



## THE WHITE WOMAN'S SYMPATHY AND BLACK WOMEN RESISTANCE IN THE TATE TAYLOR *THE HELP* FILM

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### ABSTRACT

*This qualitative research discusses black women's resistance and white women's sympathy in The Help film. In the main theory, this research uses Scott's resistance theory, which consists of close Resistance, semi-open resistance, and open resistance. The data in this research includes dialogue and scenes from The Help film, which describe black women's resistance and white women's sympathy. In obtaining the data, this research uses observation by watching the dialogue about black women's resistance and white women's sympathy and documentation by saving this dialogue and scenes from this film. The data in this research is repeatedly analyzed by the interactive technique, which consists of three steps: data reduction in selecting the representative data, data display in creating the table, and data conclusion in concluding the data analysis. This research shows that black women resist white superiority by talking to white women about white people's mistreatment, defending themselves from white people's accusations, and taking revenge on white women. Besides, white women sympathize with black women by writing a book about the black maid, feeling empathy and sorry for the black maid, and taking revenge for black maids.*

**Keywords:** resistance, Superiority, Sympathy.

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian kualitatif ini membahas tentang resistensi wanita kulit hitam dan keterpihakan wanita kulit putih di film *The Help*. Teori utamanya, penelitian ini hanya menggunakan teori resistensi oleh Scotts, yang terdiri dari resistensi tertutup, resistensi semi-terbuka, dan resistensi terbuka. Data di dalam film ini hanya berupa dialog dan gambar adegan dari film *The Help* yang menggambarkan resistensi wanita kulit hitam dan keterpihakan wanita kulit putih. Dalam memperoleh data, penelitian ini menggunakan observasi dengan mengamati dialog dan gambar adegan yang berhubungan resistensi wanita kulit hitam dan keterpihakan wanita kulit putih dan dokumentasi dengan mengambil dialog dan gambar adegan tersebut dari film tersebut. Data dalam film ini dianalisa dengan teknik interaktif yang terdiri dari tiga langkah: data reduksi untuk memilih data yang representatif, tampilan data untuk membuat table dan data konklusi dalam menyimpulkan analisis data. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa wanita kulit hitam bertahan dari superioritas kulit putih dengan berbicara kepada wanita kulit putih tentang penganiayaan dari orang kulit putih, mempertahankan diri mereka dari tuduhan orang kulit putih, dan membalaskan dendam kepada orang kulit putih. Disamping itu, wanita kulit putih menjadi simpati kepada wanita kulit hitam dengan menulis buku tentang pembantu kulit hitam, meraskan empati dan maaf kepada orang kulit hitam, membalaskan dendam untuk orang kulit hitam.

**Kata kunci:** Resistensi, Superioritas, Simpati.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In society, many racial groups live together with different characteristics and habits. The differences also create their own identity as a racial group, which can cause them problems such as intolerance. Intolerance also creates racial groups divided into majority and minority groups. Generally, the majority group dominates the minority group. Moreover, this dominance shows superiority and inferiority among them. The majority group claims to be a superior group with a beneficial life or privilege. Besides, they see the minority group as inferior to them. This superiority and inferiority can create discrimination against the minority group. For instance, whites have special rights, advantages, and immunity granted if they come from a superior race. It may be seen in workplaces and public services. In many cases, white people could be easily accepted for jobs. They were mostly accepted because they had networks and were well respected (Schnurmann, 2020).

