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**Female Empowerment in *The Help* by Katheryn
Stockett**

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to:

My dearest parents whose love, affection and encouragement make me able to get such success.

My lovely sisters Sihem and Fouzia and my beloved brothers Rabeih and Chiheb Eddin.

My grandparents Djamaa and Mohammed Who helped me in every moment.

My cousins Abd Arahmen, Zaid, Diao Elhak, Hidaya, Alaa eldjanna and Sounia.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the theme of female empowerment in Kathryn Stockett's *the Help*. The study sheds the light on the importance of women solidarity and sisterhood in facing the triple jeopardy of racism, sexism, and classism. The aim of this study is twofold. First, it examines how racism, sexism, and classism affect the life of women and what does it mean to be oppressed as a woman. Second, the study focuses on how women can support and care for each other to change their position in the society. The two approaches that are used to conduct this study are feminist and womanist approaches. The implementation of these approaches describes woman's unity in fighting oppression, and challenging the patriarchal. This thesis finds out how female empowerment can change a misfortune and can help women to voice their reality.

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Introduction

African American females were subjected to racism due to their blackness. Whites perceived blacks as dirty, thieves, and liars and this complicated black female's life. Due to these racist stereotypes, the separation between two races was legalized in America through the enactment of various laws like the Jim Crow Law which declares the separation between the two races in every single place.

The racism that black women faced halted them from making any progress in their lives especially in the employment sector. They found themselves work as maids for whites' families: cleaning, cooking and raising whites' babies with minimum wages and the worst is being maltreated and humiliated by the white housewives. Black females continued to be discriminated because of their sex 'females', they were targeted and brutally violated by the male members of their own families, especially the 'fathers and husbands'.

African American women could not tolerate such marginalization and discrimination. Hence, they turned to each other thinking and searching for solutions to change the harsh conditions that affected every single aspect in their lives. Black females were oppressed because of their race, sex, and class. They were dehumanized at the hands of white race. They were oppressed at the hands of their own fathers and husbands. Furthermore, they were exploited in the work place as maids.

Kathryn Stockett, a white American writer, depicts in her work, *the Help* (2009), the suffering of black females in Jackson Mississippi who are abused for no particular valid reason just because they were born black. Stockett in her novel, *the Help*, promotes female empowerment and examines how sisterhood can help women to transcend their situations of oppression and achieve their rights.

The present study examines the theme of female empowerment in *the Help*. The study also sheds the light on the issues of racism, sexism and classism that black females experience in whites' society and male surrounding. The current study attempts to solve the following questions: what are the different forms of suffering that black women faced in Mississippi? How are they treated as blacks, females and maids? How black females challenge the barriers and difficulties and speak aloud about their reality? In other word, how they surpass their fears and silence? What makes a white women help black females to break their silence and express their suffering?

Written by a white American writer and tackling African American sufferings as the central theme, *The Help*, by Kathryn Stockett, has garnered the attention of both the white and the black audiences. Stockett depicts the intersection of racist, sexist, and classist oppression that the black women face, and the relationship of African American women with each other and their struggle for equal rights. For that the writer represents different characters with different social status to explain clearly the difference to be white and black and to be female and male.

Kathryn Stockett in her work, *the Help*, tackled the issue of racism and the theme of female empowerment. This theme has been targeted by many Scholars. Patricia Hill Collins in her book, *Black Feminist Thoughts: Knowledge, Consciousness and Political of Empowerment*, tackles the issue of racism and sexism that black female faced. In relation to Kathryn's study, Collins depicts the suffering that black women get because of being black and female. Collins argues that whatever the case of the black female, she has to fight and resist for her rights. In an article entitled *Kathryn Stockett is not my Sister and I am not her Help*, Duchess Harris discusses the content of the novel. He assumes that *the Help* is better if it is written in the voice of black maids. According to her, the white narrator "Skeeter" uses stories of the black domestic maids in the name

of sister- hood to launch her own career and then leave them behind. This study aims to examine to what extent Stockett has succeeded in voicing Black females' concerns from the perspective of a white female writer.

In analyzing this novel, two literary approaches are implemented: the first one is feminism and the second one is womanism. These two approaches are used to express women's collaboration regardless of their color to come out from the suffering they face due to racism, sexism, and classism. Furthermore, these two approaches are crucial to analyze women's fighting path to change the stereotypical images about the woman and to give her the opportunities to have place in society and win back her rights.

This current study is divided into three chapters. The first chapter, which is a theoretical one, tackles the historical context of African American people in general. Moreover, the first chapter provides a brief overview of the representation of African Americans, especially women, in literature. Finally, the chapter provides the theoretical framework introducing the approaches employed to examine the case study.

The second chapter is a practical one. It depicts the race, classism, and gender discrimination in *The Help*. The chapter aims to shed light on how the black female is mistreated by whites, how she works and lives in harsh conditions and how she is abused by the black man.

The third chapter treats the theme of female empowerment through *The Help*. It is divided into two sections. The first one is about female solidarity in the face of racism, they gathered to fight the racist and being equally treated as whites. The second section is about the power of sisterhood in the face of sexism, this section explains women's goal and desire to be represented at the same rank with men.

Kathryn Stockett as an American novelist depicts the life of black females which is described as miserable one. Moreover, Stockett speaks about female empowerment

and how these women in *the Help* get power from their bad situation which they faced as maids in white's houses and how they challenge the white society for calling for their rights by also defying the obstacles of their personal life. Stockett's main focus in *The Help* is female empowerment. Through the novel, Kathryn speaks about racism that black women experienced as being both black and maids. However, these brave females do not accept such prejudices and decide to break their silence by seeking female solidarity to fight the oppression they face.

Chapter One: the Representation of African American Women in Literature

The first chapter is a theoretical one which focuses on African American literature and how it becomes a tool to make their voice heard. Women in general were marginalized in their society for that they gathered under the idea of feminism hoping for the equality. Black women due to their double oppression see feminism as a white concept, they established black feminism to shed the lights on their suffering as black women. Later on, womanism was introduced as a wide term.

I.1. African Americans: A Historical Context

African Americans are one of the ethnic groups in United States who come from African ancestry, also they are people who were brought to America by force to work in the New World as slaves. Their life as black was hard but as slaves was even harder. Slaves were working on agriculture and plantation of tobacco and cotton, they were also separated from their wives, and the children were taken from their mothers, no consideration was given to slaves in cultural domain. Housing, food and clothes were provided in extremely poor quality. Black slaves were excluded from education because it was illegal to let black person to read or to write. Slaves were not considered as citizens. So that blacks were inferior because of their blackness and the supremacy was for white people who treated blacks badly because of their color. William Gooch, the governor of Virginia, states “make the free Negro sensible that a distinction out to be made between their off spring and the decent of Englishmen with who they are never to be account equal” (qtd. in Andrea 4-5). According to Gooch, black people whatever their situation, they had to know that they are not like white people which means they are not treated equally.

The color is the element that determines how people should be treated, but blacks refused their situation and started resisting against the bondage using different

ways like escaping from their lords and also killing them. Moreover, they started moving to the North where the life was to some extent different. This move caused the beginning of the Civil War between the South and the North and many blacks volunteered to fight for the union, but in fact their fighting was for liberating themselves. They started establishing schools and their own churches but it did not last for long time because the South reacted and gained their power again and excluded the blacks from voting and destroyed what they built (Dickson 218). In addition to that they established the Jim Crow Law that separated the blacks from the whites in public spaces, like restaurants, hospitals and also the buses. The racist acts that were practiced by whites toward blacks were many. For example, the arrestment of Rosa Park who refused to give up her seat to the white passenger led to the outburst of Civil Right movement. Due to this oppression and discrimination of blacks, a great migration took place in 1910 and blacks gathered in New York in Harlem where they presented and promoted their culture and art. African American people as slaves made contribution to raise the American economy and their history is considered as part of American history (qtd. in Sobhi).

I.2. African American Literature: A Survey

African American people, due to the difficulties they have faced in America, searched for ways to free themselves and to make their voice heard and also to annihilate these difficulties and the discrimination that they have faced because of their blackness. Many of black people turned to writings in order to depict their suffering in America.

Black people established their own literature known as African American Literature. It becomes a tool to stand against the oppression and the racism. Looking for the equality becomes an essential reason that led to the development of African

American Literature. Moreover, due to the issue of race; the blacks were obliged to use writings to prove themselves in the American society. African American Literature emerged and developed through different literary periods. The first period is the colonial period (1746-1800), the literature at this period represented the miserable life of slaves; also slaves described their lives in Africa before slavery. The second period is the antebellum period (1800-1856) which is about slave narratives where many of black people discussed their experiences as slaves. Frederik Douglas became the most prominent figure of this period, he depicted the suffering of slaves and how they were badly punished by their masters for no reason. Such punishments amounted to killing in many times. Black women also took their chance in this period to fight against slavery with men. The best example is Terry Lucy who freed herself and became a storyteller and poet. The third period is 'the reconstruction period' where black writers focused on slavery as the major theme in their writings. It is also the era where great emphasis was placed on education, many schools were built for blacks to teach them reading and writing. It was a period that focused on the production of literary works like stories, poems, and sermons that call for equality (Sobhi 10).

