

## Double Discrimination Towards Black Women in *Hidden Figures* and *Where Hands Touch*

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**Abstract.** This research is intended to describe the double discrimination towards black women in society found in *Hidden Figures* and *Where Hands Touch*, and to find out the similarities and differences of double discrimination towards black women between the two films. This study used a qualitative descriptive method, which involves gathering, categorizing, and analyzing data. The data were dialogues and scene shots related to double discrimination. Based on the data analysis, there are racial and gender discrimination that is found in internal and external conflicts. After analyzing the data through the analysis of the intrinsic elements, similarities and differences are found between the two films. The two main characters; Katherine and Leyna, were similarly mistreated and harmed by society as black women. Katherine fought against double discrimination, while Leyna could do nothing but surrender. Their races and backgrounds are also different. Katherine was born to black American parents and lived in Virginia, United States. Meanwhile, Leyna was born biracial to black African and white German and lived in Berlin, Germany. In America in 1961, there was still tolerance, even though black women were still distinguished from white women. However, in Germany in 1944, there was no place for black women.

**Keyword:** Comparative Literature, Discrimination, Film, Gender, Race.

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### 1 Introduction

In Indonesia, the fact is that many people think that women with lighter skin are better and are the ideal of beauty. Meanwhile, women with brown skin, which is typical of genuine Indonesian women's skin, are considered not that beautiful and instead are often made fun of. This negative stereotype has existed for a long time in Indonesia, especially in Western countries where history has had conflicts related to the topic of race and skin color. Gender inequality also causes a lot of conflict between one gender and another, which differentiates one's rights from another. The closest example is a woman who is not allowed to work in a certain job because she is considered unable and as tough as a man. When talking about race, recently actress Halle Bailey, who played the character Ariel in the live-action animated film *The Little Mermaid*, was deemed inappropriate for playing the role due to skin color, facial shape, and hairstyle that didn't match the animation. However, some people think that she is not beautiful enough to play the character and is more suitable for playing other terrible magical creatures. From this case, it can be concluded that skin color can be a measure of beauty.

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Inequality in the right to live as human beings leads to an action that differentiates one group from another through an indicator as a measuring tool for some perception. This is known as discrimination. Discrimination is an act of the majority that corners and demeans a minority because of distinction of ethnicity, race, religion, gender, economic and social status. The minority group is a subordinate people whose populace has significantly less power (Schaefer, 2012). Discrimination initially occurs from prejudice. The existence of this prejudice creates many differences between minorities and the majority. This distinction occurs because, as social beings, people gather with similar groups. A group that has this resemblance is often prejudiced and has a fear of being different. So, there is a misunderstanding and generalization of other different groups. Whatever the form, discrimination will always embrace deep trauma for any group experiencing it (Nasution, 2007).

Racial discrimination as one of the most frequent forms of discrimination is inequalities based on significant distinctions of skin color, race, ethnicity, and origin that limit or violate a person's rights. The impact of racial discrimination and the consequences that arise can trigger racism by a racial group against other races. Racism is prejudice based on significant physical differences (Giddens, 2006). For example, in America, most of the races of people are white. Not infrequently since time immemorial, white people think black people are no better than them. Humanity is presumed to be divided up into distinct 'races' arranged hierarchically, with 'whites' or 'Aryans' positioned at the top, above darker-skinned Europeans and Asians, who are in turn superior to blacks, who are seen as inherently inferior in attractiveness, intelligence, and cultural form, and capacity for progress (Philips & Bowling, 2003). Based on the statement of Delgado and Stefancic, jails are dominated by colored people. People of color are consistently stereotyped as criminals, while white people, like chief executive officers, surgeons, and university presidents, always have power in society. Colored people pay more than white for many products and services (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Gender discrimination occupies the second position when talking about the most common discrimination. Gender discrimination is an act where people are treated differently because of their sex, not because of their gender (Tiska, 2014). It is commonly known as an act that leads to sexism, which is the ideology that one sex is superior to the other. When we discuss a situation where two discriminations occur at the same time, double discrimination is the right term, when a person or group experiences two forms of discrimination, which can occur because of race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. In this study, the writer discussed two discriminations regarding race and gender towards black women in the films *Hidden Figures* and *Where Hands Touch*. Films have involved photographic portrayals to exceed realistic depictions in the theater. Therefore, drama could claim realism and develop other representations in the forms of a more stylized or abstract form Klarer (2004)

*Hidden Figures* is a biographical film by Theodore Melfi in 2016. This film is based on the non-fiction book of the same name by Margot Lee Shetterly from the same year. It tells the story of three African-American female mathematicians, Katherine Goble Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson, who work at NASA during the Space Race. They did not get credit for their leading role in enhancing the status of the United States on an international level. Even they experienced discrimination in the work environment and society because of their race and gender.