Minorities like black people face challenges in employment due to limited education networks, lower job opportunities, and inadequate services and attention (Schnurmann, 2020). They often face lower pay and lack access to full services. As time passes, white people have changed their perspective towards black people by showing empathy and support. These people often defend them, ignore the consequences for white people, and show their support through various works, which are widely studied and analyzed. Their change in perspective shows the growing importance of knowing and supporting the diverse needs of black people. Many writers have studied white and black conflict despite the existing issues. Besides the issue of white superiority leading to the mistreatment of inferior races, many researchers analyze this phenomenon to spread awareness and educate people. Four studies analyze these problems. The first analysis, written by Azizah in 2020, analyzes *Black Women's Struggle in Facing Workplace Discrimination In Theodore Melfi's Hidden Figures*. Second, Fazriyah 2021 analyzes Racism and Resistance Strategies in Amma Asante's Movie *Where Hands Touch* (2018). Third, Arrasyid et al., in 2022, analyze *Racial Practices In Deep South In The 1960s on Mississippi Burning Movie: A Critical Discourse Analysis*. Finally, Rorintulus et al. in 2022, analyze *Discrimination Over Women As Depicted In Walker's And Tohari's Work: A Comparative Study*. In contrast to the researcher's analysis, the writer analyzes *The Help* film by focusing on white sympathy and black women's resistance because, despite showing white superiority, this film also shows the white main character's sympathy towards black women.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **White Superiority**

According to Jenkins (2022), white superiority is the belief that white people are superior to other races. White superiority, according to Brown's *"New American Racism: A Microcosm Study of a Small Town (Clarksville, Tennessee)"* in Al Hafizh, (2018), is a systemic and systematic force that links racism to colonialism and capitalism, relegating nonwhite people to a lower social standing and making them vulnerable to economic exploitation based only on their ancestry or biology. Furthermore, Di Angelo (2016) in *Cross* in 2020 that white people in the United States are superior to black people and dominate them in every aspect. Besides, Martinot & Sexton (2003) in *Cross* (2020) state that white people will use the power to maintain their access to resources from any other race. For example, based on Frances Lee Ansley's definition of white supremacy in Walsdorf et al. in 2020, White people overwhelmingly control the powers and resources in the economic, political, and cultural aspects.

White superiority in the United States, particularly in Southern states, is evident through segregation and historically influenced Southern women in economic, social, educational,

political, and cultural aspects, particularly during the Jim Crow Law era. (Mcrae, 2018). McRae (2018) argues that white women in southern states perpetuated white superiority by spreading evidence supporting segregation based on race, sex, marriage, and childbirth. This evidence was spread by registrars, social workers, teachers, local knowledge, and history. This led to legalizing segregation in all aspects of the Southern States.

### **Discrimination**

Discrimination is treating others differently based on race, ethnicity, or skin color. In other words, according to Fibbi et al. in 2021 Discrimination occurs when individuals are unfairly treated based on their classification, including color, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation. Discrimination also leads to limited opportunities and options for individuals or social groups based on their characteristics, negatively impacting their quality of life. (Fish & Syed, 2020).

Discrimination can also be seen in the economy of the mistreated social group. According to Becker in Berson (2016), discrimination can also reflect the interests of employers, coworkers, or consumers. Members of the discriminated-against group are paid less to be hired and welcomed as employees, coworkers, or salespeople within this system. Additionally, discrimination can be verbal, which consists of making threats or mocking others, and physical such as hitting and other devastating activity. In addition, discrimination is a part of racism which refers to racial discrimination. Pieterse and Powell (2016) in Kirkinis et al. (2021) urged that Racial discrimination involves ideology, social structures, and interpersonal behaviors that oppress and dominate other races based on racial superiority.

### **Resistance**

Resistance is resisting or enduring defensive behavior, trying to fight, and creating refusal. Grotius in Campbell (2001) argued that the individual had the right to resist violence but that society was responsible for maintaining order and might limit that right of resistance. Extreme violence or injustice may be justified by individual and group resistance. Still, Grotius was more concerned with whether the resistance would be more damaging or detrimental to the state than the original injustice. Furthermore, resistance can be seen when there is an inequality of power between a dominant group and an oppressed group (Blue, 1999). The oppressed group will fight against dominant oppression, aiming to hold, struggle, and change for a better life by defending their rights and lives against the dominant group.

According to Scott (2008), there are three forms of resistance: Close Resistance is a process where the oppressed group fights against the dominant group secretly, expressing their feelings of mistreatment. This resistance is often done through spreading gossip, defamation, and regaining respect from the dominant group. Semi-open resistance involves the oppressed group fighting openly without violence or rebellion, expressing their opposition and rejection of the dominant group's mistreatment. This resistance can be seen when the oppressed group protests against the dominant group's mistreatment and defends their rights. Open resistance is organized and conducted systematically by the oppressed group to abolish the dominant group's mistreatment and demand a better life. This form of resistance can be seen when using violence as an answer.