The next period which marks the true beginning of African American Literature is the Harlem Renaissance. Harlem Renaissance (1900-1940) is a literary and cultural movement. Its center was Harlem in New York where black gathered and demanded for their rights through different artistic production. This period is considered as a golden Age of African American literature, Jessie Smith and Gayal Jones state: "that it is a movement in music, arts, literature and politics from the early 1900s to 1940s, emphasized the importance of freedom, political, economic, social and artistic for African American"(qtd. in Sobhi 163). According to them, it is a period where blues and jazz music flourished. African American wrote about their origins and called for

equality. The other period is The Protest Era (1940-1956) from its name we can understand that it is the era where black stood against racism and also many writers faced a lot of difficulties in obtaining funds to develop their writings. The last period is 'the Contemporary Period' (1960 to present); here African American literature has been represented in United States Universities. It is a period where the voice of black women raised, among the most prominent figures: Maya Angelo and Toni Morrison who tackled the issue of racism and sexism. According to Moody Turner, these female authors, among others, did not only tackle their situation as black but also as a female because the suffering did not only happen because of white people; it happened within the same race (qtd. in Sobhi 1).

Through her poems and novels, Maya Angelou, the prominent African American author, examined the theme of racism especially the acts of white people towards blacks; she examined the theme of slavery in different tones and emotions like anger, sadness, guilt and so on. In her poem "My Guilt" she describes the memory of slavery era in America. In other Angelou's poems about slavery, she expressed the power of slavery and the slaves' strength for survival and freedom, also she described women as slaves and how they dealt with the fact that they could not protect their children and even themselves from the bad treatment of their masters (Resky 2).

Maya Angelou in her poems also depicts the suffering of African American people from discrimination in addition to that the segregation laws that made the blacks lose their rights as humans and as citizens. In one of her poems entitled "Harlem Hopscotch" she writes about the inequality showed between blacks and whites. She describes in her poem that they did not do anything bad because they are different they are not socially welcomed (Resky 2).

African American Literature represented the suffering of African American people. It represents how they were punished and oppressed by producing short stories, poems, storytelling and novels.

I.3. The Representation of Black Women in African American and American Literatures

African American women faced difficulties in their life and such sufferings were doubled because they were women and also they were black. The suffering of black women started when they came to America for the first time as slaves. They worked as men in agriculture and harvesting of cotton and tobacco. African American women's life was full of misfortunes because they were abused by their masters but they endured and resisted against this terrible life for their children and they did their best to make their children get a better life.

The life of African American women has been portrayed in both African American Literature and American Literature by many writers and these writers shed the light on many phases of black women's life from the period of slavery to the present. Morrison in her works discussed the issues that African American female faced in America. To be a woman and black, the suffering was doubled by whites' supremacy and black men's power and authority.

In her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Morrison addresses the issue of racism and beauty standards through the figure of Pecola Breedlove, the girl who relates the existence of human only by having blue eyes and blond hair. People give more importance to physical character. The protagonist Pecola represents the African American female who has experienced the racism by whites and that appears clearly when she is in the supermarket and Sir Yacobowski, a white immigrant who owns the neighborhood candy store, refuses to take money from her hand, avoiding touching her.

In the *Bluest Eye*, the narrator recounts, “she holds money toward him, He hesitates, not wanting to touch her hand. She does not know how to move the finger of her right hand from the display counter or how to get the coins out of her left hand. Finally he reaches over and takes the pennies from her hand; his nails graze her damp palm” (49-50).

Pecola suffered within the same group and even with her family. She was not beaten only by her father but also raped by him. That is a signifier of incest occurring in the black family (Aydemir 441). *Beloved* is another novel written by Morrison and published in 1987 in which she depicts mother’s love, murder and legacy of slavery. It is a novel that tackles women’s suffering from slavery, racism, violence and rape (Aydimir 144).

Francis Harper Lee is one of the American women writers who used literature as a tool to talk about the oppression against African American women. In her work *To Kill a Mockingbird*, she tackles the issue of racism and the suffering of blacks by whites. She depicts how blacks were abused and mistreated in the South.

Another prominent figure is Alice Walker. Walker beautifully portrayed the struggle of black people and how they overcome the troubles and the difficulties that they have passed through. She writes about black women by appreciating her and she stresses that women are the most essential part of any community. In her novel *Color Purple*, Walker depicts the challenges and the role sisterhood of black women to annihilate the savagery and degradation treatment by men. The protagonist of the novel suffered a lot in her life and she was subjected to violence and to rape by her own father. Walker’s novel *the Color Purple* begins with the scene of rape. The protagonist of the novel was raped by her stepfather. The scene of rape in the novel is based on Walker’s great- great grandmother, who was raped and impregnated at age of eleven by

her master Walker's great- great grandfather. As seen this abuse is related to a real event and it is written to demonstrate what the black female lived (Aydemir 438).

The depiction of African American women in African American Literature was taken from real life that black women have experienced in their life. And this depiction was created by the need rather than the desire. They started to give readers powerful insights into grim issues such as race, gender, and class, Margaret Walker claims:

It is necessary as always approaching Afro- American Literature in any form poetry, prose, fiction, and drama to give a background of the socioeconomic and political forces and the historical context before proceeding to literary analysis or synthesis. Then we will have the necessary tools with which to examine the Strange phenomena found in America and Afro-American literature. (qtd. in Africa American Women 1)

I.4. Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework is about the theories and concepts with their definitions and origins to understand these theories that are relevant to this research. This section will shed light on 'Feminism', 'black Feminism', 'Feminism of Color' and 'Womanism'. It is highly necessary to explain these theories because the case study *The Help* is written by a white female author about African Americans working in white households.

I.4.1. Feminism

In a world that gives more importance to men, women are neglected by limiting their role only to their house, family and children. Many of these women refuse to be at the mercy of men and want to improve themselves in the community and break down the bonds that are created by men. They want to show their power and capacity with the aim of achieving equality between the two genders. Women established what is called

feminism to focus on women's experience in daily life and highlights different kinds of oppressions that the female has faced because of the patriarchal society. Because of the marginalization that women go through in political, economic, and social domain, feminists therefore seek to break all the barriers and to be equal with male in all social, economic and political opportunities (Ghorfati and Medini 7). According to Murphy, feminism is a struggle to correct laws and practices that prevent women from achieving full equality with men in all aspects of domestic and public life but the deeper struggle is against attitudes that sustain such discriminatory practice (qtd. in Ghorfati and Medini 15). Feminism appeared firstly in France in the Late of the 1880s by Hunburtin Auclert, in her journals *La Citoyenne as la Feminité*, with the purpose of criticizing the domination of male and in calling for women's rights (Ghorfati and Medini 1). Then in the first decades of the twentieth century feminism widely spread in England and America and also in the Arab world as NISWA.

Feminism took different paths and waves since its appearance until now in defending women's rights. The first wave of feminism dates back to the First World War when some women called for their rights and started a strike against the undemocratic practices in United States, they mobilized to change the marriage laws, gain voting and open employment (Hansen 369). The second wave emerged in a wake of the Second World War. Women have raised their consciousness about many issues like children care, equal pay, employment and educational opportunities. Females' challenges were in family environment, work place, and in society as a whole. Feminists of this wave believe in women's total freedom and according to them the authority that men have toward women is the cause that led to inequality in such societies (Ghorfati and Medini 14).

The third wave of feminism appeared in 1990s and continuing to present, the symbolic figure of this wave is Rebecca Walker. The feminists see the third wave of feminism as the most powerful out of the three waves. Feminists' aims of this wave were to develop feminist theories and politics and to make those theories successful and more effective. They also gave a suggestion in relation to various laws and politics about women roles and other topics about gender, class and sexuality. Third wave feminists gave great importance to the issue of violence against women. Feminist of this wave wanted to build new image of women's rights in the entire world not only in America. Its aims included putting an end to classifying women into categories and removing stereotypical images. This new group of feminists was not looking only for the political and social rights for the woman but they wanted her to perform in all the domains and more importantly to have a role in life. This period also is remarkable because of the appearance of many writers and scholars. Among them Judith Butler who wrote many famous books like *Gender Trouble* (1990) discussing the unfair rules put by the government and other anti-feminism organization (Ghorfati and Medini 21).

I.4.2. Black Feminism

Feminism has always fought for women's rights and demanded equality with men. However, since the emergence of feminism in America, women of color have been marginalized. Feminism focused only on the white woman's rights and neglected the woman of color like the African American woman. African American women were in dilemma because they were marginalized in community and they have to fight from both side, for race liberation and gender liberation. So they created what they called Black Feminism. Patricia Hill Collins is one of the famous feminists who argue that feminism did not bring any right to black women because they were excluded from participating in any social, economical, and political activities done by feminist

organization. This is why black women revolted against the unfair classification and specified feminism to black feminism (47).

