

**People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research**

University of Tlemcen



**Faculty of Letters and Languages
Department of English**

Section of English

**Divided by Colour, Connected by Gender: An
Analysis of Black and White Women's Lives in Stockett's
The Help (2009)**

Dissertation submitted to the Department of English as a partial fulfilment of
the requirements for Master's degree in Literature and Civilisation

Presented by

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MA Examiner

2024 – 2025

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Dedication

To my mother, whose unwavering love and sacrifices have been the foundation of all my achievements.

To my sisters, whose laughter and presence have been a comforting reminder that I am never alone.

To my friends, for being the light during the darkest days and the loudest cheerleaders in moments of doubt.

And to the memory of my uncle, whose faith in my dreams still echoes in my heart, reminding me to keep striving, even when he is no longer here.

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Abstract

This work deals with Kathryn Stockett's novel *The Help* (2009), it aims at analyzing the depiction of black maids that worked in the American south during the civil war era in the 1960's. The research focuses on the complex relationship between black workers and their white employers, shedding light on the impact of differences in race, gender, and power. This study examines the way that Stockett uses slave narrative techniques and different symbolism to portray the struggle and resilience of black women, and the hidden parts of those white women's lives that no one dared to address. The research is divided into two chapters, the first chapter mainly deals with an introduction to slavery and slave narratives which focuses on the theoretical framework by discussing the historical and social context of the 1960's, it also provides a detailed examination of slave narratives as a literary genre. As for the second chapter, it deals with the characterization within the help, exploring the different life experiences of the main characters and their relationships, highlighting how the novel reflecting systematic oppression while offering a narrative of solidarity and courage at the same time. Precisely, this work seeks to contribute to the discourse on race, identity, and specifically the portrayal of black vs white women concept in that era within literary studies.

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General Introduction

General Introduction

Literature serves as a profound tool through which human beings experiences, cultural values, and social dynamics are communicated and examined. It is one of the most influential forms of artistic and intellectual expressions that reflected and shaped social norms throughout history, literary works always offered a deep insight into the complexities of human relationships, and the structures of power and oppression.

Slave narratives is one of the highly influential genres that served throughout the years, as a strong weapon for all of those whose voices have been shut. Throughout storytelling, slave narratives gave power to the powerless to express their suffering, and the hardship they went through due to oppression. These narratives were usually written or dictated by formerly enslaved people providing historical documentation alongside with a vivid reflection of the struggle for freedom, identity, and humanity. They highlight both the terrible experiences of slavery and the unbreakable will to be liberated.

Katheryn Stockett's *the Help* (2009) is set in Jackson Mississippi during the 1960s during the civil rights movement, a time and place still deeply attached or affected by the shadows of slavery, a city where the bitter legacies of segregation and racial discrimination remain tightly woven into the fabric of daily life. Amid all the racism and injustice, Stockett tells a story of black maids who quietly endure the deep pain of carrying their everyday lives while working for white families, despite the fact that the narrative is a fictional story, it is grounded in the truths of American history. The novel gives a chance for the voices that were often neglected and kept on the margins, the maids, nannies, and housekeepers who carried the responsibilities of white families while their own needs and stories were pushed aside.

The Help follows the lives of three women who come from completely different backgrounds; Aibileen Clark, Minny Jackson, and Eugenia "Skeeter". Through their voices, the story shares a combination of personal stories, and a

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broader social critique. Each woman has her own rhythm, emotions, and perspective, giving the reader the chance to experience lives that are all connected, yet shaped by unequal treatment.

Aibileen and Minny are both black maids who spent most of their lives serving in the white households while Skeeter is an outgoing white woman who refuses the societal norms of Jackson, and begins to question the world she has always known. As their paths in life slowly connect, they take initiative to create a bold and dangerous project, a book that tells the true stories and experiences of black workers in the south. Together, they start a journey full of challenges to break the cycle of the societal rules, a journey that forces each one of them to confront and face truths they can no longer ignore.

The novel brings together the voices of Aibileen, Minny, and Skeeter to tell a story with themes of love, loss, power, silence, and bravery. The structure of the novel turns history into an intimate experience, making everyone live it alongside with the characters. It shows that resistance is not necessarily loud and dramatic at all times like revolution, sometimes it is found in the act of telling the truth, in the act of storytelling, in shared laughter behind kitchen doors, or in quietly choosing to say “no more”.

The Help does not hold back from portraying the cruelty of racism and injustice, but it also gives the characters a different dimension of hope and courage. There are moments of light in the story that break through the heaviness of oppression, moments like the innocence of a child, a whispered secret, or a homemade meal served with love. These moments did not erase the pain, but they were more of a reminder for the reader of the humanity during the struggle.

The novel has been recognized for bringing attention to voices often ignored and neglected. However, others feel like it was not fair that the story was dealt with based on a white character’s perspective. Still, its emotional strength remains unquestionable. At its heart, *The Help* is a story about the power of narrative itself.

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It makes us think about what would actually change if every silenced voice finally got the chance to speak out and share all the hidden stories, and more importantly, it asks whether those who listen are willing to truly hear.

This study focuses on the way race and gender are connected in this work, because in literature stories can reflect and challenge the societal norms at the same time. By focusing on the experiences of Black and white women during racial segregation and gender inequality, this research aims to understand how literature shows both oppression and resistance. The importance of this theme goes back to the fact that the issues of race and gender are still relevant nowadays, only in different ways. These observations lead to several questions that will guide the path of this study:

- How does *The Help* portray the racial divide and the shared struggles between Black and white women?
- How do slave narratives and Civil Rights literature influence the depiction of women's experiences in *The Help*?
- How do the characters' interactions reveal both racial divisions and common gender struggles in *The Help*?

The proposed research might reveal the realities of the relationships between black and white women in *The Help*, which could possibly reflect racial divisions and the shared struggles. It also seems that the characters' interactions in the novel might contribute to illustrate how race and gender intersect, showing that while racial differences create barriers, common struggles as women could foster moments of empathy and connection. Perhaps, it is the influence of civil rights movement and slave narratives that actually influenced the framework of this literary piece.

This research adopts a psychological approach, in attempts to answer the proposed research questions. We will analyze the dynamics between black and white women in *The Help*, by focusing on the way the characters think, feel, and act in situations of racial and gender oppression. Additionally, this study will use concepts

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such as intersectionality, and identity to show how being both a woman and part of a racial or societal group affects the characters' lives and their interactions. This methodological framework helps giving a deeper understanding on how women may connect through shared struggles, even when divided by race.

This work is divided into two chapters; the first chapter will provide a historical background that paves the way for further analyses. We will begin with exploring the origins, and the significance of slave narratives in literature, focusing on how this genre reflects the experiences of black women that have lived through racial oppression during that period. Then we will move to the examination of key themes and symbols that illustrate the gap between black and white women, highlighting the way that literature has historically portrayed the complex dynamics of race and gender.

The second chapter will deal with a detailed characterization of the novel *The Help* by Cathryn Stockett, depicting how every individual character navigates both racial and gender-based challenges. Then, we will focus on the different ways black and white women interact, revealing their shared struggles as women, and the way this can sometimes bridge the racial gap, while also exposing the limitations of such connections. Later on, we will highlight the traits of the relationships between different characters, to illustrate the deeper meaning behind the use of personal stories in the novel for a bigger cause.

Chapter One:
Introduction to Slavery and
Slave Narratives

1. Introduction

Slavery shaped the history and social structures of America, leaving a lasting impact on race, identity, and literature. Based on oppression, slavery was not just about economics; it was a system designed to strip people of their freedom, dignity, and humanity. Laws, violence, and even pseudoscientific theories were used to justify the idea that some people were meant to serve while others ruled over them, despite the brutality of slavery, enslaved individuals engaged in various forms of resistance. Some sought freedom through escape, others actively rebelled against their oppressors. And many used their narratives to expose the realities of their experiences, and challenge the institution of slavery.

This chapter explores the reality of slavery, the way it shaped the American society, and how enslaved people used storytelling to regain their identities. Slave narratives were telling more than personal stories, those stories served as acts of resistance, revealing the brutal realities of slavery and directly challenging racist ideologies. Examining their structure, main themes, and representations of themes and symbolism, provides a deeper understanding of the way these narratives function as a powerful tool in the fight for freedom and equality.

1.1. Slavery

Slavery is a condition in which individuals were legally forced to labor; while losing the accessibility for basic human rights, those slaves were treated like objects for trade, ownership and forced to work without any payment. This phenomenon is marked with abuse, mistreatment and the denial of their own dignity (Orlando, 1982, p13). As Orlando (1982) states in the description of slaves,

Slaves were stripped of their identities, reduced to mere property in the eyes of the law and their enslavers. They had no control over their own lives, no legal rights to protect them from cruelty, and no means to seek justice. The system of slavery was not merely an economic institution

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but a social and psychological mechanism designed to dehumanize and control its victims. Every aspect of a slave's existence, from their name to their movement, was dictated by their owner, leaving them with little agency over their own fate (p. 14).

To really understand the heaviness and cruelty of this system, it is necessary to begin with taking a closer look at what slavery actually meant in people's life.

1.1.1. Definition of Slavery in America

Slavery in America was a system based on racial construction in which African Americans were enslaved by force, treated as property, and subjected to lifelong bondage. This system was reinforced by laws that established and maintained racial hierarchies, denying those enslaved people's basic rights and freedoms.

The racial nature of the American slavery system created an order or a stereotype where being black was directly associated with being inferior leading to obligatory servitude, while being white was associated with privilege and freedom, shaping the nation's social and political framework; "slavery in America developed as a system deeply tied to race, where blackness became a marker of servitude and whiteness symbolized freedom, embedding racial inequality into the nation's laws and culture" (Berlin, 2003, p8).

Another defining feature of slavery in America was its economic utility and institutional permanence. Unlike other forms of slavery in other regions, slavery in the U.S. developed into a system where it was inherited, meaning if the mother was enslaved, her child would be as well, this gave America the advantage of an endless labor supply. Enslaves were highly important for the southern economy, especially for growing crops that require a lot of work, like tobacco, rice, sugar, and most of all cotton. The south's reliance on this labor led to stricter laws, and punishments were put in place to keep enslaved people under control, working as hard as possible to increase output. Treating those people as products normalized the fact that enslaved African Americans were considered as property, instead of human beings,

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a perception upheld by slave codes, and government rules. (Levine, 2005, pp. 45–49).

