methodological design, method of collecting data, method of analyzing data and procedure of analyzing data. Chapter four contains the discussion of findings and analysis. And the last, chapter five is where the writer concludes all of the analysis and results into one short summary. This chapter also contain suggestion from the writer.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter consists of previous studies, sociology of literature, white saviorism, the history of racial injustices, and biography of Kathryn Stockett.

A. Previous Studies

There are some previous studies which have been done regarding *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett as well as white saviorism. To increase the quality of this thesis, the writer looked for various theses and journals that are related.

Azizmohammadi in 2016 entitled “A Study of Kathryn Stockett’s *The Help* from Patricia Hill Collins’ View: A Black Feminist Study”, pointed out the different ideology and stereotypes as reflected in novel *The Help*. This academic journal used black feminist theory to encapsulate the results. Azizmohammadi concluded that stereotypes were like infectious diseases that could shape people's minds, and could be transmitted from generation to generation. The researcher further explained that the children of white people who were exposed to racial injustices from the very beginning, will grow up thinking it is the norm and thus, become racist as well. Moreover, the research also included the experiences of African Americans as reflected in the novel. Where they had already been disadvantaged by the economic situation in which they had to do much of the labor and get the least salary.

A thesis called “White Savior Hegemony Depicted in *The Blind Side* Movie” by Fikzia in 2019 applied sociological approach. The object of this thesis is a movie based on the biography of a famous African American football player that is

adopted by a white family. This thesis analyzed the savior narrative from white characters which became hegemony as reflected in the movie. The research resulted that the movie clearly portrays the issue of white saviorism. It can be identified in some characters in the movie, generally portrayed by Tuohy family. Furthermore, the hegemony of white saviorism is reflected by African American characters, in which they accepted the concept of white savior. The African American characters in the movie believed that white people have the means to rescue and support them. On the movie, as well, the white characters depicted as intelligent and rich people who lived in suburban neighborhood, while the African American characters lived in poverty and unfortune environment.

Iban, Sili, and Asanti in 2019 entitled “Anti-Racism: A Study of The Main Characters in *The Help* (2009) Novel by Kathryn Stockett”, proved the anti-racism attitude that the main characters of the novel possess. By using two theories, Gordon Allport’s theory on prejudice and discrimination, and the second is social psychology theory, the result of this qualitative research showed the main characters’ anti-racism attitudes, such as: verbal antagonism, avoidance and segregation. The element that affects the anti-racism mindset of Skeeter is the identity factor in social psychology. While the racial types that are contrary to Aibileen's anti-racism attitude are verbal antagonism, avoidance and segregation category. Then the aspect that affects Aibileen's anti-racist stance is her motive. Meanwhile the categories of bigotry that Minny's anti-racist stance rejects are verbal antagonism and avoidance. The element that affects Minny's anti-racist stance is her personal trait.

“Resistance to marginalization in America as reflected in Kathryn Stockett’s *The Help*” by Normalisa and Rosyidi in 2020. Using qualitative as the method, this research applied Gramsci’s hegemony theory to examine resistance to the marginalization that is caused by racial discrimination and the factors that underline the resistance. By portraying the relationship between white people and African Americans, which is a relationship between the ruling class and the ruled class, this research concludes that marginalization can be overcome either practically or textually. Practically, resistance to systemic racism could be achieved by teaching people not to discriminate by colors, or by promoting kindness to each other. Resistance may also be exercised by pursuing higher education as a way of developing the standard of people and therefore, of society. In addition, resistance may be rendered by creating literary works or arts that expose the injustice of an inferior group that is induced by abomination.

As shown above, the previous studies discussed various topics regarding *The Help* and white saviorism, which have the same similarity with this thesis. The difference, however, is in the research on white saviorism in *The Help*, which has never been conducted before. Furthermore, this thesis brought enhancement to our perception of racism and injustice against African Americans in modern culture and how to address it as a community. Considering the previous studies, the writer argued that this thesis is crucial to be conducted as a further step to achieving the main goal, which is to abolish racial discrimination.