Black women had the same experience as men; they were abducted from Africa to the New World. They worked as house servants for whites and also worked outside in agriculture with men. In addition to that hard work, they were treated badly and suffered a lot as women. They were suffering from oppression and rape. But they refused this life as slaves and used all the possibilities to free themselves. These women decided to runaway and preferred to kill their children than to let them live the same experience as slaves (Andrea 4). At women's right convention, Sojourner Truth, in her speech "Aint't I A Woman", focuses on social justice that women lack in the society because of being black and women (5). The national black feminist organization was created in 1973 and its demand was political, social and economic equality for black women. The organization emerged from gathering of black female's lawyers, welfare rights workers, housewives and so on. The members were Alice Walker, Margaret Sloan, Shireley Chisholm, Eleanor Holms Norton and Flo Kennedy. It set up workshop which studied issues like children care, the church and education, work and violence (25). Throughout the years black women stood against sexism and racism. According to Claude McKay "the colored women are black woman should combat the waywardness of their husbands and children and the racism of whites (qtd in Torfs 441).

I.4.3. Womanism

Many African American women refused to be black feminist but to be womanists. They became more preferable to term womanism instead of feminism. The term womanism appeared for the first time in the essay "In Search of Our Mothers Garden" written by Alice Walker in describing women "consciously black women identified art" (Torfs 49). The term womanism was derived from the word Womanish

which was often used by the Afro-American mothers. According to Alice Walker, 'Womanism' denotes the following:

Womanish1: from the womanish opp. Of girlish" irresponsible, not serious. A black feminist of feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children. " you acting womanish" means you like women, usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior, want to know more, interested in grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "you trying to be growth". Responsible in change. Serious. (xi, xii).

2- A women who loves other women , sexually and /or non sexually.

Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility

. And women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men. Sexually and/or non sexually, except periodically, for health. Traditionally Universalist as in:

"Mama, why are we brown. Pink and yellow and our cousins are white, beige, and black? Ans:" well you know the colored race is just like flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in "Mama I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a banch of other slaves with me" reply "wouldn't be the first time."

3- Loves music, loves dance, loves the moon, loves the spirit, loves the love and food and roundness. Loves struggle, loves the folk, love herself, regardless.

4- Womanist is to feminist as a purple of Lavender (18).

In the first entry, Walker defines 'womanism' and gives synonym of this word and its origin which is found in black folk origin. Patricia Hill Collins argues that "taking the term from the southern black folk expression of mothers to female children (...), Walkers suggests that black women's concrete history fosters a womanist world

view accessible primarily and perhaps exclusively to black women (10). Also Walker represents womanish as the opposites of girlish which means irresponsible, not serious. Womanish means being responsible and grown up.

In the second entry, Walker defines womanism in connection with different relationships that can occur between a woman and another, or between a woman and a man. According to Patricia Hill Collins “womanish seemingly supplies a way for black men” (20).

In the third entry, Walker defines ‘womanism’ by stating the thing that women love. Walker includes moon, which is considered as a feminine symbol. Also in her list she includes love, dance, food and roundness which represent the pleasure and the happiness in life. In addition to that Walker includes struggle which means the power of resistance. And among all what women loves each other, and also themselves (20).

In the fourth entry, Walker refers to the Womanist as a black feminist. As a whole, Walker, in her definition, depicts black women as beautiful and strong beings without denouncing men or white people in the process. In this regard, Davis Amanda suggests:

Through her fourth part definition, [Walker] draws her reader’s attention to the importance of women’s intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual wholeness and she stresses the need to create a global community where all members of society are encouraged to survive and survive the whole. Madhu Dubey argues that Walker’s womanist project seeks to integrate the past and present, individuals and community; personal and political change, into a unified whole” (qtd. in Torfs 21)

According to Deborah K. King, the terms ‘womanism’ and ‘womanist’ may, therefore in an extent sense, be made applicable to all women, not necessarily of African descent.

And particularly it represents the characteristics of gender, old traits, and practices of African American Women, maybe with biological extension, it maybe said to represent the problems and issues of all women more than discriminated women (qtd. in Womanism 87). Womanism according to Deborah King has a wide sense which represents all women without exception and not only specified to African American women's origin.

Womanism has had its influence in literary and also in socio-cultural domains, as clarified by Deborah King:

womanism represents expectation and experience of female knowledge, competence and responsibilities that are beyond those associated either with youth or with the gender traits traditionally assigned females in Western culture, female characterization as audacious as well as capable of contrasts with an image of females under patriarchy as submissive and inferior. It is significant to note that while black males regardless of their ages, have been stereotypically addressed as "boys", black females were supposedly denigrated by being referred to as "women", rather than "ladies". However the connotations of "women" within the black community have become positive ones, asserting and affirming the value in female of adult qualities such as ability, independence, creativity, loving, and strength.(qtd. in Torfs 48)

In other words, King argues that womanism identifies people with respect and an appreciation for, and the reliance upon the capabilities of women (49). *In New York Times* magazine in 1984, Walker states that: "I do not choose Womanism because it is better than feminism; I choose it because I prefer the sound, the feel the fit of it, because I cherish the spirit of women" (qtd. in "Womanism" 60). According to Walker,

womanism is the best word that suits and gives real representation of women's feelings and voice.

Barbara Omolade points out, "black feminism is referred to as womanism because both are concerned with struggle against sexism and racism by black women who are themselves part of the community's efforts to achieve equity and liberty" (qtd. in Torfs 63). The main focus of womanism and black feminism is fighting against the marginalization that black women face and to achieve their rights and freedom and to be treated fairly as others.

Womanism as a wide term did not limited only to black women; it encompasses all women with different races. Gloria Steinem asserts: "womanist and womanism were not intended to define more narrowly or to light on women's experience by increasing the number and richness of word describing it" (qtd. in "Womanism" 61). womanism and womanist has great role to depict the experience of African American women and other women of color who have always fighting to overthrow the sexual and racial systems (62). The basic womanist dictum is that a womanist must build up a culture of freedom whatever the price.

The theoretical chapter tried to focus mainly on the essential points that are related to African American literature. It deals with women's path to represent themselves in the society via feminist movement. This chapter tackled it as a concept and movement in addition to the brief explanation of its three waves. As a type of feminism, black feminism is represented to speak about black as marginalized gender. Womanism is also introduced with its four definitions as a wide concept.

Chapter two: Race, Classism, and Gender Discrimination in *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett

The second chapter focuses on the themes of race, class, and gender discrimination and how they are examined by Kathryn Stockett in her novel *the Help*. Chapter two is divided into three sections. The first section tackles the issue of racism, and the description of maltreatment that the black women experienced as maids at the hands of the white housewives whom they worked for. The second section examines how the black females suffered in the work place; they were paid a minimum wage which increased their struggle as poor. The third section is about the suffering of black women within the same group because of their gender “females”.

Before the analysis of the novel is started, here is a summary of *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett:

The Help is a novel that depicts the life of black maids in Jackson Mississippi and their experience with white families. It starts with Aibileen’s chapter where she expresses the strong relationship between her and the baby girl Mae Mobley. Skeeter, the white female the Friend of Elizabeth Leefolt and Hilly Halbrook, decides to write a book which is a collection of stories about black maids and their experiences as maids for white families. She starts by interviewing Aibileen, Miss Leefolt’s maid. At first Aibileen refuses the idea but then she calls Skeeter to inform her about her acceptance. When Skeeter sends Aibileen’s section Miss Stein, Harper & Row editor, asks her to interview a dozen of maids. Skeeter gives this job to Aibileen because she is white and they will not help her. Aibileen starts by her closest friend Minny. Minny does not accept because they are in sensitive period “civil rights movement” in addition she is afraid from her abusive husband Leroy who always beats her without any reason just for pleasure. But Aibileen convinces her that they are just telling stories. The journey of

Aibileen to convince the other maids does not stop at Minny; she asks every black maid in Jackson but their answer is the same “no”. When Aibileen goes to the church to pray she meets Yule May, Hilly’s maid. Later, Yule May cannot be involved in the secret project with them because she is jailed; she is accused as a thief by Miss Hilly. She sends Skeeter a letter telling her what happened exactly. This letter becomes a turning point because most of black maids accept to tell their stories when they read it. Each night Miss Skeeter goes to Aibileen’s house with her typewriter. Maids’ stories are differing from one to another; there are the bad ones and also the good ones. Miss Skeeter includes Constantine’s story, because of that Skeeter discovers the real disappearance of her nanny that she was fired by her mother Miss Phellan because of Constantine’s colored “yellow” daughter’s rudeness. When the book is published with the help of Elein Stein who makes a book review the things get worst in Jackson. Despite the faked name and anonymity of the writer, the white ladies in Mississippi discover that it is about them from town name “Mississippi” but the pie in Minny’s section is their weapon to be protected. At the end, the three main characters Skeeter, Aibileen and Minny realize their dream and become free women.

II .1 Racism in *The Help*: The Suffering of Black Women for Being Blacks

African American women suffered a lot in their lives because of racism, social class, and gender discrimination. In other words, black females are suffering words because of their skin color ‘black’, being poor, and females. Studying these three elements became the core interested of the feminists and scholars recently.