Slavery supporters, usually used religion, fake science, and cultural beliefs to make it seem even more acceptable and natural, as if they were only born for one single purpose, to be slaves. They twisted and quoted the bible in ways that allows them to justify enslaving black people, and claimed, using false scientific theories that African Americans were naturally inferior, less intelligent or capable. These harmful ideologies spread through media, the church, and everyday conversations, normalizing racism and slavery in the American society more day by day. This mindset did not only excuse slavery, yet it made it a widely accepted part of life that only a violent civil war could bring to an end (Davis, 2006, pp. 112–118).

1.1.2. The Evolution of the System: The History of Slavery in America

The history of slavery in America shows its evolution from a colonial labor system to a deeply rooted foundation, tracing a new legacy in the whole nation.

1.1.2.1. The Beginnings of Racial Slavery in Colonial America

The first enslaved Africans were initially transported to Jamestown, Virginia in 1619, to start a new chapter in the American history (Horn,2018, pp. 3-5). The slavery system has influenced the nation`s development. In the beginning, it was linked to a system called ‘indentured servitude’ (Galenson,1981, pp. 1-10), where people work for a specific number of years to pay off their debts. However, slavery eventually turned into the main source of workers for the colonies especially within the Tobacco. As the historian Edmund S. Morgan (1975) notes, “by the late seventeenth century, race and servitude were fast becoming intertwined, creating a system where blackness itself became a badge of slavery” (p.297). This progression established the foundation for a racially based system of slavery that would endure for more than two centuries.

1.1.2.2. Growth and Establishment

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Slavery in America took a completely different path during the 1700's, it became officially legalized through laws and the extreme reliance on enslaved workers. Colonial government created slave codes that treated those slaves as property, while completely neglecting their rights in order to make sure they were staying in bondage their whole life. Those laws secured and increased the economic power for the slave holders, and created a clear racial division especially in the southern colonies where goods like tobacco, rice and later on cotton were highly important (Morgan, 1975, pp. 295-312).

As historian Ira Berlin (1998) explains, "Slavery became an institution defined by race and law, deeply entwined with the economic and social structures of the colonies". These legal and economic systems made slavery a central part of American society (p. 121)

1.1.2.3. The Expansion of Slavery and the Cotton Industry

Slavery and the cotton production were always going hand in hand in the history of America during the 18th and the early 19th centuries, particularly after Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin in 1793 (Baptist, 2014, pp. 111-120). This device simplified cotton processing, which increased the demand of enslaved labor on Southern plantations, turning cotton into the nation's most valuable export. Meanwhile, the transatlantic slave trade had forcibly transported millions of Africans to the American lands causing immense suffering, violence and devastation in African communities.

This trade not only enriched the labor needs of the plantations, but it also boosted the economies of both America and Europe, which created a global system built on exploitation. Historian Edward E. Baptist (2014) notes that "the expansion of slavery was not incidental to America's growth; it was foundational to the country's economic and political development (p111).

The expansion of slavery and the cotton industry also led to the forced migration of enslaved people as plantation owners moved westward looking for

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fertile land. The domestic slave trade became a great economic force, enslaved individuals were being sold and moved from the upper south to the deep south (Rothman, 2008, pp32–54). This internal migration, often referred to as the “Second Middle Passage”, subjected enslaved people to the hardest conditions and separated countless families. According to Walter Johnson in *River of Dark Dreams* (2013), the expansion of slavery into new territories was an honest response to economic demand, and also a deep political issue that shaped national debates over the future of the institution (pp. 142-150).

The rapid expansion of the cotton industry deepened the gap between the North and South, eventually fueling tensions that led to the Civil War. In times where Southern plantation owners focused on enslaved labor for wealth and power, Northern industries also benefited, as textile mills depended on Southern cotton. Sven Beckert (*Empire of Cotton*, 2014) explains that slavery was central to the 19th-century global economy, with banks, merchants, and manufacturers profiting from the exploitation of enslaved workers (pp. 210-215).

1.1.2.4. **Fighting Slavery: The Path to Abolition**

The fight to resist and end slavery took many forms. Abolitionists like Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and William Lloyd Garrison spoke out against slavery and fought for its end. This includes rebellions like Nat Turner’s revolt in 1831, which revealed the weakness and instability of the system, and the effort of abolitionists who wanted to expose the brutality of slavery. Anti-slavery newspapers like *The Liberator* played a key role in spreading their message.

Laws like the Missouri Compromise in 1820, and the Compromise of 1850 tried to deal with slavery and find solutions that please the majority. Yet, they only made tensions between the North and South go worse (Wilentz, 2005, pp. 381-389).

Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in 1852 was a big influence in changing people’s perspective about slavery by sharing powerful stories about its harshness. The book helped spreading antislavery sentiments, and raised awareness,

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becoming a key part of the movement to end the bondage (Vorenberg, 2001, pp 176-177).

The Dred Scott decision of 1857 made things even more difficult for African Americans, and boosted the will of people to fight for their rights and end slavery. This decision strengthened the pro-slavery stance in the South, and ignited stronger resistance from abolitionists, further pushing the country toward conflict. The Republican Party, formed in the 1850s, tried to prevent from the spread of slavery, and the Civil War became the place where the unheard voices of all the enslaved rose (Foner, 2011, pp. 135–140).

1.1.2.5. The Path to Freedom

The journey toward the ending of slavery was shaped by intense political and social struggles that eventually led to the civil war. The debate over expanding slavery into new territories increased the tension between the north and the south. During the civil war, in 1863, president Abraham Lincoln declared the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing enslaved people in confederate areas, which caused the switch in the purpose of the war to become a fight against slavery. This crucial event set the stage for the 13th amendment, in 1865, which legally abolished slavery across the United States (Foner, 2010, p. 304).

1.2. The American Civil War (1861–1865)

A major conflict accrued between the north and the south states, mainly caused by disagreements over slavery, and rights of different states. The war led to lasting social and economic changes (Fanon, 2011, pp 78–82).

1.2.1. Overview of the Civil War's Causes

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The southern states' economy was mostly dependent on slavery, especially for agriculture, whereas, the north, which was more economically industrialized, refused the spread of slavery into new territories and states. This disagreement over the future of slavery was the main lead to the war as it created a sense of tension (Dew,2001, pp. 9–28). Fanon, 2011 stated that:

The union's victory in 1865 was followed by the abolition of slavery through the thirteenth amendments, marking one of the biggest turning points in the American history. This victory also shifted power from individual states to federal government, which completely changed how the country was run (p.58).

1.2.2. Major Battles and Turning Points of the American Civil War

The American civil war has witnessed many important battles and turning points that shaped the outcome of the conflict. The Battle of Antietam in 1862 and Battle of Gettysburg in 1863 were impactful for their high number of deaths and strategies (McPherson, 1988, pp. 557-563). Gettysburg, was a well-deserved victory for the union, and it was often linked with the beginning of the Confederacy's weakness. On the other hand, Antietam was quite confusing because even though it was not obvious who won in this battle, it led president Abraham Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared all slaves in confederate states free, "if slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong", Abraham Lincoln's words in a letter to Albert G. Hodges on April 4, 1864 Other battles, such as Vicksburg and Sherman's March to the Sea, helped the union reinforce their control, and eventually lead for the Confederacy's surrender (McPherson,1988, pp. 634–636).

1.2.3. Post-War Reconstruction and its Impact

After the end of the civil war in 1865, the United States witnessed a new chapter known as "Reconstruction" from 1865 until 1877, in an attempt to rebuild the south and help the previously enslaved people adjust to freedom. This period brought a number of new laws like the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments, which finally

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allowed African Americans to own citizenships and gave them the right to vote (Du Bois, 1935, pp. 320–323). Stamp 1965, stated that:

Reconstruction witnessed a remarkable political revolution in the South, as former slaves stood in the halls of government, shaping policies and demanding rights that had long been denied to them. Yet, this period was also marked by fierce resistance from white Southerners who viewed black citizenship as a threat to their social and economic dominance. The Reconstruction amendments promised equality, but their enforcement remained a battle, as white supremacist groups and discriminatory laws sought to undermine the newfound freedoms of African Americans (pp. 120–123).

The government also implemented new policies such as freedman's bureau to provide food, education, and medical care. However, the white Southerners were not very satisfied with these changes, they even tried to resist by raising the sense of discrimination through new laws called black codes, and later on Jim Crow laws to limit the rights of black people (Du Bois, 1935, pp. 150-157). When reconstruction finally came to an end in 1877, federal troops left the south, and white leaders regained control, enforcing extreme racial segregation. As a result, African Americans continued their struggle fighting for equal rights long after the civil war, and the freedom they were promised was only a delusion as freedom is always taken, and never simply given (Litwack, 1998, pp. 247–255). "Emancipation is meaningless unless accompanied by real freedom" (Blight, 2001, p. 310).

1.2.4. Southern Society Before, During, and After the Civil War

Before the civil war, southern economy was mainly focused on farming, especially large plantations that depended on enslaved labor. Wealthy white landowners held most of the power through controlling the majority of the land, economy and politics, while African Americans had no rights, and worked under extremely harsh conditions. They were humiliated in the worst ways and often were not treated as

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decent human beings. Poor white farmers had also struggled due to shortage of money, yet they still had way more rights than the black ones (Genovese, 1974, pp. 29-35).

During the war, the south suffered greatly as many farms were destroyed, trade stopped, and lots of men went off to fight causing their families to go through extremely hard times. The union blockage severely weakened the southern economy by cutting off vital supplies, causing extreme food shortages and rising prices. Many women were left with the responsibility of running farms on their own, they faced significant hardships as they tried to survive in the midst of distraction (McPherson, 1991, pp. 400–405).