B. Sociology of Literature

Literature is the art of conveying one's mind and thoughts into written form. According to David in Aryanika (2016:2), "*Literature is an art form, like painting, sculpture, music, drama, and the dance. Literature is distinguished from other arts form by the medium in which it works; language.*" Writers from all over the world express their feelings or what they faced and seen in their lives and create literary works with the addition elements of imagination. Consequently, literature cannot be distinguished from the actual life. On the other hand, sociological condition in a certain period of time also contributed to the process of creating literary works. Sociology is an objective study field on human and society. As Swingewood (1972:11) pointed out, "*sociology is essentially the scientific, objective study of man in society, the study of social institution and the social process.*" Literature, like sociology, is mostly concerned with human social existence, adaptation, and desire to change it. Therefore, literary works can be interpreted as an attempt to create the social world of a one's relationship and place within their family and other social institutions, as well as the inconsistencies and conflicts that arise within individuals and social classes.

Lowenthal proposed, as written by Swingewood (1972:16) that the key target of sociology of literature is to explore the substance of literary works and to articulate many facets of thought and feeling on various subjects such as social status, job, love, religion, nature and art. Thus, sociology of literature is a study that examines literature as a production of sociological condition, and contrariwise, literature's impacts on social life. That is to say, literature and sociology have

mutual purpose in understanding how social life works. Literature is the tool to describe and express humans' feelings and thoughts regarding the social structures, whereas sociology is an objective study of society.

Moreover, Wellek and Warren (1956:95-96) divided sociology of literature into three classifications: (1) The author's social background and role within the society. All literary authors are part of society, which allows them the right to be included as an element that can be analyzed. In addition, the political and social views, the social affiliation, the mindset and the philosophy that each author has, play an enormous part in their work; (2) the literary work itself, such as its social substances, its indications and the goals that it would pursue. As a social document, literature have the power to provide the outlines of social history; and lastly (3) the impacts and influence that the literary works on the reader and society. For instance, if a novel has effectively portrayed society and as such, said literary work is still relevant to the social environment of this period of time and important to be studied. Literature is a form of art, therefore, has the purpose not only to replicate life, but also to mold it.

On the other hand, Alan Swingewood (1972:13-21) also propose three perspective on his own theory of sociological approach in literature, as follows:

1. Literature as an aspect of social historical documentation of a certain period of time. This perspective is called as the mirror image approach, it perceived as a clear reflection of various facets of a certain society's social structure and class conflict.

2. Analysis that demonstrates how an author is portrayed by their own literary works. The beliefs, values, and social circumstances of an author played a major role in the creation of their literary works. As such, Swingewood included literature as a portrayal of the author as one of the perspectives.
3. Applicable to the people's paradigm of literary work. This perspective is affected by the readers, as well as how the literary work is viewed by society.

This thesis applied Alan Swingewood's 1st and 2nd perspectives to answer both of the statement of problems mentioned in Chapter 1.

C. White Saviorism

The word white saviorism, also known as the *white savior industrial complex*, refers to white people who use their resources to attempt to help BIPOC (black, indigenous, people of color) in a self-serving manner. According to Reed (2018:5), the notion of white saviorism is “*the idea that people who benefit from white privilege are wanting to help those in underserved communities for their own benefit more than that of the communities.*” It is a perception that those who profit from white privilege are seeking to help others, but they also have a different motive for their own advantage, rather than the benefit of underserved populations. Shringarpure (2015:7) further explained that the white saviorism is a concept that is related to colonial history through which Europeans descended try to “civilize” the African continent. Through most of history, white saviorism has presented itself in several different ways, including literature, movies, humanitarian aid, service

work, missionary voluntaries, and etc. Teju Cole (2012:17), an American-Nigerian author classified white saviorism as a “*we have to save them because they can’t save themselves*” mentality and in a way, it has done more damages than good. It is argued that the unfortunate and under developing population are robbed from the opportunity to save themselves. Thus, according to Anderson (2013:39) it resulted in a lack of independence to steer their own lives in a way that is not exclusive to self-respect.