### **Racial Sympathy**

According to Chudy (2020), Racial sympathy is the sentiment of compassion, comprehension, or backing that individuals may feel towards those who have encountered racial discrimination or injustice. It entails acknowledging and understanding the difficulties and hardships faced by marginalized racial or ethnic communities and demonstrating empathy toward their experiences. Racial sympathy can inspire a motivation to take action, advocate for change, or support initiatives that strive for equality and justice for all individuals, irrespective of their race or ethnicity.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research applies the qualitative research of Creswell (2013) in finding black women's resistance and white women's sympathy in the expressions, actions, and utterances from *The Help* film. Before analyzing this film, the writer took three stages: collecting the data on black women's resistance and white women's sympathy from the dialogue, actions, and scenes of *The Help* film; identifying, classifying, and categorizing the collected data; and finally describing the collected data which describes the black women resistance and white women sympathy of *The Help* film.

In obtaining the data, the writer applies the observation technique (Sugiyono, 2013). Sugiyono (2013) states that the writer is an impartial observer who is not participating in the film. In this part, the writer only watches the film and notes the data, such as conversations, actions, and situations connected to white woman sympathy and black women's resistance in *The Help* film. Besides, the writer collects the data using documentation (Sugiyono,2013). In applying the documentation technique, the writer saves the dialogue, actions, and scene data from *The Help* film.

For data analysis, the writer uses an interactive technique (Huberman, Miles, & Saldana, 2014). According to Huberman et al. (2014), the processes in qualitative data analysis are carried out interactively and continue indefinitely until the data is saturated. With the three steps, such as:

1. in data condensation. In doing this step, the writer only takes essential answers and filters the data to find the black women's resistance and white women's sympathy in *The Help* film
2. In data display. The writer only uses the table to define black women's resistance and white women's sympathy after the data has been reduced and selected as the category.
3. In conclusion drawing or verification, the writer will conclude and verify the dialogue, actions, and situations in *The Help* film based on the white woman's sympathy and the black woman's resistance.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

The film shows the resistance of black women through three scenes: close resistance, semi-open resistance, and open resistance. First, Close Resistance involves a black woman discussing the mistreatment of white women in one scene. Second, semi-open resistance involves a black maid defending herself from accusations in one scene. Third, Open resistance involves a black woman taking revenge on a white woman in one scene. The table and pictures below present data on these three resistances, with acronyms like TH, which refers to *The Help*, SC refers to the source, CR which refers to Close Resistance, SOR refers to Semi Open Resistance, and OR which refers to Open Resistance in the finding section.

Table 1 Types of Black Women's Resistance in *The Help* Film

No	Types of Resistance	Forms of Resistance	Code
1.	Close Resistance	talking to the white woman about white woman mistreatment	<b>TH/CR 1</b>
2.	Semi-Open Resistance	defending herself from white woman's accusation	<b>TH/SOR 1</b>
3.	Open Resistance	taking revenge on the white woman	<b>TH/OR 1</b>

*The Help* film presents three white women's partialities in the three scenes. Skeeter, the main white woman character, takes sides for a black woman by writing a book about a black maid in one scene, feeling empathy for the back maid in one scene, and taking revenge for black maids in one scene. The data of these four partialities is presented in a table below, with

No	White Woman Sympathy	Code
1.	Writing a book about the black maid	<b>TH/WWP 1</b>
2.	Feeling empathy and sorry for the black maid	<b>TH/WWP 2</b>
3.	Taking revenge for black maids	<b>TH/WWP 3</b>

WWP referring to White Woman Sympathy in the picture, TH to *The Help*, and Sc to the scene of *The Help* film in the findings section.