*Where Hands Touch* is a romantic war drama by Amma Asante in 2018. It tells the story of a girl named Leyna Schlegel, a biracial teenager who falls in love with a member of the Hitler Youth, Lutz, and struggles with racial and gender that she experienced during the Nazi regime in Germany during World War II.

From the synopsis described, these two films discuss the same issue of racial and gender discrimination. So, the writer is interested in these two films to examine the intrinsic aspects that will be analyzed and compared. Intrinsic element is the exegesis and analysis of the works of literature themselves This study uses comparative literature to explore these two literary works.

Comparative literature examines the relationship between two or more literary works (Wellek & Warren, 1948). This theory is a way to compare two or more literary works, comparing in terms of plot, character, setting, theme, or culture. Remak put forward another definition of comparative literature, saying that comparative literature is the study of literature between one particular country and the study of the connections between the literature on one hand and other fields of knowledge and belief (Remak in Stallknecht & Frenz, 1963). This comparative literature analysis is done by analyzing double discrimination through the intrinsic elements of the story, especially the conflict between the two films.

## 2 Method

To conduct this study, the writer chose to use the qualitative method, which is used to explain or describe the use of non-verbal data and non-numeric data as the basis for analysis and problem-solving. A qualitative method is research that aims to holistically understand phenomena by research subjects, for example, action, insight, encouragement, and other actions, and employing descriptions in the form of words and language (Moleong, 2017). The source data of this study were the films themselves. The writer used several words, phrases, and sentences in dialogues, and also several scenes that describe double discrimination against black women in films as the primary data of this research. For the comparative method, this study emphasizes primary data on differences in the treatment of social systems, state laws, culture, and character backgrounds.

After collecting data from both films, to find the double discrimination found in both films, the writer analyzed the intrinsic elements; plot, character and characterization, setting of place and time, and conflict. The writer also analyzed double discrimination through internal and external conflicts in both films. After that, the writer compared *Hidden Figures* and *Where Hands Touch* by grouping the similarities and differences. Finally, the writer made the conclusion about this study after the data had been analyzed.

## 3 Result and Discussion

Double discrimination was experienced by Katherine G. Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson as the main characters in the film *Hidden Figures*, and also experienced by Leyna Schlegel in *Where Hands Touch*. There were also some similarities and differences between the two films, *Hidden Figures* by Theodore Melfi and *Where Hands Touch* by Amma Asante.

The writer found there are similarities and differences in the intrinsic elements, both films have a progressive plot. The main character in *Hidden Figures* is an African American woman who has grown up, works at NASA, experiences discrimination in society, and is able to speak herself to fight for her rights as a black woman. The main character in *Where Hands Touch* is an African-German woman who is still in school experiences discrimination in society, and does not put up a fight to equalize her rights with white people.

In *Hidden Figures*, there are three black women as the main characters although Katherine is the main focus from her childhood to adulthood. Meanwhile, in *Where Hands Touch*, there is only one black woman who is the main character that is fully highlighted. The two films have different backgrounds, *Hidden Figures* is set in America, while *Where Hands Touch* is set in Germany. The main characters of both films experience racial and gender discrimination from the inner and outer of their characters. The discrimination conflicts that occur in this film are racial and gender discrimination, which are described as similar but there are also differences.

In *Hidden Figures*, conflicts arise between the three main characters, where Katherine experiences racial and gender discrimination in her workplace by minor characters. Where the Space Task Group building did not have a colored bathroom, the male employees separated their and Katherine's coffee pots, were not friendly, and did not allow Katherine to join a meeting due to her gender. Dorothy experienced racial discrimination by NASA when applying

for a promotion and got rejected, and while in the public library by a white female minor character. Meanwhile, Mary experienced racial and gender discrimination by herself and a minor character in NASA, and the courts when she wanted to be in an engineer training program.

In *Where Hands Touch*, double discrimination occurred to Leyna Schlegel by the Nazis, society, her younger brother, and herself. Leyna experienced discrimination in Rudesheim and was banned from using the public pool. While in Berlin, she experienced it in a bakery, on the streets by some of the Hitler's Youth kids, she was kicked out of school, hated by her younger brother, and was hated, chased, and enslaved by the Nazis. At the end of the story, she has a discrimination conflict with herself, that she has no place anywhere in her own country.