After the war, slavery chapter came to an end, forcing the south to adjust to a new way of life, having to rebuild its economy based on paid labor instead of enslaved workers. However, due to the fact that many white southerners refused and resisted the change, African Americans faced new challenges of racial discrimination and major inequalities to start a new journey of resistance for their future in the United States (Foner, 2011, p. 214 –216).

1.2.5. Social and Cultural Norms in the 19th-Century America

In the 19th century, books, newspapers, and speeches played a crucial role in shaping and building people’s opinion on major social and political issues. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) showed the harsh reality of slavery and made many people in the North oppose it. In addition to that, newspapers like “The Liberator”, initiated by William Lloyd Garrison, strongly spread anti-slavery messages and encouraged debates about human rights (Garrison, 1831, p. 1).

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On the other hand, political speeches were shared widely, influencing discussions on topics like women's rights and working conditions. Meanwhile, pro slavery publications in the southern area strongly defended the institution of slavery, putting arguments like its importance in the economic system of the states, backing it up with excuses like traditions. As more people learned to read, books, newspapers and literature in general gained great strength in shaping the public opinion, people became more aware of the situation, which increased the disagreement between the north and the south leading to the civil war (Foner, 2011, pp. 120–123).

1.2.5.1. The Contrast Between Northern and Southern Societal Structures

The North and South of the United States developed very different societal structures, in the 19th century, mostly due to the differences in economic labor systems, and cultural values. The north became more industrialized, with the flourishing of factories and growing cities, which led to a rise in wage labor and a larger middle class. Education and social mobility were more accessible, allowing individuals to move up in society based on work and skill (Howe, 2007, p. 412).

The south remained dependent on more traditional methods, mostly agricultural, with a rigid social hierarchy based on land ownership and slavery. Wealthy plantation owners held most of the power, while poor white farmers had fewer opportunities for advancement. Enslaved African Americans formed the lowest class, deprived of basic rights and forced to work under brutal conditions. These differences created tensions between the regions, contributing to the outbreak of the Civil War (Foner, 2011, pp. 60–63).

1.2.5.2. Race, Class, and Gender Roles in American Society

Race, class, and gender roles were extremely impactful in many different ways. White men, specifically those with wealth and land, held most of the power in both the North and South, meanwhile African Americans, enslaved or free, faced systemic discrimination and limited opportunities. The social structure was highly

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stratified, with the elite class controlling politics and the economy, while the working class and poor had little influence (Lebsock, 1984, pp. 88–94).

Women, regardless of class or race, were expected to fulfill domestic roles, focusing on raising children and managing the household. In the South, enslaved Black women faced even harsher realities, enduring both labor exploitation and gender-based violence. While the abolitionist and women's rights movements gained momentum, true equality remained far out of reach for marginalized groups (Foner, 2011, pp. 85–88).

1.3. Slave Narratives

Slave narratives are written testimonials by former slaves that recount their former life of captivity, strive and liberation. These narratives played a significant role in uncovering the realities of slavery while being useful tools in the abolitionist movement.

I have found that, to make a contented slave, it is necessary to make a thoughtless one. It is necessary to darken his moral and mental vision, and, as much as possible, to annihilate the power of reason. He must be able to detect no inconsistencies in slavery. he must be made to feel that slavery is (Douglass, 1845, p. 54).

These reflections shed light on the mental and emotional manipulation at the core of slavery. Slave narratives are brutally important, as both historical documents, and powerful forms of resistance.

1.3.1. Defining Slave Narratives: Voices of Resistance and Freedom

Slave narratives are real life stories written by people who were once enslaved. In these stories, they describe their experiences in life as slaves, the way they escaped, and the deep meaning of freedom to them. These narratives were important because

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they were not only personal memories, they were powerful arguments and statements against slavery, by speaking up and sharing what was considered as a taboo and transmitting their message through their own lives' reflection of everything they went through, formerly enslaved people helped others understand the cruelty and injustice of the system (Olney, 1985, p. 152). John Sekora (1987) argues,

The slave narrative developed as a rhetorical form of liberation, a structured protest against the system that tried to destroy individuality. These texts served as political documents that openly challenged the institution of slavery and asserted the humanity of the enslaved.” (P. 498)

Their stories shed light on the harsh treatment they suffered from, yet they also highlighted their strength, intelligence, and determination to be free. According to Henry Louis Gates Jr. (1988) in his book *The Signifying Monkey* slave narratives were more than just historical documents; they were also carefully written stories that used different writing techniques to give more power to their messages. These narratives did not just tell facts, they were written in a way that challenged racist beliefs, and showed that enslaved people were just as smart and capable as anyone else. Many of these stories followed a similar structure, starting with life in slavery, then describing the struggles and challenges, and ending with the escape to freedom. These narratives were incredibly important, because they helped inspire people to join the abolitionist movement, which worked to end slavery (Gates, 1988, pp. 127-130).

1.3.2. Characteristics

Slave narratives share common characteristics that make them essential historical records, they offer firsthand accounts of harsh realities of slavery, highlighting the strength and resilience of those who endured it. These narratives often focused on storytelling, the importance of literacy, religious influences, descriptions of physical

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and emotional suffering, and the pursuit of freedom. Each element played a key role in shaping both individual testimonies and the broader abolitionist movement. By examining these characteristics, we gain a deeper understanding of the determination of the formerly enslaved individuals (Smith, 1993, pp. 45–49). Frances Smith Foster (1994) writes,

The slave narrative served not only as a testimonial of individual experience but also as a form of communal expression. In these narratives, former slaves reached beyond personal liberation to speak on behalf of all those who could not speak. These were strategic and moral documents—crafted to confront readers with the injustice of slavery, but also to illustrate the moral and intellectual capacity of African Americans. The repeated structure—from bondage to literacy to freedom—offered a model of transformation that stood in direct opposition to white supremacist ideology (p. 67).

Together, these shared traits helped transform personal stories into a collective voice of resistance and hope that still resonates in American historical memory.

1.3.2.1. Autobiographical Nature

Slave narratives are highly personal stories. Those narratives serve both as historical records and testimonies of survival. The accounts usually follow a certain structure following the timeline from the person's early life in slavery to their journey toward freedom, and their reflection on life as a free person. The personal nature of slave narratives paved the way for formerly enslaved people to include their identities and to finally gain the strength and guts to challenge the racist ideologies that denied their humanity (hooks, 1990, p. 89). According to Henry Louis Gates Jr. (1987), these narratives functioned as "literary acts of self-creation", enabling enslaved individuals to reclaim their own stories and reshape public perceptions about their intellect, resilience, and moral worth (pp. 3-5). He further explains that "the act of writing one's narrative was not merely about recounting past suffering, but about

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asserting one's right to be seen as fully human, with a voice that demanded to be heard" (Gates, 1987, pp. 4-5).

1.3.2.2. Focus on Literacy and Education

A recurring theme in the slave narratives is the hustle for literacy, as reading and writing were mainly seen as tools of liberation. Enslavers often forbade enslaved people from learning how to read or write, because education was associated with self-awareness and resistance. Frederick Douglass, in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), describes the way he secretly learned to read despite all the harsh punishments, realizing that literacy was "the pathway from slavery to freedom". Literacy opened the path of communication between enslaved individuals and abolitionists, it helped them document their experiences, and inspire others to resist oppression (pp. 78-81).

While most enslavers prohibited literacy, a minority of plantations mistresses went against the norms, and decided to teach their slaves reading and writing, often out of conscience or faith, secretly giving them a chance to be educated (Jordan, 2005, pp. 213–215). these acts of kindness were rare and had to be hidden because teaching slaves to read threatened the very foundation of slavery. Most enslaved people without a helper, meaning those who were strictly forbidden from any source of education, had to teach themselves by swapping secret lessons, tracing letters in the dirt, or trading favors. All to gain the necessary literacy that would become their most powerful weapon. This stark difference in education access highlights both the bravery of those who learnt on their own, and the cruelty of a system that bent on keeping most slaves ignorant. (Blight, 2001, pp. 45–47).

1.3.2.3. Religious Themes

Religion plays a major role in many slave narratives, often highlighting the contrast between genuine Christian beliefs and the hypocritical use of religion by slaveholders to justify enslavement. These narratives usually include moments of spiritual awakening or divine intervention that led the author to seek freedom

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(Raboteau, 1978, pp. 125–127). Many previously enslaved people found the light in faith, seeing it as a source of hope and resistance. Olaudah Equiano, in *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), explains how his spiritual journey gave him strength amid suffering, yet he also condemns the religious justifications for slavery, arguing that true Christianity can never support such cruelty (pp. 132-136).

Enslaved people made great efforts to attend church services and hold secret worship meetings because they saw faith communities as vital sources of hope and unity through hymns, prayers, and sermons. When barred from formal worship, they would walk miles to reach plantation chapels or hold secret gatherings in makeshift “brush arbors”. Even under threat of punishment, enslaved worshipers clung to their faith communities, transforming religious gatherings into acts of resistance and mutual support (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990, pp. 75–78).

1.3.2.4. Brutality and Resistance

Slave narratives often provide vivid and painful descriptions of the brutality suffered by enslaved people. These accounts include physical violence, psychological torment, and dehumanizing treatment. However, these accounts also showed acts of resistance, whether through open rebellion, escape, or subtle defiance (Genovese, 1974, pp. 56–58). Solomon Northup’s *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853) details the severe beatings and the inhumane treatment he endured, yet he also highlights his unbreakable will to survive, and his determination to return to his family (pp 210-215). These depictions served as a powerful indictment of slavery, exposing its inherent cruelty to the audience in the United States and Europe.

Many women slaves in the United States suffered terrible sexual abuse from overseers, masters, and other white men, experiences often mentioned in their

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narratives with heartbreaking honesty. These women were casually assaulted, harassed, and raped, this led to the birth of numerous children that were called “mixed-race”, they were usually claimed as property by their white fathers, sold as property, or denied recognition from both parents, deepening the trauma of separation and loss. Moreover, this violence robbed women of control over their own bodies and even made slaveholders richer by increasing the number of people they owned. The legacy of this gendered violence reverberated through generations, making family connections confusing and undermining the very idea of family among enslaved people (White, 1985, pp. 112–115).