A great number of white people that come to Africa to do so-called charities are actually have different agendas. Cole (2012:14) claimed that they used Africa as a setting for white dreams of liberation and heroism. Furthermore, Freire (2005:44) explained, that the oppressors—who, by virtue of their dominance—oppress, exploit, and rape others, can not find in their power to redeem themselves or the oppressed. Therefore, any attempt to "soften" the oppressors’ power almost always expresses itself in the form of false kindness, in deference to the weakness of the oppressed. In this case, white people had inherited the power and dominance from their ancestors, which were the oppressors, and said white people had never intended to liberate themselves. Instead, they—still to this day—wanted to somehow “save” the unfortunates to make themselves feel better.

Moreover, Cooney-Petro (2019:7-12) classified white saviorism in three components, as listed below:

1. White saviorism is a mythical genre and narrative that appears often in novels, movies, and stories. The myth of the white saviorism is the belief that seeks affirmation of privileges rather than finding justice.

Interestingly, the myth also occurs in news and the media. The narratives that surface increasingly portray white saviorism as a message of optimism, transformation, and white liberation embedded in a vision of a "post-racial" present. For example, a plot in which a young, white character "saves" the lives of BIPOC protagonists are often guided by the myth of white saviorism. Cooney-Petro further stated that the first component of white saviorism is so normalized in America that it goes uncriticized and consequently, it continues to get reinvented and recreated. The aftermath is that the people who engross in the myth of white saviorism often adhere to a mentality that they should attempt to help the unfortunates as they feel empowered and entitled to do so.

2. White saviorism is a byproduct of white supremacy. However, the ideology behind white saviorism disputes it, and rather pledging itself to ignorance as well as colorblind perspective in which it perceives that race inequality will cease to exist if people stop referring to race. But in doing so, white saviorism erases the history of racial discrimination and economic hardships endured by BIPOC.
3. The final component is how white saviorism manifest itself in one's behavior. Cooney-Petro wrote that an individualistic kindness under the illusion that they have the power to relieve widespread suffering of the unfortunates caused the systemic oppression continues to exist. In addition, the assumption that individuals should help because of their exemplary status, behavior, or skills is often paternalistic as well as

patronizing, and has only a short-term effect. Additionally, people who volunteered for humanitarian work expressed a desire to serve people in order to empower themselves, or in other words, they took advantage of the opportunity for selfish reasons. Hytten in Cooney-Petro (2019:11) argues that instead of attempting to support the unfortunate in a self-serving way that only lasted for a brief period of time, individuals in positions of wealth and authority should listen to, cooperate for, and learn from the less fortunate.

The writer applied Cooney-Petro's classification of white saviorism in order to support Swingewood's theory to describe the indication of white saviorism in the Hilly Holbrook and Eugenia "Skeeter" Phelan characters as well as its reflection to the author of *The Help*, Kathryn Stockett. Furthermore, to validate the white saviorism in the novel, the writer also has included the racial historical context for a more comprehensive understanding.

D. The History of Racial Injustices in United States

The Help took place in 1960s, when the Civil Rights movement was still raging. It was a revolutionary period for African Americans as they marched for equal rights and to bring an end to discriminatory treatment, as quoted from Muldoon (2015:22), "*Slavery may have ended decades before. But African Americans in the South were not free.*" In addition, Hasday (2007:35) mentioned that majority of white citizens in Southern America viewed African Americans as lesser beings and as such, it was implanted in the way white people treated Afro-

Americans. Having a darker skin and living in the South, there were obloquies that they had to endure as part of everyday life, because unfortunately, racial discrimination went beyond public-school segregation.

African American women have been the most affected by these injustices as most of them worked as maids in white households. A former housekeeper for white family and a civil right activist, Anne Moody, had testified in *Metress* (2002) as cited by Hasday (2007:35), “*Before Emmett Till’s murder, I had known the fear of hunger, hell, and the Devil. But now there was a new fear known to me—the fear of being killed just because I was black.*” Although problematic, *The Help* surely bring lights to these injustices. Subsequently, it is very important to highlight the historical context that is reflected in the novel, such as racial segregation and the suffering of African American domestic workers in white households.