Table 2 White Woman Sympathy in *The Help* Film

### A. Black Women's Resistance in *The Help* Film

#### 1. Talking to the White Woman about White Woman Mistreatment (Close Resistance)

In scene 01:29:58 01:31:10, the black maids did close resistance by interviewing a white woman who wanted to write a book about the black maids' lives. Besides they did this resistance in Aibileen's house, one of the black maid's houses in the Southern State, Mississippi community. The Black maids told and answered the questions from the white women interviewer about how their masters, or white women at that time treated them unequally and harshly.



Picture 1 Talking to the White Woman about White Woman Mistreatment (TH/CR 1)

Black Woman 1: "I used to take a shortcut every day. when I went to work at Dr. Dixon's house Cut through that farmer's lower 40 to get there. One day this farmer was waiting for me with a gun. Said he'd shoot me dead. if I walked on his land again. Dr. Dixon went and paid that farmer double for two of those acres. Told him he was gonna start farming, too. But he bought that just for me, so I could get to work easy. He did."

Black Woman 2: "I worked for Miss Jolene's mother till the day she died. Then her daughter, Miss Nancy, asked me to come and work for her. Miss Nancy is a real sweet lady. But Miss Jolene's ma done put it in her will I got to work for Miss Jolene. Miss Jolene's a mean woman. Mean for sport. Lord, I tried to find another job. But in everybody's mind the French family and Miss Jolene owned me. Owned me."

(TH, Sc 01:29:58→ 01:31:10)

This scene shows their experience working as maids for the white family. The first black woman told the white woman about the kindness and meanness of the white man on their

property. She said the first white man would kill her if she passed his property. Then, the kind white man helped her by buying that white man's property to make her pass that land safely. Conversely, the second black woman told about how she was mistreated and worked for a white woman for the rest of her life.

From the conversation above, those stories contained mistreatment by white people. In addition, the black maids could not talk about it frankly; otherwise, they would have suffered the consequences of putting them all under the whites' law. As a result, they fought it by talking about their mistreatment secretly and changing the white people's mistreatment by asking for help from the white woman who created the book about the black maid's life.

## **2. Defending herself from White Woman Accusation (Semi-Open Resistance)**

In the scene of 02:13:02→ 02:15:31, Aibileen, a black maid, did semi-open resistance by defending herself from Hilly's or the white woman's accusation of stealing utensils. Aibileen defended herself by telling Hilly that she did not steal it. Hilly still did not believe Aibileen and even accused her for the second time of blaming her mistress or Elizabeth's child for stealing the silvers. The accusation worsened until Hilly fired Aibileen and took her to the police. Aibileen still defended herself and decided to leave her job as a maid.



Picture 2 Defending herself from White Woman Accusation (TH/SOP 1)

Aibileen: "I ain't got no silver".

Elizabeth: "She says she doesn't have them".

Mrs Hilly: "Then it behooves me to inform you that you are Tired, Aibileen. And I'll be calling the police".

Mae: "Aibee, my throat hurts".

Aibileen : "I'll go get some syrup, Miss Leefolt".

Mrs Hilly: Elizabeth can take care of her own children.

Elizabeth: I'll go get the cough syrup.

Aibileen: Come here, Lil Man.

Elizabeth: I'm OK.

Aibileen: I didn't steal no silver.

Mrs Hilly: Maybe I can't send you to jail for what you wrote, but I can send you for being a thief.

Elizabeth: Aibileen, you have to go now.

(TH, Sc 02:13:45,→ 02:15:31)

Hilly was the head of the white women's socialites, and Elizabeth was one of her close friends. Since her black maid, Minny stopped working for her, she tried to incite her friend by accusing their maid and trying to put them in prison. Besides, Elizabeth was kind, and her child was in good care by Aibileen, but because of Hilly, she could not do anything and agree with her. From the dialogue above, Hilly wanted to imprison Aibileen and remove her from her job. Meanwhile, Aibileen showed semi-open resistance by defending herself against this accusation by telling the truth. This conversation indicated the accusation and intention to mistreat the black woman. By telling her truth, indirectly, she did not fall or keep herself away from the white people. In addition, Aibileen's dialogue of "All you do is scare and lie to try to get what

you want", and "Ain't you tired, Miss Hilly? Ain't you tired?" was indirectly indicated as her expression of the inconvenience of the white people's mistreatment of the black people.