1.3.2.5. The Quest for Freedom

One of the defining characteristics of slave narratives is the pursuit of freedom, which often serves as the climax of the story. The process towards freedom was very difficult, for enslaved individuals either had to buy their own freedom, escape through the underground railroad, or get legal emancipation. In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Harriet Jacobs shares the difficulties she faced while trying to finally escape, particularly as a woman who was vulnerable to sexual exploitation (pp. 85-89). Many of these stories emphasize the challenges of obtaining true freedom even after escaping slavery, as formerly enslaved people still faced racial discrimination and financial problems (Blackmon, 2008, pp. 3, 10, 39).

Many of those who attempted to escape relied on the Underground Railroad, a secret network of “conductors,” safe houses, and coded communications to guide them to freedom. They traveled mostly at night, following the night star, they hid in barns, basements, homes of sympathetic abolitionists like Quakers, free Black communities, and white allies who provided them with the necessary supplies like food, clothing, and directions. Brave leaders such as Harriet Tubman made dangerous trips back into the South to help others, while others depended on coded songs or quilt patterns to signal safe paths. Despite the constant threat of capture, this collective effort, their courage and cooperation enabled thousands to reach Northern states and Canada, where slavery was outlawed (Larson, 2001, pp. 54–57).

1.3.2.6. Family Separation and Emotional Trauma

A recurring theme in slave narratives is the painful separation of families. Enslaved individuals were often sold away from their spouses, children, and parents, leading to deep emotional damage. The trauma of losing beloved ones was not a normal personal tragedy, it was used as a deliberate strategy by slaveholders to break the spirits of enslaved people (Gutman, 1976, pp. 45–47). Harriet Jacobs (1861) writes about the agony of being separated from her own children, and how the constant threat of sale loomed around enslaved families (pp. 92-95). As she painfully recalls, "the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others. If she be not pure, nature itself has made her to differ" (Jacobs, 1861, p. 93) highlighting the immense suffering and lack of control enslaved mothers had over their own families.

Male enslaved people endured the same heartbreaking separations. Fathers helplessly watched their own children being sold out to distant plantations, sometimes they never got to see them again, and husbands were constantly ripped of their wives without any further warning (Franklin & Moss, 1988, pp. 45–47). Solomon Northup, in *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853), describes the agony of hearing children's cries while they were led away, and the helpless rage of a father who is powerless to stop it (pp. 150-153). This forced separation of families took away those men's roles as protectors and providers, making the wound of emotional trauma, and loss even deeper.

1.3.2.7. White Allies in the Fight against Slavery

White abolitionist and supporters who helped enslaved people to escape to freedom were often mentioned in slave narratives. While some writers appreciated and acknowledged the help of white allies, they also focused on their own efforts in gaining freedom. In *the Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave* (1847), W. Brown shared how he met both cruel and helpful white people in his escape, showing the complicated nature of these relationships between white people and black enslaved individuals (pp. 45-48).

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In many narratives, white allies are portrayed as both crucial and complex figures in the help for those slaves' freedom., often provided hiding places, food, and advice to help enslaved people escape. However, these friendships could be complicated, while many risked getting jailed or worse to lend a hand, some treated fugitives as projects rather than equals. Enslaved escapees had to navigate carefully the intentions of those who were willing to help, and reach for the ones that are trustworthy, balancing gratitude with caution. Despite these tensions, the help of sympathetic white people was vital for many to reach safety and freedom (Johnson, 1996, pp. 102–104).

1.3.2.8. Struggles for Justice and Equality after Freedom

Even after escaping slavery, and gaining their freedom, formerly enslaved people still witnessed legal and social hardships. Many narratives include accounts of discrimination, lack of economic opportunities, and threats of re-enslavement. some writers, like Solomon Northup, who got kidnapped and forced to slavery even though he was a free man, and he was obliged to fight legal battles to reclaim his freedom (Northup, 1853, pp. 278-281).

After the Civil War, a group of white supremacists formed a group called the Ku Klux Klan because they were too angry about Black people gaining their freedom and rights, they terrorized freed people and kept them from exercising their rights. This Klan used fear and violence to stop formerly enslaved people from voting, going to school, or living peacefully. violence aimed to restore white dominance and stop African Americans from achieving true equality (Litwack, 1998, pp. 65–68).

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These post emancipation struggles prove that freedom was not an automatic solution to racial oppression, yet it was just the beginning of a continued fight for civil rights.

1.4. Characterization in Slave Narratives

Characterization in slave narratives serves as a powerful tool for explaining and portraying the harsh realities of slavery, and the strength of those who lived and survived through it. Enslaved people are often portrayed as smart, determined, and morally strong, challenging the racist ideas to justify slavery but they were also portrayed as helpless and gaining strength through their hardships. At the same time, these narratives revealed the true colors of those slaveholders, proving their cruelty and hypocrisy, these accounts completely rejected enslavers' claims of being benevolent, instead revealing them as both physically and emotionally abusive (Gates, 1988, pp 45-47).

Abolitionists and sympathetic figures have a strong appearance in many narratives, representing the broader fight for justice and freedom. These character portrayals had a great hand in changing public opinion on slavery, making slave narratives a powerful force in the abolitionist movements (Andrews, 2004, pp. 10-12).

1.4.1. Mechanisms of Characterization

Slave narratives use different methods to shape their characters, and make their stories impactful. One common technique is direct and indirect characterization, authors often describe themselves and others through detailed personal experiences, highlighting their intelligence, resilience, and moral strength to counter the racist stereotypes of enslaved people (Olney, 1985, pp. 147–149).

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Dialogue also plays a key role in bringing characters to life, showing the harsh language of slaveholders, and the resistance or suffering of the enslaved. In addition to that, the use of contrast is a powerful tool, many slave narratives compare cruel enslavers to sympathetic white allies, focusing on the moral divide in society. Another important mechanism is first person narration, which creates a deep emotional connection with the readers, making the suffering of enslaved people feel more real and immediate (Andrews, 2004, pp. 20-23).

1.4.2. Symbolism of Characters

In slave narratives, characters often carry deeper meanings beyond their personal experiences. Enslaved individuals embody resilience and the struggle for freedom, showing their strength through learning, resistance, or escape. However, enslavers represent cruelty and the corrupting influence of power. In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Harriet Jacobs illustrates how Dr. Flint's actions reflect the broader oppression faced by enslaved women (pp. 43-46), as Jacobs writes, "He told me I was his property; that I must be subject to his will in all things" (p. 45). Figures who assist in the journey to freedom, such as abolitionists or sympathetic individuals, highlight the ongoing fight against injustice. Through these symbolic portrayals, slave narratives deliver powerful messages about oppression, survival, and the pursuit of dignity (Andrews, 2004, pp. 30-33).

1.5. Relationship between Characters

Slave narratives show the complex deep emotional relationships between enslaved individuals, their families, and those who held power over them, and even white allies. Bonds between enslaved people were often marked by love, solidarity, and shared struggle for survival and dignity. Many narratives highlight the strong connections between parents and children, siblings and friends, emphasizing how these relationships provided strength in the face of cruelty. However, the constant threat of separation through sale or punishment made these connections fragile and painful (Blassingame, 1972, pp. 88–90). Harriet Jacobs (1861) described how the

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fear of losing loved ones was a constant burden, stating that "the slave mother can only weep and pray that some kind hand may unite her broken household in the world of peace" (pp. 100-102).

Relationships between enslaved individuals and enslavers was defined by power, violence, and hypocrisy. Some enslavers presented themselves as kind, yet their actions exposed the contradictions of a system built on cruelty. Frederick Douglass (1845) recounts how one of his mistresses initially treated him with kindness, taught him the alphabet, but soon that kindness vanished away under the influence of her husband and the institution of slavery itself (pp. 50-52). He reflects on this transformation, stating:

Slavery proved as injurious to her as it did to me. When I went there, she was a pious, warm, and tender-hearted woman. There was no sorrow or suffering for which she had not a tear. She had bread for the hungry, clothes for the naked, and comfort for every mourner that came within her reach. Slavery soon proved its ability to divest her of these heavenly qualities and her heart became stone. The first step in her downward course was in her ceasing to instruct me. She now commenced to practice her husband's precepts. She finally became even more violent in her opposition than her husband himself (Douglass, 1845, pp. 51-52).

These stories prove how slavery poisoned even basic human connections, reducing them to dynamics of control and oppression. At the same time, some stories introduced white allies and sympathetic figures who played a role in helping enslaved individuals escape, showing that even though oppression was widespread, so was resistance (Andrews, 2004, pp. 35-37). Harriet Jacobs (1861) states,

There are noble men and women who would gladly toil day and night to advance the cause of the poor and friendless; yet, when some of these same persons have been spoken to on the subject of slavery, they have turned away

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with an air of contempt, and with a polite smile have changed the subject (pp. 120-122).

These different types of relationships whether supportive, abusive, or conflicted whether supportive, abusive, or conflicted, reflect the deep complexity of human interactions shaped by slavery, which makes slave narratives accounts of survival and hope.

1.6. Racism and Racial Discrimination

Racism forced individuals to live under prejudice and discrimination based on their skin color, denying all equal rights and opportunities. It created deep social divisions, justifying oppression through false beliefs of superiority (Fredrickson, 2002, pp. 5-7).

1.6.1. The Roots of Racial Discrimination

Racism is the belief that some races are superior than the others, this led to discrimination and unequal treatment. Racial discrimination occurs when individuals are treated unfairly or excluded because of their race (Fredrickson, 2002, pp.10–12). The roots of racism trace back to slavery, where people were dehumanized and treated as property based on their skin color. In the 18th and 19th centuries, pseudo-scientific theories falsely claimed that certain races are biologically inferior, justifying oppression and segregation, Morton (1839) argued that

The Caucasian race [...] is endowed with the largest brain, and therefore the highest intellectual endowments. The Mongolian is next in intellectual rank [...] while the African and the American races fall behind, their intellectual inferiority evidenced by their cranial capacity, moral character, and social advancement (p. 5).

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These ideas shaped laws and social structures that enforced inequality for generations (Fredrickson, 2002, pp. 10-13).