Intersectionality was introduced in order to shed light upon the relationship between race, class, and gender and how they affect the life of women.

In his work entitled ‘Intersectionality’, Wendy Sigle- Rushton states:

“Intersectionality is a term coined by black feminist lawyer Kimberlé Grenshaw in 1989

through her seminal critique of United States antidiscrimination law and its failure to acknowledge black women's unique experience racism and sexism as simultaneous and inseparable"(1) . Wendy Sigle- Rushton explains further:

Intersectionality is an umbrella term that brings together a set of ideas about the complex multidimensionality of subjectivity and social stratification and consequences of its misspecification. Intersectionality asserts that different dimensions of social life hierarchies, axes of differentiation, axes of oppression, social structure, and normative are intersecting, mutually modifying and inspirable. It aims at grasping the complexity of inequality on societal as well as subjective levels and refuting the hierarchisation of different structure (3).

Intersectionality is employed by activists and feminists scholars to study the reasons behind the marginalization of black women. They developed theoretical insights and political strategies to fight the interlocking nature of systems of oppression along with gender, race, class and sexuality (1).

Kathryn Stockett's novel, *The Help*, offers an account to all the abuse practiced against black women in Jackson Mississippi. Racism, social class and gender discrimination are the main concern elements in this novel. Black female characters are presented as an inferior who suffer from racism, social class and gender discrimination. Minny Jackson is an example of this triple suffering. She suffers from racism by white people, and is maltreated by her husband Leroy " he throw the kids in the yard and lock me in the bathroom and say he gone light the house on fire with me locked inside"(437). The maids' experiences, depicted in *The Help*, reflect how they are subjected to different misfortunes because they are blacks, poor and females.

Black people faced difficulties because of their blackness. They are classified inferior and they are referred to as “others” which means they are not accepted as a part of the American society as well as they are not considered as humans because of their skin color. The skin color is the standard that makes the African American more exposed to racism. “In Racism Curriculum”, Wijeyasinghe, C .L and others comments:

The systematic subordination of members of target racial groups who relatively little social power in United States by the members of the agent racial group who have relatively more social power (whites). This subordination is supported by the actions o individuals, cultural norms and values, and the institutional structures and practices of society. (88)

Racism in America is very wide and taken as something serious even the government declared about the inferiority of blacks and the superiority of whites. The United States’ president Theodore Roosevelt stated categorically that “As a race and in the mass Negroes are altogether inferior to the white” (S. Plous and Williams 796). The president Linclon also expressed the similar position in Linclon- Dauglas debates when he declared:

There are physical differences between the white and black races which I believe I will fervor forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality and in as much as they cannot so live white they do not remain together there must be position of superior and inferior. And I as much as any other man am in favor of having superior position assigned to the white race. (796)

Due to skin color, African Americans struggled with superiority and inferiority classification. They were separated from whites wherever they go; in restaurants, hospitals, public spaces, schools, and also the place where they lived. This idea is portrayed in *the Help*: “colored people part town we one big antill surrounded by state

land that ain't for sale. As our members get bigger we can't spread out, our parts town gets thicker" (Stockett 12). Here Aibileen the black character, compares black's part of town as a big anthill because the place is overcrowded and small to live.

The racist laws that are established by whites should be obeyed by blacks and if there is any lawbreaking they will be punished. This scene is presented in chapter seven when Robert, the black man, was beaten by two white men because he used the toilet of white people accidentally (Stockett 103). Such suffering is doubled when we talk about black women. The black female is more targets to racism because she is black and female. Deborah King defines the oppression of black women as "Multiple jeopardy", he further asserts that most ideas regarding double and triple jeopardy merely assume an additive nature of discrimination. Akin to a mathematical addition: racism plus sexism plus classism equals triple Jeopardy ("African American Women Writer"). The black woman is not only a target of the racism but also she suffers due to classism and sexism.

The oppression of black females is illustrated in *The Help* clearly through two main characters Aibileen and Minny. The two characters represent how the black women are subjected to racism in Mississippi. Aibileen sees that her blackness is the reason for her suffering. The scene that represents this suffering is when she is asked by Mae Mobly, the girl she is raising, "how you're come colored Aibileen?" (Stockett 392). The difference in skin color is not only noticed by adults but also by children, and all that is due to grown up whites who make fun of colored people in front of their children. The blacks are seen as dirty people because of their color and the whites think that the black color is the color of dirt; this is portrayed in Hilly's conversation with Elizabeth when she states that how you can teach people how to be clean while looking at Aibileen (Stockett 428).

White people are separated from the blacks, and the color is the line that enforces such separation. Moreover, it is the basic element that through it people are classified as superior or inferior. All the good things and the values are from and for the whites and all the bad things, and worthlessness are from the blacks. Whites have stereotypes about blacks, they consider them as liars, thieves, and never be trusted. That what has happened with Minny, she stands for black female who has been subjected to racism by whites. Minny is fired from her job because she is accused and charged as a thief. This false accusation smirched Minny's reputation in Jackson town and created a lot of problems for her to find a new job because white women believe each other. Minny is not maltreated by white housewives but also by white men. This appears when she is neglected by the doctor of Miss Celia "he looks at me as a Nigger and says you don't think it's his business, he walks into bedroom and shuts the door in my face" (Stockett 237). But when the doctor received the same demand from Miss Celia, the white lady, he acts gently and accepts her decision. Racism of white people toward blacks has affected their life especially black females who are forbidden to share things with white and they face difficulties to find job because they are not well educated and they do not have the chance to access the school.

II. 2. Classism in *The Help*: The Suffering of Black Women as Maids

The life of the blacks in United States was very difficult and hard, they faced many obstacles to find job. For the black women, the only job that was offered to them was to work as maids for white families. They cooked, cleaned houses, washed clothes, and raised the white family's children, all these works were rewarded with lower wages. Patricia Hill Collins examines the issue of oppression that black women faced; she writes that: "due to the racial discrimination, black women do not have access to good equality education. And this barriers and difficulties make black African American

women powerless so that they experienced not only oppression but also suppression. So they have been seen as “the help” or they are servants of white community” (11).

Racism is not only manifested in the forced separation of African Americans from whites, but also in the jobs appointed to them. African Americans worked as servants for the whites in their houses, under their control. The job is inherited from their parents and they were expected to carry on such imposed heritage.

Stockett’s novel, *The Help*, is about black maids that work for whites. She focuses on the oppression and mistreatment that they experienced during their work at the hands of the white housewives. It is also worth mention that the female characters in *The Help* dropped out from the school firstly since they did not have costs to finish their study. Secondly, in order to help their families, they started working as maids.

Aibileen is among those people who left the school and started working as a maid. In the novel, Aibileen works for Leefolt family. During her career as a maid Aibileen has raised eighteen white children. Mae Mobley is one of them. Aibileen is serious and honest in her work. Aibileen is raising Mae Mobley better than her real mother; she treated her like her own daughter. Aibileen is not only hired to take care of Mae Mobley, but also she cooks, cleans the house, and prepares food for the family and its guests (Stockett 3). However, in return, Aibileen is not rewarded for her honesty and hard work; she is abused by her employer Elizabeth and most of time upbraided by her. Mrs. Leefolt treats her maid as if she owns her or as she is something that belongs to her. The scene that shows that is when Aibileen is talking to Skeeter during the working hours; Mrs. Leefolt disapproves such act and tells Aibileen the following: “you and Miss Skeeter looked like you were talking awful serious about something” (Stockett 11).

The maids can never stand against the housewives' decisions, so the maids prefer to be silent during their work to protect themselves and to hold their job. Such attitude appears clearly in Aibeleen's saying all the time "yes, Ma'am" or "no Ma'am". This is what Aibeleen utters during her work in front of Mrs. Leefolt. The relationship between the lord and the maids is limited; the maids have borders that must not be exceeded. The whites do not share things with their maids for that they build a separate toilet for them. This is exactly what the Leefolts have done with Aibeleen, they built a separate toilet for her outside the house, in the garage. And she is forced by Mrs. Leefolt to use the toilet immediately "don't you get some tissue and go there and use it" (Stockett 29). Aibeleen as an obeying maid has no choice but to use the toilet, not because of necessity but to justify Mrs. Leefolt. The separate toilet represents the racial segregation practiced by the whites on the blacks. The idea of separation is expressed through the separated toilet for maids. Miss Elizabeth prevents her daughter from using the separate toilet for the maids because it contains diseases, as it is mentioned in the novel "this is dirty out there you will catch diseases" (Stockett 95). Aibeleen was not only abused by Mrs. Leefolt but also by the other housewives. Hilly Halbrok, Mrs. Leefolt's friend, called Aibeleen 'dirty' and charged her with stealing the silver "get me a new plate, one you haven't soiled with your dirty clothes" (Stockett 428). Aibeleen never complains about the maltreatment that she experiences as a maid, and never feels sorry for herself, because she is aware of the prejudice of white people and their false sense of superiority.