1. Racial segregation: Jim Crow laws

The period that began as Reconstruction ended in 1877 known as Jim Crow Era, represents the beginning of segregation in United States. According to Muldoon (2015:11), a group of white people called The Redeemers wanted to return to the days where African Americans had no basic rights. The group decided to strip away the independence and freedom that Afro-American people had achieved under the new legislation and, as such, started to take over the governance of the Southern State. They created laws to distinguish white and African American people. They also increased taxes and reduced the prices of cotton, where most African Americans at the time gained their income. Furthermore, those who had obtained land have lost

it. In addition, Muldoon (2015:11) also wrote that The Redeemers made it difficult for African Americans to vote. Extrajudicial killing against Afro-Americans were also at its' peak during this period and "*more than 3,500 African Americans were lynched by white mobs*" Muldoon (2015:26).

Etymologically, the phrase "Jim Crow" referred to a white comedian that used a black face to mock Afro-American people in 1840s. As mentioned by Valk (2010:12), a famous white performer popularized a song and dance routine, "Jump Jim Crow" to insult the inferiority and restriction which African American endured in the 1940s. Valk (2010:9) also noted that Jim Crow was used as a sign of white supremacy, with the intention of excluding Afro-Americans altogether, rather than putting them in a subordinate role. Sadly, Afro-American citizens in America couldn't do anything to prevent them since it was made legal as law by white Southern Democratic government and later known as Jim Crow laws.

Jim Crow laws were implemented in 1896 in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. As Hasday (2007:12) mentioned, a decision which effectively validate a "separate but equal" doctrine was handed down by U.S. Supreme Court in 1896, and it was essentially a legal form of segregation. It guaranteed an "equal" protection under the law for every person in United States, despite their skin colors. The doctrine was confirmed in *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, after an African American man named Humor Plessy deliberately boarded a train and took a seat in "whites only" rail car. Plessy was arrested and brought his case to court, arguing that the state Louisiana had violated the 13th and 14th

amendments. However, he lost and then took his case to U.S. Supreme Court. According to Hasday (2007:12-13), the court, once again, dismissed his arguments and the judge at the time wrote that the Constitution of United States was “color blind” and didn’t tolerate classes among its’ citizens. The ideology of "separate but equal" extended not only to public transportation, but also to public schools, public places, bathrooms, restaurants and even drinking fountains. In addition, Bartlett (2008:24) stated that the laws and legal structures placed many African American men on chain gains, where they were leased to hard labor for small amount of wage, essentially returning the worst slave conditions under state supervision.

The purpose of Jim Crow laws was to divide white people and Afro-American people in the South during the Jim Crow Period, and to show that white people were greater than any “colored” people. According to Valk and Brown (2010:8), Jim Crow laws “*operated effectively to keep most African American southerners aware of “their place,” even if they dared to challenge it.*” Moreover, the public facilities that the government provided for African Americans were in a such bad condition. For example, as noted by Muldoon (2015:16) the rail cars that were reserved for African American people were used to transport animals as well.

Furthermore, racist attitudes were also ingrained into children's minds, and as it is, the perception of Afro-American people as inferior individuals led into a reality and thus became a normal way of thinking. African American children were most harmed because they thought themselves were

subordinate to society's rules. Muldoon (2015:24) stated that even if their parents were trying to make them believe differently, they had to obey the Jim Crow laws for their own protection.

2. African-American Domestic Workers

Domestic worker is a term used to refer to someone who performs different servant duties in a household belonging to someone else. According to Armstrong (2012:7), domestic work is undervalued and poorly supervised, and it remains overworked, underpaid and unprotected for many domestic staff.