1.6.2. Racism in the Institution of Slavery

Racism was the foundation that kept slavery in place, shaping laws, economics, and social norms to justify oppression. Slave codes stripped enslaved people of their rights, making it illegal for them to learn, move freely, or own property. For instance, a 1905 law in Georgia stated that "It shall be unlawful for colored people to be buried on ground set apart or used for the burial of white persons"(Woodward, 1955, p. 15). This kind of segregation extended to schools, transportation, public facilities, and even cemeteries, reinforcing the idea that Black Americans were inferior and keeping racial divisions firmly in place (Woodward, 2002, p. 67).

Plantations thrived on this system, treating human beings as mere labor to maximize profit. Even after slavery ended, racial discrimination remained deeply rooted with Black Codes and Jim Crow laws ensuring that freedom did not mean equality. The idea of racial superiority was extremely widespread that it influenced every part of life, keeping power in the hands of those who had built their wealth on slavery (Berlin, 2003, pp. 120-125).

1.6.3. Racism in Slave Narratives

Formerly enslaved people used their narratives to reveal the racism that kept slavery in place. Frederick Douglass (1845) described how enslavers used racial ideology to keep black people in ignorance, believing that "education and slavery were incompatible" (p. 49). Harriet Jacobs (1861) showed how racism shaped lives of enslaved women, as they endured both physical oppression and the constant fear of being sexually abused. She wrote "the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others" (p. 86).

These stories did more than recount personal suffering; they directly challenged racist beliefs by proving the intelligence, resilience, and moral strength of black

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individuals. By sharing their stories, Douglass, Jacobs and many others broke down the false ideas that had been used to justify slavery, fighting back a system on oppression, making their voices powerful weapons to fight against racism (Andrews, 2004, pp. 40-43).

1.7. Conclusion

The history of slavery is a story of cruelty, resistance, and survival. It left scars that did not fade after emancipation, as racism continued shaping laws, opportunities, and everyday life. Slavery shaped the racial and cultural divisions that persist today. The system was designed to break people – to take away their sense of self. Yet, it never fully succeeded. Enslaved individuals preserved their sense of identity, hope, and resilience despite the systemic oppression designed to erase their autonomy and dignity.

Slave narratives provided a powerful response to this oppression, serving as both personal testimonies and political statements. These stories highlighted the resilience of enslaved individuals, and challenged the racist beliefs that sought to dehumanize them. They confronted the misconceptions that were used to justify slavery and exposed its harsh realities. Through their narratives, formerly enslaved individuals reclaimed their humanity, demonstrating that they were not mere victims of an oppressive system but resilient individuals who actively resisted and reclaimed their voices. By analyzing their structure, characterization, and symbolism, one can develop greater insights into how these narratives continue to be an essential part of history, literature, and the ongoing fight for justice.

Chapter Two:
Threads of Resistance:
Women's Lives and Silent
Rebellions in *The Help*

2.1. Introduction

The Help by Kathryn Stockett takes readers into the lives of women in 1960s Jackson, Mississippi, showing the hidden unfair rules that shape their relationships and identities. The novel follows Aibileen, Minny, and Skeeter, highlighting the shared experiences of Black and white women and the expectations placed on them. This chapter sets a deeper exploration of how each character deals with the harsh social norms of their time. Through Aibileen's quiet strength, Minny's bold resistance, and Skeeter's growing awareness, the story shows how power and discrimination show up in everyday life.

The focus then shifts to the complexity of relationships between women in the novel, looking at how the connections between Black women, white women, and the combination of black and white women, as both support and challenge the social system in Jackson. Finally, it explores the way that these women, even though they have different situations, resist the strict norms that limit them and define the nature of their relationships. By looking at both direct and quiet acts of resistance, this chapter shows the shared unnoticed similarities between these women, suggesting that the desire to regain one's voice goes beyond race and social class.

Through this analysis, we will see how the novel shows the complicated issues of race and gender in the American South, bringing attention to the lives of people who have often been ignored or silenced. At its heart, *The Help* is a story about women's strength, their bravery in facing injustice, and their shared fight for respect and dignity.

2.2. Summary of *The Help*

The novel is set in Jackson Mississippi, during the early 1960s, a time when racial tensions are high, and segregation is strictly enforced. The plot follows three main characters Aibileen, Minny, and Skeeter, as they become involved in a dangerous and potentially transformative writing project.

The story begins with Eugenia "Skeeter" going back to her hometown in Jackson Mississippi after graduating from Ole Miss College. Unlike her childhood friends, Skeeter always knew there was something wrong with their society, and she had a totally different opinion about the way they were treating their black maids. She built this rare perspective mainly because of her relationship with Constantine, the maid that raised her. However, her absence, especially that it was unexpected, and never explained by her mother. In a glimpse of an eye her beloved Constantine was gone, leaving her to deal with the devastating emotional trauma. Skeeter's mother, Charlotte keeps avoiding the topic of the disappearance of Constantine, saying she simply left without any warning.

Skeeter aspires to become a big writer; she gets a job at the local publishing house and writes her first series of articles about cleaning tips. However, she has no experience in doing chores, or housekeeping in general, that is why she decides to ask for help from Aibileen, the black maid who works for her friend Elizabeth Leefolt.

Aibileen is a kind, deeply observant maid, she spent her whole life raising white people's children, and she had enough love and patience for all of them, including Mae Mobley, Elizabeth's daughter who she always neglected. When Skeeter asks her to help with the cleaning columns, they start to build a special bond, and Skeeter gets this idea to write a book from the maids' perspective, and expose the realities of working for white families in the south.

At first, Aibileen was very hesitant about Skeeter's suggestion, yet, after witnessing the intensity of Hilly Holbrook's cruelty, she decides to take the next step and participate in Skeeter's book. Hilly, Skeeter's former friend, organized a campaign to install separate bathrooms for the help in all Jackson's white households, claiming that she was concerned about black people spreading diseases into their houses.

Minnie, Aibileen's best friend, gets fired from her job at Hilly's for false accusations, and gets blacklisted from all the jobs in Jackson. When she finally gets employed by this naïve, nice woman named Celia, she discovers her desperation to fit in with other women of the society, and her heartbreaking suffering from all the miscarriages she experienced.

Skeeter secretly begins to collect stories from Aibileen, Minnie, and other black maids, those maids were putting their lives on the line, by speaking up about their experiences. Skeeter's editor in New York got really impressed by her work, and showed interest in publishing the book, only if she was able to get more maids to share their accounts, in order to make the book more compelling.

Hilly becomes highly suspicious about Skeeter's activities, meanwhile, Skeeter was still trying to figure out what happened with her beloved Constantine, discovering that Charlotte actually fired her after a humiliating incident involving Constantine's daughter, Lulabelle. This shatters Skeeter's idealized image of her mother, and exposes the effect of social divisions even in her own home.

After months of secret meetings, and mounting tension, Skeeter finally completes the book, entitled *Help*. The final story added to the collection is Minnie's account of the "Terrible Awful," in which she baked a pie with her own feces and served it to Hilly as a revenge for her mistreatment. Minnie's story serves as a safeguard, as Hilly would never admit to it, allowing the book to be published anonymously.

When *Help* is released, it becomes the talk of the hour in Jackson, with people quickly recognizing themselves in the stories. However, Hilly kept denying that the book had anything to do with Jackson, because of her humiliation from the pie incident, and her fear that it would be exposed. At the same time, the maids who shared their stories on the book were anxious and afraid of what is hidden in the future as consequences of what they did.

Despite the book's success, Aibileen gets fired right after Hilly falsely accuses her of theft, yet, she leaves with strong feelings of courage and determination to pursue her writing. Minny decides to leave her husband Leroy after years of domestic violence, when she finally finds that support she always needed in Celia's house. Skeeter on the other hand, is offered her dream job in New York, says her goodbyes to Aibileen and Minny, leaving them feeling more empowered than ever.

The novel concludes with Aibileen reflecting on the impact of the book in changing the dynamics between white families and their Black maids. Though life remains difficult for them, Aibileen finds hope in the fact that their voices were finally heard.

2.3. Characterization

In *The Help*, Kathryn Stockett gives dimension to her characters in a way that reflects the effect of social and racial divides of the 1960s in Jackson, Mississippi on their lives. Each character has a different story to tell, yet, the interference of their stories is what creates a deeper understanding of the influence of these divides.

2.3.1. Aibileen Clark: the Power of Quiet Resistance

Aibileen is the soul of the story, a black maid in her fifties, who spent most of her life raising white people's children, seventeen children, only for them to break her heart more every time she watches one of them grow up, and carry the same racist attitudes she always faced. Her story begins right after she loses her only son, a traumatic event that was chasing her through every interaction she has. She is wise, spiritual, and steady, full of quiet strength and emotional depth that carries the reader into her world with tenderness. Her decision to share her story and life experiences was an act of defense, yet for her it was also the beginning of a healing journey, a shift from whispered thoughts to written words, proving that resistance can also be quiet and steady, like a river slowly carving its path through rock. As she reflects, "Truth. It feels

cool, like water washing over my sticky-hot body. Cooling a heat that's been burning me up all my life" (Stockett, 2009, p151).

2.3.2. Minny Jackson: The Sharp Edge of Survival

Minny, Aibileen's best friend, is a bold, strong person completely different from Aibileen's calm nature, she makes sure to speak out her mind no matter what the consequences are. This, often, puts her in trouble, which makes it nearly impossible for her to hold a job despite being one of the best cooks in Jackson. She is funny, sharp, and honest, yet beneath all that strength there is a lot of pain. Her life at home is hard, she suffered from poverty and domestic abuse, which she tries to hide with her sarcasm and tough attitude, she states: "I'd cry, if only I had the time to do it" (Stockett, 2009, p91). When she starts her job at Celia Foot's house, Minny slowly opens up, revealing a soft woman that craves safety and respect as much as she fears being neglected and shut down again.