Another character who has to deal with the abhorrent conditions as a maid is Minny Jackson. She dropped out of school at the age of fourteen in order to help her mother. Minny's mother was also maid. Minny's mother and because of her experience as a maid, gives her daughter some rules that she must follow as a maid herself, these

rules must be followed by Minny. The first rule is “white people are not your friend” (Stockett 38). This rule is considered as a reminder because the blacks can never be friends with the whites. The second one is “don’t ever let that white lady find you sitting on her toilet” (Stockett 38). The third rule is to “use same cup, fork, and plate and keep it separate from the others” (Stockett 39). The fourth one is to “eat in the kitchen” (Stockett 39), and the last one is “do not hit their children” (*The Help* 39). These rules help the maids and protect them from any abuse at the hand of the whites hiring them, and at the same time these rules emphasize the whites’ segregation against the black maids. These rules are an example of the racist white community and how blacks are considered as diseases carriers.

Mিনny’s first day as a maid was not easy at all. Minny was ordered to hand-wash all the clothes then put them in the electronic machine to finish up (Stockett 39). The maids work from the sun rise to sunset with minimum wages. The worst is the white housewives make their maids pay for the things that they break accidentally, as has been highlighted by the narrator in chapter three about the minimum wages, Minny states “dollar an hour feeling ashamed” (Stockett 37). The mistreatment that black maids undergo during their work is both physical and verbal as it has been portrayed in *the Help* when Minny is called a Nigger by Mr. Charlie because he finds it funny. His wife is no better than him, she asks Minny to eat outside the house even in the middle of January or when it snows (Stockett 227).

White people’s prejudice towards the blacks is legal due to political rules set by the government. For instance, Hilly Halbrock is the one behind the idea of building the maids a separate toilet. She comes up with this idea because her husband is a political and this help her to be free and do what pleases her even if it is on the expense of another human being. For instance, Hilly Halbrock is the one behind the idea of

building the maids separate toilets. Hilly threatened Skeeter stating “I am about to be a politician’s wife, unless you have anything to do with it” (Stockett 205).

The other black character in *the Help*, Constantine, Phelan’s maid also suffered a lot as a mother and as a maid. Due to her skin color, Constantine was unable to raise her daughter because if she held her she would lose her job. Aibileen recounts:

being Negro with white skin...in Mississippi, it’s like you don’t belong to nobody. But it wasn’t just hard on the girl. It was hard on Constantine. She ... folks would look at her. White folk would stop her, ask her all suspicious what she doing toting round a white child. Policemen used to stop her on the state street, told her she needs to get her uniform on. Even colored folks ...they treat her different, distrustful, like she done something wrong. It was hard for her to find somebody to watch Lulabelle while she at work, Constantine got to where she didn’t want to bring Lula...out much. (Stockett 358)

Constantine, the mother, suffered greatly because she cannot show her daughter love as other mothers do because of skin color, and if people see her with her yellow daughter she will face some problems. She used to wear the white uniform to hide the truth and to make people believe that she is just a maid with a white family child.

During Skeeter’s conversation with other black maids, most of them are complain from the abuse that they faced in whites’ house. The maid Callie states that “Miss Margaret always made me put my hair up in a rag, say she how colored don’t wash their hair counted ever piece of silver after I done the polishing” (Stockett 260). Whites never trust their maids and they are prejudiced against them; even though they see that maids are honest; such prejudice becomes a habit for the housewives who blame the maids for anything that can happen.

Working as a maid is the only job opportunity that the black women can have; and this represents how racist is the white community. White people want blacks especially women under their control and mercy. The white community dehumanized the blacks, men and especially women. Working as maids means that the African American women are female, poor, and live in a white society which will never accept them as a part of it. Hence, these African American women suffer greatly due to the triple jeopardy of gender, class, and racism. The black maids are aware of the inferior status they are at and how their self confidence is affected by it. When Aibileen is asked by Skeeter during the interview, whether she always thought she would be a maid. Aibileen replies in an affirmative manner “yes” (Stockett 144).

The social status of the black females was very harsh. They used to live in small houses. These houses were cold in winter and very hot in summer, Aibileen recounts “the houses all be small, but every yard’s different- some scrubby and grassless like a blad-headed old men” (Stockett 16).due to the minimum wages black females’ life become harder with the payment of the telephone, water, electricity and the gaze bill. They cannot cover all the necessities. Black females used to wear the old clothes given to them by their housewives. Concerning the food, it is totally composed only from vegetables in their yards. Black female wanted better life for their children. They sacrificed by themselves for their children future. Minny’s motive to tell her stories is her children, she states “what I care about is, if in ten year, a white lady will call my girls dirty and accuses them of stealing the silver” (Stockett 218). Also Yule May who steals for her twin educational chance, she confesses “I stole from that woman an ugly ruby ring hoping it would cover the rest of tuition” (Stockett 249).

II.3. Sexism in *The Help*: The Suffering of Black Women as Wives

People are classified in communities due to their gender male or female. Due to such classification, the treatment differs. In a patriarchal society, the man holds the primary power and is in control. In contrast, the woman is considered a subordinate and is dominated and oppressed. Such subordination is clear in the limited role given to her; she is expected to be dedicated only to her house, family, husband, and children.

Gender determines the person's position in the world. This fact charge women especially black women because they are classified in both sides' female and blacks and this is known as gender discrimination. Gender discrimination is defined as follows:

“Gender discrimination is therefore a difference in treatment based on sex that put the individual at the disadvantages or limits his or her access to opportunities that are available to other members of society” (“Gender Discrimination”).

It is obvious that the black man also suffered from racism but not like the black woman. The black woman suffered at hands of both the white race and her partner, the black man. The merciless of the white race and cruelty of the black man make the life of the black woman miserable, hard, and unbearable. The domestic violence that black woman face is due to the lines that black society. These lines give more power to man and make women' live in society known as patriarchal society. Joseph Adam explains how patriarchy works as following “Patriarchy, the institutionalized structure of male dominance, encourages males of all races and classes to define their masculinity by acts of physical aggression and coercion toward other, women and children” (qtd. in Hassan and Rashid 1).

Throughout the decades, the black man (the father, the brother, and the husband) abused the black woman just because she was a female; a subordinate, and an inferior to them. Due to the humiliation the black man felt and experienced in the segregationist

white society, he brought home his bitterness and disappointment only to make his wife and children take the blame. It is true that black men faced racism but not like black women who suffered outside and inside community. As Hook asserts: “It is obvious that most black men are not in positions that allow to exert the kind of institutional patriarchal power and control over black women’s lives that privileged white men do in their society. But it is undeniable that they do a lot of power over black women” (qtd. in Torfs 15).

The state of the black woman is the worst, she is like neither the white nor the black man; her suffering is intensified due to her sex ‘female’ and race ‘black’. The black man sees the black woman as a tool to show off his manhood and power in the black community. The black man abused the black woman physically- by beating her- and verbally- by comparing her to the white women. Eldridge Cleaver, an African American writer and activists, comments regarding this:

I love white women and hate black women; I would jump over ten Nigger bitches just to get one white oneA white woman is beautiful, even she is baldheaded and only has one tooth. There is softness about white women, something dedicated and soft inside, but Nigger bitches seems to be full of steel, hard resisting not soft and submissive like white women. (qtd.in “African American Women” 159)

Black women have been disparaged, hated, and neglected by African American men; black men not only oppressed black females but also hankered after white beauty ideals (“African American Women Writers”). Minny Jackson is oppressed by her family as a daughter then later as a wife because of sexism. Minny’s childhood as a black female is not like the white’s one. Minny dropped out from the school at the age of fourteen just to help her mother. She reminisces “I was about to quit the job and.

Mama wanted me to stay on and go to ninth grade, she always wanted me to be a school teacher instead of working in Miss Woodra's house, but with my sister's heart problem and my no good drunk daddy, it was up to me and mama" (Stockett 38). Due to their drunken father who did not care about their family, Minny lost her right to study and her mother's dream to be school teacher. The Black man intensified the suffering of the black woman because of his carelessness and irresponsibility; the black woman works hard for the family and especially the children and the children and the black man seeks drinking to face the harsh reality. Black females, because of the family's poverty and the carelessness of the men, they do not eat well; only in occasions. In this regard, Minny states "I was fourteen old to the day. I sat at the little wooden table in my mama's kitchen eyeing that caramel cake on the cooling rack, waiting to be iced. Birthdays were the only day of the year I was allowed to eat as much as I wanted" (Stockett 38).

The suffering of the African American female starts at childhood and continues after she becomes a wife; she is mistreated by her own father first, and then she abused by her husband. Minny's life as a child does not differ from her life as a wife because she is married to a drunken man who always beats her, she narrates: "Leroy came home last night smelling like old crow again. He pushed me hard and I bumped my thigh on the kitchen table" (Stockett 135). Also she states "he doesn't mess with me when I'm pregnant but he moves closer. He squeezes my arm hard" (Stockett 402). The black women suffered a lot because of the black man sexist domination. The African American woman was not only abused by the whites but also by the black man 'the father and the husband' within the same race.