### **3. Taking Revenge to White Woman (Open Resistance)**

Mিনny, a black maid, did the open resistance in the scene at 01:37:33→ 01:38:44. She did this by giving Hilly, or Minny's white mistress a pile of turds. The cause of this resistance began when Minny got fired after she used Hilly's toilet, which made Hilly so angry and fired her immediately. After that mistreatment, Minny's right to find a living by creating slander to all white people that Minny was stealing a candle. As a result, Minny chooses to fight and take revenge by doing this resistance.



Picture 3 Taking revenge to the white woman (TH/OR 1)

Mrs Hilly: "If I take you back, I'll have to cut your pay five dollars a week."

Mিনny: "Take me back?"

Mrs Hilly: "What do you put in here that makes it taste so good?"

Mিনny: "That good vanilla from Mexico... ..and something else real special."

Mrs Hilly: "Mmm."

Mিনny: "No, no, no, Missus Walters. That's Miss Hilly's special pie."

Mrs Hilly: "Mama can have a piece. [Scoffing] Cut her one. Go get a plate." [Slamming pie down]

Mিনny: "Eat my shit."

Mrs Hilly: "What'd you say?"

Mিনny: I said, "Eat... my... shit."

Mrs Hilly: "Have you lost your mind?"

Mিনny: "No, ma'am, but you about to, 'cause you just did."

(TH, Sc 01:37:33→ 01:38:44)

Mিনny was one of the best cooks in Mississippi, and one of her famous dishes was her chocolate pie. After getting fired and being accused by Hilly, she wanted revenge by giving Hilly a pie filled with turds. At first, Hilly does not realize and enjoys eating the pie, thinking it is an apology from Minny for taking her back as her maid with a low wage. Then, Minny responds to Hilly's offer by saying "Take me back?". Minny's response indirectly indicates her resistance to rejecting the white people's offer. In other words, she declared herself to disobey and be against white people openly. Besides, Minny let Mrs. Hilly eat her turd pie and said, "Eat my shit" to Mrs. Hilly. The pie itself had a message to Mrs. Hilly, as did Minny's anger and disrespect when Mrs. Hilly mistreated her as a black maid woman badly at that time.

Lastly, Minny created this organized resistance toward Hilly to openly express her inconvenience and disrespect about the mistreatment of white women. Furthermore, taking revenge on the white woman by giving her the turd pie had a detrimental effect on the victim physically, especially Hilly. In addition, Minny did this resistance to prevent and stop Hilly from hurting and mistreating the black woman in the days to come.

#### **B. White Woman Sympathy in The Help Film**

##### **1. Writing a Book about the Black Maid**

In the scene, 00:35:55 → 00:36:38, Skeeter, the writer from the Jackson Journal, had a task to get information from the black maids in Mississippi. At the same time, she felt the

mistreatment of white people toward the black maids. As her response, she decided to write about the black maids, which indirectly can change the black woman maid's life and their perspective from the perspective of white people.



Picture 4. Writing a book about the black maid (TH/WWP 1)

Skeeter: "We never finished our conversation at Elizabeth's. About that book I want to write? I'd really like to interview you, Aibileen. I know it's scary."

Aibileen: "They set my cousin Shinelle's car on fire, just 'cause she went down to the voting station."

Skeeter: "A book like this has never been written before."

Aibileen: "'Cause there's a reason. I do this with you, I might as well burn my own house down."

Skeeter: "I promise we'll be careful."

(TH, Sc 00:35:37 → 00:37:04)

In this scene, Skeeter tries to convince and offer to the black maid named Aibileen to make a book about the black woman maid's life. At first, Aibileen was afraid and knew that meeting white people at certain places was considered breaking the law and would imprison her. Besides, this meeting would make some white people do detrimental things toward her. However, Skeeter convinced Aibileen that the interview about making this book would be conducted carefully and safely away from any danger in Mississippi.