2.3.3. Eugenia "Skeeter" Phelan: Between Two Worlds

Skeeter, a young white woman recently returned from college, who does not quite fit into the rigid society of Jackson. Unlike her peers, she is not interested in marriage, or playing the usual social roles, and she is especially bothered by the sudden disappearance of Constantine, the black maid who helped raise her. As she starts to see the truth of the world around her, her consciousness drives her to do something out of the box for someone with her background; she decides to write a book from the perspectives of the maids, exposing the realities of their lives working for white families in the South stating that: "I'm not writing about the help. I'm writing for the help" (Stockett, 2009, p 150). She is willing to learn, to be humbled, and to use her platform for something larger than herself, she had a bigger cause to defend, and she deeply believed in what she does, she said: "I was raised by a colored woman. We love them and they love us, but they can't even use the toilets in our houses" (Stockett, 2009, p121). This shows her pure intentions to share what needs to be shared, and embrace the beginning of a brighter future for those black

maids. Skeeter genuinely saw the maids as equivalent of her and all the white women in Jackson, she never considered them as inferiors.

Skeeter's role is not simple; she helped giving a voice to those maids. However, her privilege casts doubt on the purity of her intentions, her story is a story of self-awareness, facing hard truths, and slowly letting go of everything she once thought was normal.

2.3.4. Celia Foote and Hilly Holbrook: Femininity on Opposite Ends

Celia Foote and Hilly Holbrook could not be more different, yet both reflect the pressure southern society puts on women at that time. Their appearance, behavior, and belonging were in a constant state of judgment, Celia with her flashy tight dresses, and blond hair was considered as a sample of vulgarity, an outcast of the Jackson elite.

Sadly, under that bright smile and desperate attempt to fit in with society, there was a woman deeply wounded by the repeated miscarriages she was experiencing. People think she is just a silly woman trying to belong, but in fact she is simply very lonely, a loneliness she experienced for being rejected not by men, but by women, she clearly declared: "I just want to be in it. All y'all's lives... I'm lonely" (Stockett, 2009, p109). Her innocence is often mistaken for ignorance, yet she holds such an empathetical heart, which especially shows through her treatment to Minny, that makes her one of the novels surprising sources of kindness.

Hilly, on the other hand, is portrayed as the perfect image of a southern lady. Respected, well dressed, and powerful, but behind the smiles and polished image lies a dark cruelty. She highly supports racism without even needing to shout out loud. She quietly oppresses through subtle manipulation and social control, this clearly appears through many passages, she once said: "It's just plain dangerous. White people have to take precautions. Negroes carry different diseases than we do—everybody knows that" (Stockett, 2009, p.62). This passage is a part of her "Home Help Sanitation Initiative", it is when she decides to plan a whole event to

demand that every white household must have a separate bathroom for the colored maids. It describes how badly she wants to spread her racist ideology among all of her friends and the society in general by applying social pressure. Hilly's character is not built just to be mean. She is the reflection of a system that rewards those who play by its most harmful rules, the book shows how unfairness can hide behind a smile and nice manners.

2.3.5. Elizabeth Leefolt and Charlotte Phelan: The Everyday Face of Complicity

Elizabeth, Aibileen's employer, is neither a leader nor a reformer, she mostly blends into the background, making choices based on her fear of social judgment instead of what she truly believes. Her treatment to her daughter comes more from emotional distance rather than cruelty, shaped by the cold, harmful attitudes she has endured and dealt with her entire life. She moves through it all without protest, letting the harm unfold around her, and somehow, that quiet surrender feels even heavier. In one of the passages, she addresses Skeeter saying: "'She's just help, Skeeter,' Elizabeth says, like I'm stupid for asking why Aibileen doesn't use the inside bathroom" (Stockett, 2009, p43) this quote shows the complexity of this character. At first, she tries to diminish the value of Aibileen by saying she is just help, despite the fact that she is the one raising her child Mae Mobley. Then, she completely ignores Skeeter's question: "Why doesn't Aibileen use the bathroom inside the house?" (Stockett, 2009, p43). which shows her support of the racist rules of Hilly. Finally, she peruses by such an anxious tone "like I'm stupid" (Stockett, 2009, p43). reflecting her fear of being outcasted in case she did not follow the norms.

Charlotte Phelan, Skeeter's mother, is more complicated. At first, she seems like a typical southern mother, loyal to old fashioned values, worried about her status in the society, trying to make her daughter fit as well by pushing her to find a match and get married like her peers. But there are a few moments, especially those when she speaks about Constantine, we see a different side of her where she shows

vulnerability “Constantine was... more than just a maid to this family. She loved you, Eugenia. And you loved her. That’s why it hurt so much when she left” (Stockett, 2009, p.428). She turns out to be more flexible and softer than usual. Her inner conflict between loving Constantine and hurting her shows how torn she is. She symbolizes a generation that is caught between the comfort of clinging to the past and the need for a change.

2.3.6. Constantine : The Absent Presence

Constantine may not be present through most of the novel, but she always felt close through Skeeter’s writings, as if she was her inspiration, and one of the great reasons she realized the reality of life in Jackson. She is not some maid from Skeeter’s past, she actually helped shaping who she is. Constantine’s story, which we only discover in fragments, carries the pain of being erased, the pain of being loved, yet never fully protected, she suffered from others always trying to erase or reshape her truth “Lulabelle sat at my table, drinking my coffee, telling me she was too good to use the back door. And I told her—I said, ‘You will never set foot in this house again.’ But Constantine... she looked at me like I’d cut her throat” (Stockett, 2009, p32). this quote captures the intensity of Constantine’s pain. It shows the neglect of her motherhood, when her daughter Lulabelle comes to visit her and she is treated as an intruder to the household she has spent her entire life working for, the quote also focuses on the depth of her wound as Charlotte states: “she looked at me like I’d cut her throat” (Stockett, 2009, p32). In the novel, Constantine is a representation of all those maids whose hard work and pain were ignored, whose stories were left untold. Her absence leaves a powerful echo, showing that sometimes what is missing can speak the loudest.

2.3.7. The Anonymous Maids

Beyond the named characters in the novel, there are many maids who took the huge risk of speaking up. Their presence is quiet yet powerful, their voices carry

the weight of the story, they came through quiet moments, they came with shaky hands, nervous looks, and the constant fear of being caught. Together they form an image of what it means to be a mother, a worker, and a woman living in constant fear. They stand for all black women whose lives were shaped by service and voices kept silenced. By the time their stories are finally heard, their words ring with both pain and power.

2.3.8. Narrative Perspective and the Characterization of Jackson as a Social Space

In *The Help*, Jackson Mississippi is not just a setting of the story, in fact it serves as a character itself. Through the novel, the town shapes the way people behave, what they hide, and all the words they are afraid to say. It is a place where following the rules and the norms brings safety and comfort, however stepping out of the line brings trouble and chaos. This rigid order in Jackson quietly presses down on everyone who lives there.

As mentioned before, the story is told through the voices of Aibileen, Minny, and Skeeter, each narrator reveals a different side of Jackson Mississippi. For Aibileen, it was a place filled with grief and caution, where every step must be calculated. Minny sees it as a minefield of danger and insults, but also a place where she gets to be bold and sharp despite her fears. Skeeter sees the town as a nostalgic place at first, yet later on, it starts to give her a sense of discomfort, and its beauty slowly fades as she begins to discover its truths.

Through these three women's narrations of the story from different perspectives, everyday casual places like kitchens, churches, and bathroom scarry a deeper meaning. Each space reflects the characters' emotions and the roles society forces them to play no matter how they feel about it. Through this, Jackson both holds and shapes the story, as if it is a character itself. The town influences the characters' actions, fears, and even their paths towards change.

2.4. Women Relationships in *The Help*: Between Intimacy and Oppression

In a society built on injustice, women's relationships are never purely personal, they are shaped by the pressure of the rules society amplifies on each one of them, by the expectations placed on them by race, class, and gender. Katheryn Sockett's *The Help* presents a complex network of female relationships, where each bond carries the weight of societal norms.

2.4.1. Black/Black Women Relationships

In *The Help*, the friendships between Black women are built on common pain, struggle, and strength. These women share a bond of similar circumstances, they live in a world that refuses to give them any chance to speak up for themselves, a world that does not even listen to them, thus they rely on each other in quiet, powerful ways. Their friendships are not flashy or dramatic, but they are full of deep support and understanding. There are many passages in the book that stand for the strength of those women's relationships, Aibileen said "we stand there in the kitchen, holding on to each other. I don't say anything else. I just hug her tight. I don't let go." (Stockett,2009 p. 552)

Aibileen and Minny's friendship reflects this sisterhood, their bond, though rooted in a history of pain, is one of the few places where honesty can exist freely. They do not need big words to connect, yet all they need is simply small looks, jokes, sarcasm, and moments of silence. Aibileen is there whenever Minny needs to let out her anger, and express her thoughts, and Minny is also therefor Aibileen whenever she feels that overwhelming sadness. Aibileen mentioned in a beautiful description of their interactions: "We stand there in the kitchen, holding on to each other. I don't say anything else. I just hug her tight. I don't let go" (Stockett, 2009, p.522). Even though these two are not capable of fixing each other's problems, they make sure to stay present for one another, and that's what helps them survive.

These women live under a great amount of pressure, through their whole life, all that they have learned was to stay quiet, to be careful, and to avoid drawing attention under any circumstances. For them, keeping their jobs and their safety at the same time was a matter that only the white families they work for can decide, Yule May is one of those black maids who have lived the terror of being fired, and sent to jail “Hilly said if I didn’t apologize, she’d press charges. [...] Now I got four years in prison. Four years for a damn nickel ring. My boys ain’t got no mama, no money for school. And I’m stuck in here till I rot” (Stockett, 2009, p.390). Speaking up can actually cost them everything, but their strength is never gone, it is just quiet and hidden. The fact that some of the maids decide to speak up and tell their stories to Skeeter to share them on her book, was mainly because they were tired of being afraid, and they were finally ready to let go of their fear and reveal their bravery. That decision brings them closer together in a new way, through courage and hope, which shows the power of solidarity in their relationships.