During Jim Crow Era in the South, white women did not have a place in society, and the social position centered on the social status of their husbands. However, it was not the case for African American women as their families were subjected to poverty and as such, they had to work to support their families. African American women had little or no options about their source of income. It was either being a maid in a white house or work in a plantation to collect cotton. Many African American women chose to work as maids and as noted by Armstrong (2012:20) “*by the 1960s, nearly ninety percent of black women in the South worked as domestic workers.*”

For most white women, the employment of an African American maid was also a status symbol, not just for sustaining their households. Even middle-class white families hired at least one maid to sustain a sort of recognition in a form of social structure, as Valk (2010:4) mentioned white

women with little wealth employed Afro-American women as housemaids, forming a racial hierarchy by women's labor and perpetuating a kind of white privilege. The condition in which the maids worked were inhumane and they received a very small amount of wage. Often, they were also sexually harassed by their white male employers. As stated by Thompson in Armstrong (2012:2), African American women who worked as domestic workers were seen as a childlike creature, uneducated, and poor.

E. The Biography of Kathryn Stockett

Stockett was born on 1969 in Jackson, Mississippi, United States. She was born and raised during racial segregation period in Southern America. During her childhood, her family employed an African American woman as a family maid called Demetrie McLorn. In an article, Stockett (2009:3) described McLorn as a parent figure who would stay with her and her siblings as their parents divorced and would leave them a lot. Fast forward, McLorn died when she was 16 years old. Stockett (2009:451) expressed regret to not having a chance to ask her nanny “*what it felt like to be black in Mississippi and working for her family.*”

In her afterword, Stockett outlines her reasons for writing a novel. Her nanny, McLorn, was the main cause. Thinking back on their time together, today, as an adult, she has a greater sense of the complexities of the situation in the South at the time. Stockett added McLorn was lucky to be employed in Stockett household as it was a secure job in a nice house belonged to white Christian people. Moreover, as McLorn had no children of her own, Stockett (2009:448) wrote that her and her

siblings filled the void in McLorn's life. Furthermore, Stockett attended University of Alabama and after she graduated with a degree in English and creative writing, she moved to New York. She worked in magazine publishing company before publishing her first novel, *The Help*.

F. Intrinsic Elements of *The Help*

The intrinsic elements are the elements found in a literary work with the intention of establishing the story. In general, the intrinsic elements of literary works are as follows:

1. Characters

a. Eugenia "Skeeter" Phelan

Skeeter is one of the main characters that narrated the novel. She was introduced as tall, rich, white young woman that just graduated from University of Mississippi. Skeeter lives in her family's cotton plantation in Jackson and was very close with her family's maid, Constantine Bates. Since graduating from college and went back to Jackson, she had been asked about her plan for settling down and have family by her mother and close friends. But to no avail, Skeeter always avoid the questions. She expresses that she desired to have a real career as professional journalist and dreams that "*one day I would write something that people would actually read*" (Stockett, 2009:59). Later in the novel, Skeeter recruits Aibileen and Minny to write a novel about the experiences of African American maids in Jackson, Mississippi. She is influenced to write about this subject by her

intimate friendship with her family's maid Constantine, who mysteriously vanished shortly before Skeeter returned from college.

b. Aibileen Clark

Aibileen is also one of the three main characters who narrated the novel. She works for Elizabeth Leefolt and her job includes taking care of a toddler called Mae Mobley Leefolt, which Aibileen adored, despite knowing that their intimate friendship may be harmful to all of them. Aibileen is characterized as a gracious and gentle African American woman who earns her living by caring for white families' children.

c. Minny Jackson

The other main character that narrated the novel is Minny Jackson. Minny is an African American woman who, like Aibileen, employed as a maid in white people household. In the beginning of the novel, Minny worked for Miss Walter, Hilly Holbrook's mother. But later, she was fired for allegedly "stole" Miss Walter's silvers. It was later discovered that the actual reason for Minny's discharge is because Hilly wanted to hire Minny to be her maid, since Minny is famous for her cooking.

d. Hilly Holbrook

The character of Hilly Holbrook is described as the novel's antagonist character. She is a wealthy white woman from Jackson, Mississippi. Hilly is also the president of the *Jackson Junior League*, a group of high-society white women in Jackson who are dedicated to volunteerism and charitable

work. Hilly is married to an aspiring politician called William. She is also Skeeter's best friend.

e. Elizabeth Leefolt

Elizabeth is one of Hilly and Skeeter's friend. She employs Aibileen to care for her home and her children. Elizabeth is a dutiful follower of Hilly's rules, as she is also a member of *Jackson Junior League*.