African American women's life was full of obstacles and difficulties, they did not only suffer from racism at the hands of the whites but they suffer due to their gender

because they are women and this suffering is experienced at the hands of their partner. A society ideology is that the women have to show her respect to her husband and never mess with him, she has to accept their situation as an inferior. She can never rebel or stand against his decision because of the power and authority given to him by the patriarchal society and the black woman finds herself weak and alone and has nothing to do but to obey and show respect to the careless and irresponsible husband. Black women experienced all kind of the violence in her life verbal, physical and emotional. The violence is defined as: “Violence is the intentional use of physical force or powers threatened or actual, against oneself, another person or against a group or community that either results in or has a high like hood of resulting in injury, death, physical harm” (“World Health organization”).

Stockett’s novel, *The Help*, portrays various scenes of suffering of black women as wives in a patriarchal society, and the violence and the abuse that black female experienced is represented in different forms physical and emotional. In *The Help*, Minny endures and suffers at the hands of her husband, Leroy. A mother of five children, Minny is beaten violently frequently by her brutal husband, Leroy. Minny experienced the physical violence by her husband as it is illustrated in chapter twenty five “Leroy screamed at me all the night, threw the sugar bowl upside my head, threw my clothes out on the porch, I mean when he is drinking the thunderbird it’s one thing, but...oh the shame is so heavy. I think it might pull me to the floor. Leroy wasn’t on the thunderbird this time he beat me stone- cold saber” (Stockett 304). Minny represents the black female who is oppressed because she is a female. Minny is punished by her husband not because he is drunk but because it became a habit for him to do; he beats her for no particular reason, Minny states” he was beating me for the pure pleasure of it” (Stockett 304).

Husbands were cruel toward their wives, they treated them like animal. Minny's husband, Leroy used to beat her harshly as Minny recounts "I was dropped in the corner of the bathroom like a dog he was beating me with his belt" (Stockett 413).the violence took another, the wife forced to work as a maid to help the husband with the costs. Minny works for the whites, she cleans and cooks just to help her husband and satisfy him. She then returns home to prepare supper for her family and in return she is welcomed home by an abusive husband and angry children. Kindra yells at her mother, Minny, saying "I hate you" (*The Help* 51), she does so because Minny tells her to be patient until the supper is ready to eat.

The African American woman is forced to work in order to help the husband, but this is clearly unfair, because she ends up working outside and in her house. The black man finishes his work and does nothing after that but the black wife has to take care of her house and children without any help from the man. Moreover, the black man gets angry if the wife is fired from her job, Minny recounts in this regard what Leroy does when she is dismissed that "he shut around the kitchen like a plumed rooster cause he in front of his a kids, act like he the only one supporting the family and I'm just doing this to keep my poor self entertained" (Stockett 45).

Aibeleen is another victim of her husband; Aibeleen experienced the emotional violence when her husband left her for another women. She suffers a lot when she lost her son, she faced terrible days because of the death of her son and her husband was absent to support and encourage her, she was alone in this blackness suffering "that was the day my whole world went black, Air black, soon look black" (Stockett 2). Aibileen's life with her husband Clyde was full of misery, he was irresponsible in addition to that he took her money for his entertainment and left her at the end. Aibileen was angry with this infidelity and the same time sad being alone, she narrates "kind a

man I like ain't the kind that stays around when he done spending all you money[...]when my husband Clyde left me for that no-account hussy up on Farish Street, one they call Cocoa (Stockett 22).

Kathryn Stockett's novel, *the Help*, sheds the light on many issues of racism, classism and sexism that black woman faced in Jackson Mississippi. It depicts the miserable life that black women experienced as being maids for whites families and illustrates how they harshly abused because of their blackness. Further, *the Help* depicts black women's life as wives who abused and humiliated by their cruel husbands.

Chapter three: Female Empowerment in *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett

Chapter three tackles female empowerment as a theme and represents how all women works hand in hand in terms of solidarity and sisterhood to fight racism and sexism. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first one is about the female solidarity in the face of racism in which female work hand in hand to end discrimination practiced over them by white race. With the help of some white people, these women succeed in making a change in Jackson Mississippi. Section two tackles the power of sisterhood in the face sexism and explains how women in Jackson regardless of their color fight to improve themselves as empowered women in a patriarchal society seeking gender equality.

In *The Help*, all female characters are doubly marginalized due to racism and sexism 'black females'. By coming aware of such injustice, these women bond together in terms of solidarity and sisterhood in fighting the oppression they are facing because of the men's dominance and the patriarchal society. The solidarity and sisterhood of females make them more powerful and determined to be developed. The Beijing declaration presents women's empowerment as a key strategy for the development, he states that: "women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision making process and access power are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace" (09). Females' characters work collectively and show their power in order to be treated equally. Women decide to break their silence in fighting the prejudice of racism and male dominance.

III-1 Female Solidarity in the Face of Racism

African American women suffered a lot from racism and this suffering was doubled because they were women and black. This terrible suffering was not accepted

no more by black women and also some white females, because both races became aware about the inequality and the unjustified maltreatment they were undergoing because they were black and female. Hence, this superior and inferior relationship between white and black races which is based on color had to be changed because black women no longer tolerate such suffering. These women decided to break their silence and to fight for their race and to their situation with the help of some and white women in term of solidarity against the whites' prejudice and racist rules that were practiced over them. African American women wanted to be treated as any human and never accepted their blackness to be used as a reason to humiliate them at the hands of the white race. Black women, with the help of some white females, decided to take action in order to end this separation between the two races based on the skin color and to seek social equality.

Kathryn Stockett's novel, *the Help*, is a depiction of female solidarity between black and white to end racism. In her definition of 'womanism', Alice Walker argued that a womanist is the one who loves other women and Walker returns to her idea wholeness of the both individuals and community (Tally 216). The idea of love, universality and solidarity is depicted throughout the main character Skeeter who decides to help the black maids by telling their stories. The strong love between Skeeter and her African American nanny Constantine is the main reason that makes Skeeter, the white lady, offer her help as illustrated in chapter five when she expresses: "I missed Constantine more than anything I've ever missed in my life" (Stockett 60). Skeeter supports the African American females on several occasions. For instance, when Hilly Halbrook speaks about the separated bathroom, Miss Skeeter reacts in two ways to show her solidarity with black females. First, she frowns at Miss Hilly and set her cards down face cup and says "maybe we ought to just build you bathroom outside Hilly"

(Stockett 08). Another example showing Skeeter empathizing with the black maids is when she asks Aibileen “do you ever wish you could...change things” (Stockett 10). These examples are signs of the solidarity of white women with black females; Skeeter refuses the separation between the two races.

Skeeter’s support represents white females’ solidarity with the African American maids in the face of racism. Skeeter does more than just providing emotional support to Aibileen and other black maids, she takes a courageous decision to write a book about black females and their experiences as maids for white families as illustrated in the novel “I want to interview you, about what is like to work as maids” (Stockett 102). Skeeter aims to write a book that recounts stories of black maids and what they face during their work for white families. Skeeter does not care what will be stated by black females about the white housewives whom she shares with the same race; she only wants the truth to be told. Skeeter wants the voice of the African maids to be heard and does not think much about the whites’ reaction. This is apparent when Aibileen accepts to tell her stories but she is afraid of Skeeter’s reaction, Skeeter is a white lady after all. Aibileen addresses Skeeter about this concern saying: “what if you don’t like what I got to say? I mean, about white people... but how I know you ain’t gone get mad, turn around on me?” Skeeter comforts and assures Aibileen that she will not betray her saying “ I don’t... I guess y’ll just have to...trust me.” (Stockett 121). In depicting females’ suffering, they should work together and portrayed their shared experience collectively in order to make it more convinced. Collins argues: “how I can as one person speak for such large and complex group” (xi) like what happen in the novel when Miss Skeeter and the maid to support this idea from the novel, Skeeter seeks for a big amount of maids with the help of Aibileen for the secret project. Aibileen asks other maids for their help to tell their stories, she states: “I look around to see who’s here,

reckoning I better ask more maids to help us.” (Stockett 207). Females’ solidarity is to work hand in hand in order to achieve their goals and fight for black’s freedom.

Skeeter considers her help to the black females as her duty; she is a human helping other humans. Skeeter is aware about the injustice that is practiced in Mississippi over African Americans as she states “I don’t why, being white, I feel duty to help them” (Stockett 254). The sense of humanity and solidarity of Miss Skeeter is also portrayed in chapter thirteen when Skeeter goes to whites’ library to bring a book for Aibileen and she is very careful in checking books because she knows white people and their hatred to the blacks, Skeeter narrates:

I spot a single copy of Frederick Douglass, an American slave; I grab it, excited to deliver to Aibileen but when I open it, I see the middle section has been ripped out inside, someone has written NIGGER BOOK [...] I am not as disturbed by the words as by the fact that the handwriting looks like a third grad’s [...] it seems better than to putting it back on the shelf. (Stockett 172)

In the novel, Skeeter is not the only white girl who supports the black maids; there are other whites who disapprove the existing racism. Skeeter, the anti-racist white lady, is supported by the of Harper & Row editor, Miss Stein, who encourages her to write more about these black ladies. Skeeter shares what Miss Stein told her “and four or five interviews won’t be enough for a book. You’ll need a dozen, maybe more; you have more interviews set up. I assume?” (Stockett 159). Skeeter’s decision to write a book about the black maids’ experiences and issues of racism can also related to the novel *to kill A Mockingbird*. Skeeter reads Harper Lees’ *to Kill a Mockingbird* and she finds it interesting and encouraging how she agrees with what the book conveys. Skeeter disapproves the harsh racial inequality existing in the south and calls for social equality through changing black maids conditions; this is the same

message conveyed in *to Kill a Mockingbird*. Skeeter's interest in this book is evident when she says "I finished *to KillMoking Bird*" (Stockett 110).