Even family relationships among black women carry the same mix of fear and love. Aibileen learned from her mother and grandmother how to care for others and stay strong, not only for the children she helps raising, but for all of her friends like Minny, and she makes sure to pass that on to her community as well. Minny, while tough on the outside, always thinks about ways to protect her daughters “I look at my kids and I think... I ain’t never letting nobody knock on they door in the middle of the night. Never. And then I think... how I’m gon’ stop it?” (Stockett, 2009, p.400). She teaches them how to stay strong in a hard world, and she does that through sharing her food recipes, and life pieces of advice. These women find ways to support one another. Minny, known for her outspoken nature, reveals her vulnerability when she says, “I cry and cry... for the first time in years, I cry for myself” (Stockett, 2011, p.370). This highlights the emotional toll of their experiences and the importance of their mutual understanding. These connections stretch across years and generations, rooted in the belief that perhaps, one day, things will be better, even if only slightly.

The love between these women is not soft at all times, it is strong, heavy, and worn down by life. But it lasts through kitchen talks, bus rides, and stolen laughs. These Black women hold each other up. Their friendships are a quiet kind of resistance, a resistance that is soft, yet powerful.

2.4.2. White/White Women Relationships

In *The Help*, the relationships between white women are quite different from those between black women, they are not built on survival, they are rather built on appearances and social status. These women are expected to act like perfect 'Southern ladies', hosting garden parties and joining charity groups as Skeeter observes, "The Junior League is not just a social club. It's a citadel of power" (Stockett, p. 104). However, behind this polite, polished image of the perfect ladies of the society, there is a strict, controlling system. Their friendships are usually based on fitting in and following the rules, without focusing on real emotional connection. These women are trapped in a world that looks perfect on the outside, but it is the pressure that they put on each other that keeps them there, not men.

This is especially clear in the friendship between Skeeter, Hilly, and Elizabeth. They were childhood friends, but as they grew up into adults, their relationship becomes full of tension. Hilly acts like the boss of the group, she orders everyone around, and walks with extreme ego, which she created for herself as a shield of protection from the society that could harm her if she did not fit in. She uses politeness and social pressure to control others. Elizabeth follows Hilly's lead, even when it goes against what she really feels, because she is scared of being left out or judged. Their friendship is based on fear and pressure, not because they chose to be close to each other, and open up about their feeling to build an actual bond. They act like friends because that is what society expects, not because they are truly connected. "We smile and nod and pretend to care about each other's children, but really, we're just waiting for our turn to talk. Waiting to prove we're still the

prettiest, the happiest, the best” (Stockett, 2009, p118). This passage is taken from Skeeter's internal monologue, and it reflects the white women's relationships ideology.

Skeeter, meanwhile, finds herself drifting from both of them, because she starts to question the realities of her society, which makes a great change in the way she sees her friends, not that she does not love them anymore, but rather because she does not exactly support their mindset, and what they live for. She starts asking questions, noticing injustices, and no longer fits into the world they live in. By standing up for what she believes in, she becomes an outsider, and she slowly lost their friendship, When Skeeter questions Hilly's racist bathroom initiative, Hilly snaps: “All these houses they're building without maid's quarters? It's just plain dangerous. Everybody knows they carry different kinds of diseases than we do” (Stockett, 2011, p.54). She was ignored, laughed at, and even abandoned. It certainly hurts, but it also helps her to move forward to what she really is, and what she wants to give to the society.

The pressure on white women in the book is quiet but strong. It tells them what to wear, how to act, and to stay silent even if they do not agree on the context. They are taught to please their husbands, be obedient and polished, and impress their friends by the most luxurious social events. Even when they are cruel, it often comes from their deep sense of, fear of not fitting in, of being called “too much” or “not enough.”

This also shows up in Skeeter's relationship with her mother, Charlotte. Charlotte loves Skeeter, but she wants her to succeed in the way society approves of, she wants her to get married, have kids, and let go of her rebellious attitude. When Skeeter resists traditional expectations, Charlotte warns her: “No man will ever love you if you don't learn how to cook!” (Stockett, 2009, p. 71). Moreover, when she starts writing and breaking rules, her mother disapproves and panics, she gets scared that her daughter and herself will become outcasts of the society, not out

of hate towards Skeeter, nor disapproval on her actions because she disagrees, but out of fear for what could happen to her daughter in such a strict world.

Celia Foote's story is another example. She desperately wanted to be friends with women like Hilly and Elizabeth, she wants to fit in, but they keep rejecting her, and ignoring her no matter how hard she tries. Even though she is such a kind and open person, they see her as "different", and leave her out of their social group. Hilly's disdain is clear: "I do not socialize with the help. And neither should you" (Stockett, p. 222). She becomes invisible to them, proof of how unforgiving it can be.

In *The Help*, white women's friendships look nice on the outside, but are often full of competition, pressure, and fear. Their friendships may appear polished and proper, but they are often restricted by appearance, insecurity, and the desperation to fit in. It is not just men or tradition that keep these women trapped, it is also each other. Trying to seem perfect all the time comes at a high cost, and many of these women suffer silently because of it.

2.4.3. Black/White Women Relationships

The relationships between Black and white women in *The Help* are the most emotional and complicated of all. They are built on daily acts of care, but power never leaves the room. These connections are shaped by a painful history that is never far away, even if they felt warm for a glimpse. Love exists, but it is tangled with silence. Trust appears, but it is mixed with fear. These women share homes, raise children together, and sometimes even share parts of their hearts. However, they never truly live in the same world.

The bond between Aibileen and Mae Mobley is filled with a mixture of sweetness and sadness. Aibileen gives endless love to a child who is not hers who may one day forget her. In a home where she is treated as less than human, Aibileen teaches Mae Mobley kindness and self-worth: "You is kind. You is smart. You is important" (Stockett, 2009, p. 443). Their relationship is gentle and pure, but also incredibly fragile. Mae Mobley's love cannot protect Aibileen, and Aibileen cannot stop Mae Mobley from growing up to be like her mother. Their connection lives in a bubble that is bound to burst.

Then, there is Minny and Celia Foote, a relationship that begins in confusion and grows into a bond closer to equality. Celia, with a naïve and isolated nature, treats Minny with unexpected decency, she does not give harsh commands or lay down firm expectation like typical employers; she simply tries to make an effort to build a friendship-like atmosphere with her maid, which is a first in Jackson. For Minny, as a person who was used to being mistreated and misunderstood, experiencing this shift softens her defenses. It is true that Celia is kind, and she acts with such consideration, yet she is still the employer, and even if Minny may trust her, she can never forget the fact that she cleans her floors and nothing will change that fact. When Celia loses her baby, Minny comforts her, and for a moment, the barriers between them seem to dissolve. Yet Minny never forgets her place: "I may be a maid, but I ain't no slave" (p. 234). Their bond is one of the few where Black and white women begin to meet as equals, but even then, unspoken limits remain.

Skeeter and Aibileen's connection begin with an alliance, born of mutual necessity rather than genuine emotional connection. Skeeter encourages Aibileen to trust her and tell her stories about all the experiences she had within the white households. On the other hand, Aibileen was frightened by Skeeter's demand, yet she finds it such a great opportunity for her voice to be finally heard. For Aibileen, the collaboration awakens a dangerous hope, one she articulates with piercing clarity: "All I'm saying is, kindness don't have no boundaries. Ain't that the whole point?" (Stockett, 2009, p.256).

At first, there was no emotional connection between the two, nor any kind of friendship, it was merely a deal, Skeeter needed her narratives to add depth to her book, and Aibileen found the opportunity to tell the world her story. However, as trust slowly starts to build, and both showed their vulnerability, Skeeter begins to see Aibileen as an actual person, and not just a maid. Aibileen starts to believe that someone might actually listen, yet, their bond is never equal. Skeeter has the freedom to leave Jackson and continue to build her career, as for Aibileen it was never an option for her to leave. In fact, the book they write together changes Skeeter's life for the better, while it puts Aibileen's life at risk. That difference always lingers, even in their most honest moments. Skeeter said: "And I realize: The book didn't change what's in their hearts. But it changed what's in mine. And hers. And that's enough to kill you, or save you, or both" (Stockett, 2009, p.522).

The relationships between black and white women in *The Help* are constantly pulled between affection and oppression. They show us that love can exist without justice, that kindness does not erase inequality. These women may laugh together, cry together, even trust each other in certain moments, but the society they live in does not allow true balance. One comment, one choice, can break everything, a truth the black maids all know too well. Their survival depends on navigating the demands of white women who hold control over their future, safety, and dignity. Even Skeeter, who positions herself as an advocate, cannot fully escape her role in this system. The constant danger becomes clear when Aibileen warns:

We're scared we'll be fired if we talk. Or worse. Ain't no law saying they can't drag you out your house in the middle of the night, beat you till your face look like a plum forgot its wrinkles. Ain't no law saying they can't pour gasoline at your door, light a match, ask questions later (Stockett, 2009, p.151).

In this moment, Aibileen highlights the shocking nature of these hidden injustices, the danger of truth-telling, and the weight of trust. This passage shows the cruelty of those Jim Crow Mississippi laws, those laws were far from being just,

or even giving a slight decency for the lives of those black maids. Aibileen focuses on the fact that speaking up would put her life at great risk, as no law prevents white people from punishing, hurting, or killing black workers.

Even in these strained and limited social spaces, there are always brief moments where real connection and understanding appear. These moments do not tear down the system, but they do show that the lines between people are not as strong as they seem. As Skeeter says in *The Help*, “We are just two people. Not that much separates us. Not nearly as much as I’d thought” (Stockett, 2009, p. 424). Even small acts of seeing each other as human beings can quietly push back against the rules that keep people apart.

In *The Help*, the relationships between women show the hidden struggles and unspoken tensions of life in Jackson Mississippi. Whether they are Black women, white women, or women from different races, their connections are shaped by systems that control them, systems that make them compete with each other or force them to play roles they never chose. But even in these difficult situations, moments of care and support appear, like small acts of quiet resistance. These women may be stuck in strict social rules, but through their friendships, they create small pockets of comfort and understanding. These bonds reveal a powerful truth, the truth that proves that relationships can both keep people trapped and help them fight back against oppression, hinting at the possibility of change.