Significant differences between the conflicts that the authors found, the main characters in *Hidden Figures* have resistance and fight for their rights by speaking up by themselves. While Leyna in *Where Hands Touch*, has no resistance and no courage to fight for equality for black women like her, with white people.

### 3.1 Similarities and Differences Based on Intrinsic Elements of *Hidden Figures* and *Where Hands Touch*

The writer found similarities and differences in the intrinsic elements between the two films. In the table above, it is found that both films have the same type of plot. Not only that, the conflicts in both films also occur in internal and external conflicts. However, there are differences in appearance, background, and character, of the main characters in both films. The setting of place and time is also different so the conditions of society and culture are also different.

**Table 1.** Similarities and Differences based on Intrinsic Elements of *Hidden Figures* and *Where Hands Touch*

| No. | Intrinsic elements             | Hidden Figures   | Where Hands Touch   |
|-----|--------------------------------|--|---|
| 1.  | Plot                           | Progressive plot   | Progressive plot  |
| 2.  | Character and Characterization | <p>Katherine G. Johnson is a woman in her late thirties, born to African-American parents. One of the black female mathematicians working at NASA.</p> <p>Katherine's character is described as a brave woman who is able to speak to herself to defend and fight for her rights as a black woman.</p> | <p>Leyna Schlegel is a sixteen-year-old biracial woman, born to a White German mother and a Black African father. The only black girl high school student in school.</p> <p>Leyna's character is described as a woman who surrenders to her fate and is unable to defend her rights as a black woman.</p> |
| 3.  | The setting of Place and Time  | Virginia, United States of America, 1961   | Rudesheim, The Rhineland and Berlin, The Fatherland, Germany, 1944  |
| 4.  | Conflict                       | Internal and External conflict   | Internal and External conflict  |

### 3.2 Similarities and Differences of Double Discrimination through Internal Conflict in *Hidden Figures* and *Where Hands Touch*

Based on the story, double discrimination or racial and gender discrimination was found against black women in these two films. The writer also found similarities and differences of double discrimination through internal conflict in the two films.

**Table 2.** Double Discrimination Towards Black Women through Internal Conflict

| No. | Data A  | Data B   |
|-----|---|--|
|     | Hidden Figures  | Where Hands Touch  |
| 1.  | <p>Mr. Zielinski: “Mary, a person with an engineer's mind should be an engineer. You can't be a computer the rest of your life.”</p> <p>Mary: “Mr. Zielinski. I'm a Negro woman. I'm not gonna entertain the impossible.”<br/>(00:15:04-00:15:46)</p> | <p>Leyna: “<b>I am not a Gypsy. I'm not a Jew. Even in this camp, they tell me I have no place to belong.</b>”</p> <p>Lutz: “I see a German girl, loyal and dutiful to the Fatherland.”</p> <p>Leyna: “<b>But I was never allowed to love it.</b>”<br/>(1:40:50-1:40:09)</p> |

Based on the table above, similarities were found in a conflict involving self-awareness or internal conflict. Both characters claimed and discriminated against themselves because they were black women.

The difference in the A1 data, the main character tells her supervisor that she is a black woman who is unable to become an engineer and says it plainly. In B1, the main character tells her lover that she has no place to belong, and is not allowed to love her own country. But it does not explicitly say that the reason is that she is a black woman.

### 3.3 Similarities and Differences of Double Discrimination through External Conflict in *Hidden Figures* and *Where Hands Touch*

Double discrimination is also found in both films through external conflict. External conflicts are shown through dialogues between characters and scenes. The conflict that occurs between the major character and minor character becomes a highlight when it alludes to racial and gender discrimination as shown in the data below.