2. Themes

a. Race Injustices

The main theme of *The Help* is racial injustices, in which African Americans are oppressed because of segregated society. African Americans are denied educational and career opportunities, are forced to do tedious work for white families, must limit their speech to avoid abuse, and must use separate facilities. African Americans are also continually surrounded with stereotypes implying that they are filthy, lazy, and inferior to white people in any way. These injustices are described in the novel from Aibileen and Minny's perspectives.

b. Social Class

Other than race injustices, *The Help* also centered around the social class of Southern America in the 1960s. Race, background, and economic condition played a big part to determine a person's social class.

3. Settings

- a. Time:** 1960s during Civil Rights Era
- b. Place:** Jackson, Mississippi, United States of America

4. Plot

a. Exposition

The novel begins with Hilly Holbrook, a 23-year-old white woman, and Eugenia “Skeeter” Phelan, a 23-year-old white woman, meet for lunch at Leefolt's house to discuss Hilly's proposal to pass a bill requiring any white household to provide a separate bathroom for black housemaids. Aibileen Clark, Elizabeth's maid, witnesses the exchange between the white women. Skeeter, on the other hand, is baffled by Hilly's proposal and later encounters Aibileen, and asks whether she ever felt she could help. Aibileen refuses to tell a white woman her true feelings, instead claiming that all is well. Skeeter took a job writing "Miss Myrna," a housekeeping advice column for the *Jackson Journal*. Skeeter has no experience with housekeeping, so she asks Aibileen for help. Skeeter discovers that Aibileen's newly deceased son was working on a book about his experiences working with white men in Mississippi. Skeeter, who wants to be a journalist, gets the idea to interview Aibileen about her experiences for a book about African American domestic workers in the South after seeing firsthand how her friends handle their maids.

b. Raising Action

Skeeter proposes the idea of the book to Aibileen, who reluctantly accepts, but quickly becomes as absorbed in the initiative as Skeeter. They meet secretly in the evenings at Aibileen's house to work on the book as the town's racial tensions escalate all around them. Aibileen enlists the help of her best friend, Minny, a sassy maid who has been fired several times for voicing her opinions. Skeeter's perspective transforms after hearing their tales, as her eyes are opened to the real stereotypes of her childhood. Skeeter develops a bond and understanding with Aibileen and Minny that none of them anticipated.

c. Climax

When Hilly's maid, Yule May, is imprisoned for petty stealing, the other maids plan to contribute their tales to Skeeter's book because they are outraged by the justice system's unfair treatment. Skeeter begins to fear that the maids' pseudonyms won't be enough to save the Jackson housewives from finding out the novel is about them as the book nears completion. Minny decides to tell Aibileen and Skeeter about her "defense" of Hilly. Minny baked Hilly a pie with her own manure in it and served it to her as a form of retaliation for ruining her job prospects. Hilly will know for sure that the novel is about Jackson when she reads this story in the book. Hilly will realize that the novel is about Jackson when she reads this story in the book, but she will still use her power to persuade others not to reach the same assumption as to avoid the

embarrassment of people discovering that she ate an African American woman's excrement pie.

d. Falling Action

Skeeter's book was written anonymously and is set in the fictitious town of Niceville. It quickly becomes a nationwide bestseller, and white women in Jackson begin to see themselves in the protagonists. Skeeter accepts a position as an editorial assistant in New York and packs up and leaves after a tearful farewell with Aibileen. Hilly, on the other hand, continues to seek vengeance against the maids. Hilly also has Elizabeth fire Aibileen after determining that she may have played a part in the project. Fortunately, Aibileen is planning to take over Skeeter's job, writing cleaning advice column for the local newspaper.

e. Resolution

Hilly is finally silenced by a secret about Hilly that Minny shares in Skeeter's novel. The book is a strong influence in giving African American maids a voice and causing the society to rethink the boundaries between the two races.