Aibileen is the first one who gives help to Miss Skeeter to write her book. Aibileen has her way in fighting racism. For instance, Aibileen looks after the children of the white household she works for but she never thinks of taking revenge through them. Aibileen gives these babies only love and tries to teach them peacefully that there is no difference to be a black or to be a white by telling stories. Aibileen tells the following story to Mae Mobly:

Once upon a time they was two little girls, "I say one girl had black skin, one girl had white "[...] so little colored girl say to the little white girl, "how come your skin be so pale? White girl say, 'I don't know. How come your skin be so black? What you think it mean? But neither one a them little girls knew. So little white girl say, 'well, let's see. You got hair, I got hair.' [...] little colored girl says 'I got a nose, you got a nose.' [...] little white girl say, 'I got toes, you got toes.' [...] "So we's the same. Just a different color." Say that little girl. The little white girl she agreed and they were friends, The End. (Stockett 200).

Aibileen's idea throughout this story is to teach the children the equality between the two races because the dialogue of the two little girls shows the commonality of all human and there is no difference between them only the color. Aibileen at the end of the story shows her desire to make whites and blacks friends. Aibileen, despite her education degree which is low compared with Miss Skeeter's, is clever because she knows that changes starts with children who are still pure and are not affected by their white community prejudice against the blacks. Aibileen believes in children and wants them to be aware of the importance of equality between the races and how to love each

other, she states “After all I spent teaching Mae Mobley how to love all people not judge by” (Stockett 409).

Solidarity of white females is represented also by treating blacks equally like any person regardless of their color ‘black’ or social class ‘maids’. Miss Celia, the white lady who hires Minny, does not believe in social barriers between the two races and she treats Minny with respect and kindness. Since the first day she is hired, Minny is treated as a friend by Miss Celia as it is illustrated in chapter seventeen when Miss Celia announces “I’m lucky to have you as friend, Minny” (Stockett 224). Celia never makes Minny feel she is inferior; she eats with Minny at the same table and this is an act that can be witnessed in the majority of whites’ households. Minny narrates “she sits at the kitchen table, asks me if I’m ready to eat” (Stockett 223). The relationship between the employer Miss Celia and the employee Minny is normal not intense, in contrast they take care of each other. This is evident when Celia protects her maid Minny, from a naked white man who enters her yard as Minny states “[...] is this really happening a white woman really beating up a white man to save me? (Stockett 308).

The depicted black females in the novel, *the Help*, live in a racist society with no rights in Jackson Mississippi. Such extremely difficult conditions necessitated action and the black females decide to stop the abusive rules of the racist whites. Skeeter received a letter from Yule May after she jailed for theft Hilly’s ring. This letter is considered as motivation to Skeeter and other black females to be together in fighting racism and portraying their suffering by their bosses. As it is mentioned in Yule May’s letter:

My boys are equally as smart, equally eager for an education. But, we only had the money for one and I ask you how do you choose which of your twin sons should go to college and which should take a job spreading tar? How do

you love him just as much as the other? You have decided he won't be to one to get a chance in life? You don't. You find a way to make it happen. Any way at all. (Stockett 249)

The black women who are gathered in Aibileen's house listening to Yule May's letter that is read by Miss Skeeter show their solidarity with their friend and decide to share their stories with Skeeter as it is narrated by Skeeter "women with curly gray hair and black coat, she say without smile 'I 'm on help you on the stories Miss Skeeter [...] I'm on help you, Miss Skeeter, tall and lean [...] am too Miss Skeeter, I'm on help[...] after the next one, I start counting. Five, six, seven" (Stockett 252-53).

Collins, in her book *Black Feminist Thoughts*, argues that "my hope is that others who were formerly and are currently silenced will find their voices" (xi). Like what happens to Miss Skeeter and her hope from Aibileen to convince other maids to break their silence and face whites' prejudice by sharing their stories, Skeeter is curious about others help to finish their secret project "the book" and she keeps asking Aibileen each time about the maids. In the novel, Skeeter never loses hope that the other maids will help her eventually by sharing their stories. Skeeter on different occasions asks Aibileen to convince the other maids to break their silence and face white's prejudice by helping her to finish their secret project 'the book'. Each time Skeeter asks Aibileen to try again with the maids who refuses to help them, Aibileen answers "I' m on ask em again" (Stockett 116).

The power of the black females becomes so big due to the harsh abuse they received from white families and they become courageous enough and break the silence wall that was built between them and whites. These black females chose to show they are strong and ask for their rights. Minny Jackson, the black maid, is the best example who confronts the white lady, Hilly, because the latter is forcing Minny to be her maid

but Minny refuses. Minny, the powerful maid, prepares Hilly a pie made by Minny's feces and watches her eat it. Minny narrates: "I tell her to eat my shit [...] I watch her eat myself two big pieces (Stockett 339). To stop this white lady's abuse, Minny is not satisfied with watching Hilly eat pie prepared with her excrement but she confronts Hilly by telling her from what this pie is prepared: "I say it's good vanilla from Mexico and then I go ahead I tell her what else I put in that pie for her"(Stockett 339). This pie becomes famous among the maids and is considered a weapon of protection and an insurance against Hilly's anger as Minny remarks: "I think what we need is some insurance [...] what if we put the terrible awful in the book."(Stockett 367). In fact Minny's idea to include the pie story in the book is not to protect herself but for her friend Aibileen and the other maids, as Aibileen states "Minny made us put the pie story in to protect us, no to protect me and other maids" (Stockett 429). In order to free them and come out from the darkness of racism to the light of freedom these women make sacrifices.

Solidarity between women has its effect in society. It is the key that they bond all women together to obtain their rights as humans and break down the barriers between black and whites. Solidarity between women of Jackson Mississippi does not stop when the book *the Help* is published, in contrast their relationship becomes stronger and they are unified and determined to stop racism. That is represented in *The Help* in chapter thirty three when Skeeter the white who wants to stay with them in this mess because of the book, she refuses the chance that is given to her to be an editor just to be with those black females and face the consequences, Skeeter explains "I can't leave now right when things are getting bad. I'm not going to leave you in this mess." (Stockett 424), and she adds "I can't abandon Aibileen in this mess" (Stockett 415). The power of females appeared by breaking their silence and showing their power in front of

white people and never feels fear from their actions. This is portrayed in Aibileen's power in facing Hilly when she latter threatens her to put her in jail. Hilly accused Aibileen of stealing the silver which is not true. In fact it is a fake accusation from Hilly because she is taking revenge. Hilly discovers that the published book is about Jackson because of the pie story; she is the protagonist of that story after all and decides to take revenge from the maids. However, Aibileen challenges Hilly and warns her by saying: "and from what I hear, they's a lot a time to write a lot a letters in jail [...] time to write to every person in Jackson the truth about you plenty time the paper is free" (Stockett 441).

Solidarity and the power of females whether black or white in facing racism has its effect in society. Females in bonding with each other they succeed in destroying the barriers between whites and blacks, and in making change in whites' mind that there is no difference between them. This idea illustrated in chapter thirty four through the maid Willie who works for Miss Chotard that she has been working there thirty seven years and this is the first time they eat together at the same table together and treated her with respect (Stockett 429). The separation and the disliking of people from each other in terms of racism whether from whites to blacks or vice versa is faced through their cooperation and communication with each other and breaking the barriers that prevent them to do so as Hook argues: "in order to build up a dialogue; white women have to overcome their fear and hatred of black people and vice versa" (09). This solidarity and communication between black and whites is depicted when Skeeter shows starts helping them in their case and also it appears hen the black maids shows their gratefulness and gratitude to Skeeter and accept her as one of them. This is evident when all the maids give Skeeter a signed book with their names inside telling that "this one is for the white lady, you tell her we love her like she is our own family" (Stockett 398).

III. 2. Female Sisterhood in the Face of Sexism

Women are suffering due to the gender discrimination and male dominance, this suffering makes them work hand in hand seeking gender equality. Women, in general, black or white, are marginalized in different ways because of the patriarchal society which gives importance, superiority and authority to men. Females are perceived as housekeepers and carers: they take care of everyone especially inside their houses. The injustice between the two genders is not accepted from the females' side; their awareness is raised because they cannot understand such men-centered mode of thoughts any more. Women decided to break their silence by arguing for women's rights, and promoting female identity; they choose to challenge the patriarchal society. In this regard, Tangapiwut Napat argues:

Women have long suffered from sexual discrimination under patriarchy; however the involvement of human society is dynamic. Women's cultural and historical oppression is being challenged at present. Not every woman is willing to hold her tongue and swallow her own tears they have decided to break their silence at the right time and the time place.