This scene was described as the first step for Skeeter to sympathize for the black maid's rights by writing the book about them. In addition, she sympathized with the black maids, who were always underestimated and mistreated by white people. Besides, she created this book to change white people's perspectives about the black woman maid's life in the white community, indirectly improving the black maids' lives. Another reason she wanted to write this book was because she was angry with her family, who mistreated her former black maid, Constantine. For Skeeter, Constantine was more than her family, so she wanted to help the black maids like her.

## **2. Feeling Empathy and Sorry for The Black Maid**

During a socialite group meeting, Skeeter heard Hilly's plan to create the separation of using the toilet between black and white people in the white people's house. This plan aimed to prevent the disease from black people who used white people's toilets. Indirectly, this was one of the mistreatments and harmful acts against black people. At that time, Aibileen, a black maid, heard and felt that bad plan. When the social group meeting ended, Skeeter saw Aibileen and felt empathy and sorry for her, as seen at 00:16:50 - 00:17:00.





Picture 5 Feeling empathy and sorry to the black maid (TH/WWP 2)

Skeeter: “All that talking there and thing, Hilly's talk. I'm sorry you have to hear that.”

Aibileen: “Glares”.

(TH, Sc 00:16:50→ 00:17:00)

Aibileen worked for Elizabeth, and Hilly held a gathering at Elizabeth's house. At that time, Hilly refused to use Elizabeth's toilet just because Elizabeth let Aibileen use the toilet. In front of Aibileen, Hilly made a discriminative plan to prevent the disease from white people's toilets that black people used. Witnessing Hilly's words, Skeeter came to Aibileen and apologized to Aibileen. Aibileen seemed to have heard of it many times, so she became quiet and glared at Skeeter. This scene showed the empathy that the program created by the white people was discriminating and gave inequality between those two races.

### 3. *Taking Revenge for Black Maids*

White people in Mississippi had the privilege to control and develop their lives better. Besides, with their privilege, they also mistreated black people unequally. In this film, Hilly was one of the white people who controlled and made a law that harmed black people's rights. As a response, Skeeter, a white woman who takes sides with black maids, wanted to change the white people's perspective by creating that talk about the life of black woman maids, she did not like anything that harmed black people's rights, including her friend at that time named Hilly. She avenged the black maids by putting Hilly's yard with many toilets, as seen at 01:18:32 → 01:19:04.



Picture 6 Taking Revenge for Black Maids (TH/WWP 3)

Hilly: [Crying]

Photographer: [taking pictures]

Hilly: “Oh! You trespassing! It's Skeeter, she put it in the news letter.”

Elizabeth: “Oh my god..”

Hilly: “I specifically said, drop old coats at my house, not commode! Why she do this to me?! !”

Elizabeth: “I don't know, I don't know Hilly..”

(TH, Sc 01:18:32 → 01:19:04)

Hilly was the head of their white socialite groups. She wanted to do charity and asked Skeeter to write about her initiative to drop old coats at her house for charity. While typing for

the initiative, she suddenly thought about Hilly's mistreatment of the black maids. This thought made her pissed off until she humiliated Hilly by changing the "old coats" that turned out to be toilets in that initiative to give Hilly some lessons. Besides, Skeeter already knew that putting the commodes or toilets in front of Hilly's house was derived from Hilly's idea to prevent black people from using white people's toilets. In other words, whatever Hilly used to prevent the black people from using the white toilet, was a blunder for herself and indirectly humiliated herself.

## CONCLUSION

*The Help* film highlights the black women's resistance and white women's sympathy for black women in their fight against white mistreatment. In close resistance Black women secretly speak up to a white woman about their mistreatment from white people, hoping to change their perspective. In semi-open resistance, a black woman defends herself from the white woman's accusation of stealing cooking utensils, demonstrating her desire to defend herself and prevent her from falling victim to white people. In open resistance, a black woman takes revenge by serving a turd pie as a rejection and expression of rage.

The film also highlights three white women's sympathies to the black women. The white woman writes a book about black maids and aims to change the perspective of white people that white women mistreat all black maids in the white community. Besides white woman takes sides with black people by feeling empathy and apologizing toward black maids. Then, a white woman takes revenge by putting a bunch of toilets on the person who harmed black maid rights as the hatred of black women's mistreatment and sympathy.

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