**Table 3.** Double Discrimination Towards Black Women through External Conflict that Shown in Dialogue

| No. | Data C  | Data D   |
|-----|---|--|
|     | Hidden Figures  | Where Hands Touch  |
| 1.  | <p>Paul: “There is no protocol for a woman attending these meetings.”<br/>(1:21:48-1:21:52)</p> | <p>Leyna: “Koen.”<br/>Koen: “What?”<br/>Leyna: “Do you still love me?”<br/>Koen: “No, I hate you. <b>You're a girl and I hate girls!</b>”<br/>(00:42:42-43:06)</p> |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>2. Mary: "They are never gonna allow a Colored woman to just take classes at an all-white school."<br/>(00:47:28-00:47:47)</p>   | <p>Teacher: "Schlegel. Stand. Come. Leave your books, <b>you don't need them anymore. And take your bag.</b>"</p> <p>Kerstin: "They didn't hurt you, that's all that matters. <b>They can force you from school</b> but they can't stop you from learning. You'll learn here at home."<br/>(00:20:17-00:21:18)</p> |
| <p>3. White woman: "<b>We don't want any trouble in here.</b>"<br/>Dorothy: "Oh, I'm not here for any trouble, Ma'am."<br/>White Woman: "You have books in the Colored section."<br/>Dorothy: "It doesn't have what I'm looking for."<br/>White woman: "<b>Well, that's just the way it is.</b>"<br/><br/>(00:40:41-00:50:58)</p> | <p>Leyna: "In Rudesheim, I'd swim every week. There were many Jews. They were told they couldn't use the pool. And then, <b>I was told I couldn't use it either.</b>"<br/><br/>(00:32:45-00:33:00)</p>   |







The similarities between data C1 and D1 are that both main characters are experiencing gender discrimination. The difference between these two data, gender discrimination is shown in different situations and places by different male roles. Gender discrimination occurs by colleagues in the work environment because they prohibit women from attending meetings and D1 by younger brother at home because she is a girl.

The similarities between C2 and D2 are educational places; schools and universities prohibit black women from joining them. The difference is how the prohibition is delivered. C2 directly through dialogue by black women. Meanwhile D2 non-verbally, through scenes and explained by other characters in later scenes.

The similarities between C3 and D3, the two main characters are prohibited from using public facilities. The differences are the main character is prohibited from visiting the public library for white people in C3 and it is ordered directly by the minor character in that scene. While the main character in D3, was ordered not to use public swimming pools for white people by a minor character in the past.

Not only through dialogue, double discrimination that occurs through external conflicts also shown in the scenes in both films. See the table below.

**Table 4.** Double Discrimination Towards Black Women through External Conflict that Shown in Scene

| No. | Data E  | Data F   |
|-----|---|--|
|     | Hidden Figures  | Where Hands Touch  |
| 1.  |          |    |
|     | Vivian: “Our runner can pick up your work, Dorothy. You need to be working, not walking.” |    |
|     | (Min. 00:41:19-00:41:48)  | Bakery owner: “There are people waiting.”  |
|     |   | (Min. 00:11:36-00:11:47)   |
| 2.  |        |  |
|     |        | (00:27:38-00:28:48)  |
|     | (00:37:56-00:38:03)   |  |

The similarities between E1 and F1 are the main characters are both unfriendly towards the white people around them. They also get an indirect expulsion. The difference between the two data, E1 takes place in the workplace and those who give unfriendly looks and sentences are colleagues and supervisors. While F1 takes place in the bakery, those who give the unfriendly looks and sentences are the customers and the bakery owner.

The similarities between E2 and F2, black women are separated in line, and not allowed to mingle with white people. The differences are that one group of black women in one event was separated by white women, and the other was that there was only one black woman who was rejected and not allowed to join white teenagers.

## 4 Conclusion

So, the writer presents the conclusions from the analysis of the films *Hidden Figures* and *Where Hands Touch*, as the application of one of the functions of comparative literature in a comparison of two literary works that present two cultures. The two films are similar in several aspects but differ in general. Double discrimination analysis was found in both films, but double discrimination was much more explicit in *Hidden Figures* than in *Where Hands Touch*. Racial and gender discrimination appears in several conflicts in both films, with different storylines but with similar types of conflicts.

The main characters in both films also have differences, in *Hidden Figures* which experiences double discrimination there are three main characters as black women, while in *Where Hands Touch* there is only one main character as a black woman who experiences double discrimination. Even though the main characters in both films have the same race and gender, they have different ages, backgrounds, and characterization in dealing with double discrimination.

The two films also have different backgrounds, *Hidden Figures* is set in Virginia, USA in 1961. Meanwhile *Where Hands Touch* is set in Berlin, Germany in 1944. This shows how the social, governmental, and cultural situations in these countries are exposed through conflicts in the story, the same but different. In Virginia, the United States, tolerance between white people and black people still exists, such as segregated bathrooms, or how black people are allowed to have a decent and family life, even though equality in work, promotion, and complete facilities still do not exist and not equal with white privilege. Meanwhile, Berlin, Germany, had less tolerance for black women. Black people have almost no place in society, they are hated, ostracized, prohibited from using public facilities, do not get the right in terms of education, and are also required to sterilize themselves for not having children.

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