Kathryn Stockett *The Help* does not only depict black women's suffering because of racism, she also examines the black women's suffering because of sexism. All black women of Jackson Mississippi are marginalized and their role is limited only in their houses. These black females of Jackson turn to each other in fighting the prejudice of men and work together to free themselves from men's brutality; as Kathleen Puher asserts:

African American woman depicts heroic struggles and gallant role models who have helped their sisters not only to endure but to prevail. Cut off from support systems in mainstream culture, they have turned to one another [...] the practice

of women rely on one another for direction and strength corps up with notable regularity in the novels of African American women (519).

Minnie Jackson, who married Leroy- an abusive man-, suffers because of this drunken man who beats her for no particular reason. Minny who is exhausted from her husband's maltreatment, decides to free herself and chooses to tolerate no more a life with such a husband. Because she works with good wages and the published book became a bestseller providing her with more money. Hence Minny can live a life worthy of respect with her children. Minny's confidence in herself and her power is clearly seen in her saying "God help him, but Leroy don't know what Minny Jackson about to become" (Stockett 439). Lisa Chesler argues "the first step of woman turning independent is that she needs her own career, for which she can be proud of herself because she's good at it, through the career she gets her financial support. She no longer needs men to provide supply" (04). The support and emotional help provided by the other women boost Minny's self confidence in her ability to succeed in realizing her goal. Women care for one another because of sisterhood bonds. In this regard, Hook points out: "sisterhood [...] it was about to care for one another and be in solidarity (130). The sense of sisterhood is portrayed in Aibileen and Minny's strong friendship in which they always support each other and be together in any time and in any place. This support from a sister to a sister appears in chapter thirty four when Aibillen encourages Minny to take her chance to be free saying that "it's time. Do you hear me! You are free" (Stockett 438). The support of Aibillen to Minny is not represented only in front of her; it is represented in her prayers for her friend as Aibileen states "I say my prayers to Minny."(Stockett 493)These prayers which are something personal that makes the person pray in order to get what she wishes, Aibileen preferred to make it for her friend instead of making it for herself. The black women helps each other in the difficult times,

they helped their enjoined friend Yule May to get a lawyer as Aibleen says “the church already set up a plan to pay the lawyer” (Stockett 252), also Skeeter offers her help by saying “ I could ask my daddy. He try and get her a ... white lawyer” (Stockett 251).

Women’s sisterhood and friendship in Jackson Mississippi aims at seeking equality and improve themselves in male society. In the novel, *the Help*, women established their own organization ‘Jackson League’ and make the husbands believe in their capacity by attending to benefits ceremony with their wives “Celia grabs for Johnny’s arm as they make their way into the room” (Stockett 322). Not only ordinary males attend to the Benefits but also politicians’ ones as it is illustrated by Hilly “congress man with us tonight” (Stockett 326).

The sisterhood in *the Help* is not evident only within the same race but also it appears among white and black women. Hook argues: “we can be sister united by shared interests and beliefs, united in our appreciation for diversity, united in our struggle to end sexism...” (65), in the novel Stockett depicted different experiences in which women support each other despite their color. The case of sisterhood between two races is represented through Skeeter and her nanny Constantine who always supports her to reach her dream and to prove herself in their patriarchal society. Constantine used to take care of Skeeter who comes home hurt because of boys’ bullying. Skeeter used to be called tall and ugly. Constantine’s advice as Skeeter narrates is “Ever morning, until you dead in the ground, you gone to make this decision [...] you gone to ask yourself. Am gone believe what them fools say about me today?” (Stockett 63).

Minnie’s relations with her household Miss Celia is very strong. Minny help Celia how to be a good house wife by teaching her how to cook as Minny narrates “Miss Celia comes In the kitchen and says she’s ready for her first cooking lesson” (Stockett

48). Minny's love and empathy towards Miss Celia represents when Miss Celia lost her baby as Minny states "I push her back up but she's gone limp and I feel tears spring up in my eyes" (Stockett 236). Minny's support and encouragement to Celia appears also when Miss Celia bullied by Hilly at the benefits ceremony, Minny calming Celia saying that "but Miss Hilly don't count, don't judge yourself by the way that woman see you" (Stockett 336).

Skeeter is helped by African American women on different occasions and this is represent the bond of sisterhood between women from the white and the black races. The black maids help her greatly when they tell her their stories and experiences as maids to write and publish the book. In addition to Aibileen and Support, Skeeter works hard to be an editor. After the publication of the book and when as they are dealing with the fallout from the book's publication, Minny encourages Skeeter to pursue her dream and go to New York by saying: "you listen to me Miss Skeeter, I'm on take care on Aibileen and she gone take care on me [...] so don't walk to New York, Miss Skeeter, run it" (Stockett 424). Also Aibileen encourages Skeeter to find her way as an independent woman saying that "Go to New York, Miss Skeeter, go and find your life" (Stockett 437). Aibileen's capacity in her writing with the help of Miss Skeeter make her work in *Jackson Journal* in Skeeter's place as it is illustrated "I think the next Miss Myrna should be you." (Stockett 435). This clarifies that not only white women can change their lives but also black women who resist improving themselves not only in front of black males but also in front of white ones because *Jackson Journal* is ruled by white men. Hence women are aware now that the power and superiority given to men is only in their mind as it is portrayed in chapter twenty four by Minny "cause that line ain't there, except in Leroy's head." (Stockett 312) For that women starts to struggle for the equality between the two gender male and female.

Female empowerment is highly represented in Kathryn Stokett's work, *the Help*, females characters unified and connected with each other in terms of solidarity and sisterhood in fighting the oppression that they faced in a racist and patriarchal society. Due to the shared experiences that women experienced, they find in each other the strength to rebel against the racist rules for their survival and equality.

Conclusion

Kathryn Stockett in her work, *the Help*, represents the African American women's suffering in Jackson Mississippi. She depicts their suffering as maids who are abused by the white housewives who hired them; they work with lower wage from the sunrise to the sunset. They are subordinate due to their color "black" the color of dirt that carries diseases according to white. Stockett also focuses on men's abusiveness toward women.

In *The Help*, male violence is witnessed through the character Minny who is always beaten by her drunk and abusive husband. Stockett does not only narrate women's suffering, she also represents their struggle and power to stand against the oppression that they faced, how they work closely together to end racism, gain equality, and earn their rights.

The theme of solidarity and sisterhood between women appears in *the Help* through the three main characters Aibileen, Minny and Skeeter. These three female, regardless to their race and class, work hand in hand to fight racism and sexism. From the one hand, Aibileen, and Minny help Skeeter by sharing with her their and other maids' experiences as maids to write her book. On the other hand, Skeeter helps Minny and Aibileen and other maids in Jackson to break their silence and to challenge all the issues that minimize the opportunities for them to attain self-realization. Women in general black and whites did not stay hidden and invisible behind male dominance, they challenge men's power and succeed to improve themselves as empowered women who aspire to reach their dreams and goals and to be free and independent women.

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ملخص

تناقش هذه الأطروحة موضوع تمكين المرأة من كتاب عاملة المنزل للروائية كاترين ستوكت حيث تسلط الضوء على أهمية التكافل و الأخوة في مواجهة الخطر الثلاثي المتمثل في العنصرية والتمييز الجنسي إضافة إلى الطبقية. هدف هذه الدراسة ذو منحيين. الأول يتمثل في مناقشة ما مدى تأثير العنصرية التمييز الجنسي على حياة المرأة وما معنى أن تضطهد كامرأة. أما بالنسبة للمنحى الثاني يتمحور حول دعم النساء ورعايتهم المتبادلة فيما بينهم. المنهج المتبع في دراسة هذه الأطروحة هو المنهج النسوي والمرأة . الهدف من تطبيق المنهاجين المذكورين سابقا هو لتصوير وحدة وصلابة المرأة في محاربة الاضطهاد وتحدي سلطة الرجل في المجتمع. تكشف هذه الأطروحة مدى إمكانية المرأة في تغيير الحالة المزرية وتكاتف النسوة في التعبير عن الواقع المعاش.

Résumé

Cette thèse examine le thème de l'autonomisation des femmes dans l'œuvre '*La Couleur des Sentiments*' de Kathryn Stockett. Cette étude met en lumière l'importance de la solidarité et de la fraternité des femmes pour faire face au triple péril que sont le racisme, le sexisme, et le classisme. Le but de cette étude est double. Tout d'abord, il examine l'impact du racisme, du sexisme et du classisme dans la vie des femmes et de ce que signifie être opprimé en tant que femme. Deuxièmement, l'étude porte sur la manière dont les femmes peuvent se soutenir et s'épauler mutuellement afin de changer leur position dans la société. Les deux approches utilisées pour mener cette étude sont féministe et womaniste. La mise en œuvre de ces approches décrit l'unité de la femme dans la lutte contre l'oppression et le défi patriarcal. Cette thèse découvre comment l'autonomisation des femmes peut changer le malheur et peut aider les femmes à exprimer leur réalité.