2.5. Standing Against the Norms

In the rigid social landscape of Jackson, going against the rules is such a risky act, especially for women, it can lead to outcast or even death. However, in *The Help*, the writer shows that both Black and white women find ways to quietly resist, and step out of the box. Whether it is through sharing secret stories, making brave choices, or taking small but bold actions, they fight back against the roles society forces on them, to finally raise their voices. It is incredible how these women stand up to the rules in subtle yet powerful ways. Even though they have different levels

of power, they remain connected by a shared desire to fight back and reach for a better future.

2.5.1. Black Women: Strength in Silence

For the Black women in *The Help*, standing up for themselves is not always defined as a loud, violent action, it is often quiet and subtle. Aibileen starts her small acts of defiance with Mae Mobley, telling the little girl she is kind, smart, and important. She does this to fight against the way Mae Mobley is ignored and put down at home. Each kind word Aibileen speaks is like planting a seed of hope, a tiny push against the unfair rules that keep her unseen, she states:

I want to yell so loud that Baby Girl can hear me that dirty ain't a color, disease ain't the negro side of town. I want to stop that moment from coming—and it come in every white child's life—when they start to think that colored folks ain't as good as whites (Stockett, 2009, p.220).

This is Aibileen's inner thought as she reflects on the racism Mae Mobley will inevitably absorb as she grows up in 1960s Mississippi, Aibileen knows that despite her love and care, society will teach Mae Mobley to see Black people as inferior.

Aibileen's words show how upset she is about the unfairness she cannot completely protect Mae Mobley from. But even in such a harsh world, she tries to teach Mae Mobley to be kind and believe in herself. It is her way of pushing back against the rules that keep them down. Aibileen's bravest act is telling her story to Skeeter. By doing this, she risks losing her job, her safety, and even her friends, just to speak a truth that others are too afraid to say.

Minnie's way of fighting back is louder and riskier and bolder. She refuses to be treated badly or humiliated, and she makes sure to stand up for herself using her sharp words no matter how bad was the danger. Even after years of Hilly's abuse and cruelty, Minny finally takes control by using the pie incident to get back at her.

In that moment, she shows that she still has power, even in a world that tries to take it from her.

Towards the end of the novel, after the book is published, Jackson's white women are desperate to figure out which maids shared their stories. Minny thinks about how Hilly, who once controlled and bullied her, is now scared of her because of the pie incident. The chocolate pie Minny had made for Hilly with an extra special ingredient which is her own feces. She served the cake to Hilly, and watched her eat it while she enjoyed her revenge. Minny called that pie the "Terrible Awful." Minnie states: "All I know is, I ain't saying it's true and I ain't saying it ain't, but Hilly Holbrook ain't called me no n** to my face since the Terrible Awful" (Stockett, 2009, p.256). Even though Hilly suspects Minny was involved in the book, she is too afraid to treat her badly now. The fear of being exposed and the shame of the pie give Minny a rare sense of power over Hilly.

Black women in *The Help* do not protest loudly or openly. Instead, they resist quietly every day through cooking, cleaning, and sharing stories. Constantine refuses to let Skeeter's mother erase her from her own daughter's life, leaving behind her beloved caramel cake as a final message. Louvenia protested through grief after her son is blinded for using a white bathroom: "I ain't cleaning no more toilets... I'm done" (Stockett, 2009, p.522), and the Black maids who laugh among themselves about Hilly's ridiculous "Home Help Sanitation Initiative". Their actions might seem ordinary, but they are actually powerful, as Aibileen says: "Stories are like seeds... They take root inside you and grow" (Stockett, 2009, p.492). Stories for them are a way of refusing to be invisible, of showing that they are more than just "the help."

2.5.2. White Women: Defying Expectations

For the white women in *The Help*, going against the rules means risking everything, including their friendships, reputation, and even family. Skeeter starts to rebel by asking questions that others are too scared to ask. Writing the book is her way of

fighting back, even though it could ruin her future, she states: "I am terrified that I have just ruined my life. But then I think, No. This is the way to really live" (Stockett, 2009, p.355). Her privilege protects her in some ways, but it also leaves her feeling alone, separated from her friends and mother. Skeeter's rebellion is not loud as well, but it changes a lot of principles and taboos. She uses her position to help Black maids share their stories, doing what most white women in Jackson would never dare to do.

Celia Foote does not mean to rebel, but she does it anyway. By treating Minny with kindness and respect, she breaks the unspoken rules of her social circle when she asks Minny to join her table: "Minny, I know you're not supposed to eat at the same table as me. But it's just so lonely out here" (Stockett, 2009, p.109). Hilly and Elizabeth reject her, not just because they think she is tacky, but because she does not see Minny as just "the help." Celia wants to be friends with Minny, not because she is trying to make a statement, but because she genuinely cares. Even though she is a bit naïve, her actions quietly challenge the racist rules about how white women are supposed to treat Black women.

Even Skeeter's mother Charlotte, shows her own kind of bravery, and stands against the norms in her unique way. At first, she is all about keeping up appearances and doing what is proper for the society, she pushed her daughter Skeeter supper hard to make her fit in the standards. However, in the end of the novel she defends Skeeter's choice to write the book, standing up to her friends and showing a side of herself that Skeeter did never expect, as she states "You are a writer. And I am proud of you" (Stockett, 2009, p.89). In that moment, she chooses to support her daughter instead of following the rules of Southern society.

In *The Help*, white women's resistance is also not loud or openly political, it is more about personal choices, Skeeter said "All my life I'd been told what to believe about politics, coloreds, being a girl. But with Constantine's thumb pressed in my hand, I realized I actually had a choice in what I could think" (Stockett, 2009,

p.89). Every small act, whether it is writing a critical book from the society's point of view, showing kindness, or standing up to someone, starts to challenge the world they have always known. These actions may seem minor, but they slowly start to change the unfair rules they have always followed, slowly paving the way for change.

2.5.3. Common Points of Resistance: Finding a Common Ground

Despite their different experiences, both Black and white women in *The Help* have moments of defiance that connect them. Their resistance is often small, quiet, and personal brave acts done in secret, away from the public eye.

Aibileen and Skeeter both use storytelling as a way to fight back. Aibileen puts everything on the line to share her story in the book, and she even took part in helping Skeeter convince other maids to participate by sharing their stories as well, while Skeeter risks her reputation to make sure those stories are heard. Aibileen wants justice for her community, while Skeeter is looking for a meaning in her life. Even though they have different reasons, their work together becomes a way to stand up against the silence and rules in Jackson.

Minnie and Celia also connect through their acts of resistance. Minny is treated badly because she is Black, and Celia is looked down on because she does not fit in the standards of the society. Even though they are completely different, they both suffer under Hilly and struggle in a society that tries to diminish them. Their friendship becomes a safe space where they can be themselves and feel understood away from all rules and restrictions.

Charlotte Phelan's choice to stand up for Skeeter reveals a link between her and Aibileen. Both women are trying to protect the next generation in their own ways, Aibileen by teaching Mae Mobley kindness, and to believe in herself, and Charlotte by defending Skeeter's right to speak out. Even though they go about it differently, both are driven by the same desire to keep their loved ones safe from a world that tries to control them.

These small acts of resistance show that even women from different backgrounds can find common ground. While racial divisions are still strong, these moments of shared defiance reveal that deep down, they all want the same outcome of getting the respect they deserve, full control over their lives, and to be seen for who they really are. These connections might not tear down the unfair system, but they do create small openings, little glimpses of hope for change.

2.6. Conclusion

In *The Help*, Kathryn Stockett shows how the lives of Black and white women are connected by the unfair rules of race, class, and gender. The story explores how these women's lives are closely linked, yet, divided at the same time by the effect of these rules, showing the connections and the walls between them. By focusing on the stories of Aibileen, Minny, Skeeter, and others, the analysis shows how each woman deals with a world that tries to control them through racism, social expectations, or the pressure to fit in.

Whether they resist openly or quietly, all these women are seeking respect and a sense of worth. Despite the differences of race and class, their struggles are quite similar, showing that even in a divided society, the desire to be heard and to have control over their own lives is such a common desire.

General Conclusion

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Slave narratives have a unique touch of giving voice to the silenced ones, revealing hidden strength, courage, and humanity, telling stories that deliver the reality of those who have endured unimaginable circumstances in their path for freedom. The help by Catheryn Stockett shows how race and gender status effect both black and white women's lives in Jackson Mississippi in the 1960s, only in different ways, yet, all of them have concerns to live with. this research has shown how these women received pain despite their skin color or social class, a pain that is caused by division, and the hope for a chance to connect with each other.

Aibileen, Minny, and the other Black maids represent more than individual figures, they are living testaments to a history of systemic dehumanization. Yet, they are symbols of strength, resilience, and quiet rebellion. Their experiences are shaped by the brutal legacies of slavery and Jim Crow, which still effects their daily lives. At the same time, the novel's portrayal of White women such as Skeeter, Hilly, and Celia highlights aspects of complicity and resistance, revealing how race and gender come together in complicated ways. This portrayal helps readers see how deeply racial and gender roles affect people's lives.

Skeeter's growing friendship with the maids shows how being women can bring them together despite the social differences. However, the division amplified by racism is always an obstacle for that kind of friendships to grow, it simply limits any possibility for genuine equality. Their connection remains fragile despite the moments they share talking and laughing, proving that the deep-rooted prejudice makes true equality difficult, or almost impossible. This struggle reflects their reality of daily challenges, reminding us that the fight for racial and gender justice is a complicated task, that is surely not easy to achieve.

The novel portrays female alliance as a powerful yet complicated force. It can either stand up against any injustice, or easily get weakened by the same social divisions it tries to break down. It acknowledges both the strength and the

General Conclusion

vulnerability of these connections, suggesting that empathy, and sharing stories can actually start a huge shift, even when full true equality remains out of reach.

These findings reveal the double-sided reality of women in the novel, being divided by color, but united by gender, by their experiences as women. Despite facing ongoing barriers there are always moments of hope, which takes us back to the core of this research, focusing on the tension between division and connection, oppression and resilience.

This work contributes to a deeper understanding of how literature can reflect and question social realities. It focuses on the act of giving the chance to hear the voices of those who have been neglected and shut down, while challenging the readers to confront uncomfortable truths. Yet, it is only a step in a much larger conversation.

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