

THE UNCANNY PHENOMENON PORTRAYED IN KATHRYN STOCKETT'S "THE HELP": POSTCOLONIAL APPROACH

Erlis¹, Emil Eka Putra²

¹Student of English Department, Putera Batam University

²Lecturer of English Department, Putera Batam University

email: pb161210008@upbatam.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the uncanny phenomenon in "The Help" by Kathryn Stockett. This research aims to identify uncanny phenomenon and how it is reflected in the story. This research also uses the uncanny theory by Homi K. Bhabha. The researcher collects the data by reading the novel and writes down the data that is matched with the problem that is going to be identified. After the data has been gathered, the researcher analyzed the data with qualitative descriptive method and the result is presented by words and sentences. The result of the research shows that uncanny phenomenon occurs in characters through their conversation and activities. The uncanny phenomenon mostly reflected in the maid's (colored skin) experiences dealing with their boss (white skin). The experiences classified into the differences in using restroom, utensils, eating etiquette, etc.

Keywords: *uncanny, postcolonial, Homi K. Bhabha*

INTRODUCTION

According to Liliweri (2018), race is the characteristic and feature that used to classify people according to their skin color (black, white, Asian, etc) (p. 570). Meanwhile, Sussman (2014) stated that race is just a population with a particular set of gene frequencies that are constantly shifting due to migration, natural selection social and sexual selection, mutation, random genetic drift, and so forth (p. 207). From the definition, the researcher can conclude that race can be identified as a group of people that are categorized into specific classification that is based on their common historical culture, nationality, or their birthplace. In these days, many people still believe that every person has different social class that once was applied in the colonialism era long time ago. This belief will create discrimination among the individual and grouping in the society. At last, the social gap between different races will create social deviation.

The differential among races could actually bring positivity and diversity if each individual appreciates one another. However, this difference has not always been taken positively by people. Some people still think that their own race is better than the others. This way of thinking can make people act harshly towards people who are not in the same race as theirs. Example can be taken from Independent News, January 9th 2019 where there was news about a former employee of MOSCHINO who was suing the company for alleged racial discrimination. The store appeared to have a code word for black customers. The term was reportedly used when the black customer happened to be not a celebrity and did not have an appearance of rich people like wearing branded things or jewelry entered the store. The employee was asked to closely watch over the black customers who entered the store just in case they might steal something. From this incident, it can be concluded that the

uncanny phenomenon that portrayed is the black customers still taken as a criminal, even though they live in the same place as the whites since long time ago.

In Madiong (2014) racism is an ideology that justifies the domination of one particular racial group against another or a feeling of excessive superiority towards certain social groups (p. 227). In other words, racism is generally associated with the different skin color or domination of specific race. In the colonialism era, the colored skin was usually treated as the lowest social class in the society and western was usually the contrary. It is mostly like inferior and superior class. This historical story is the common cause why people are still racist towards people with colored skin.

The racism in *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett still exists in that time and people with colored skin still could not get the same rights as the westerns as they did not get treated equally. Although they live in the same place as the westerns, they still did not get the feeling of being at home, at their safe place. This problem is known as the uncanny, where one does not feel that they are at home and in their safe place despite having a physical house. The uncanny phenomenon often appears among the colored skin because of the racism.

It appears that some people still experience racism in modern days although racism was firstly 'introduced' by western during colonialism era where enslavement of colored skin people (especially black people) was vastly adapted. Therefore, the researcher is interested in racism especially the uncanny phenomenon occurring in the *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett. The suitable approach the researcher used is the postcolonial approach because *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett talks about racism in colonial era with the theory of uncanny by Homi K. Bhabha. The postcolonial approach focuses on the uncanny phenomenon in the novel.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1 Postcolonial Approach

The use of postcolonial approach in this research is based on Bhabha's explanation in the book *The Location of Culture* and *The World and The Home*. His idea was influenced by Said in his book *Orientalism*, so Bhabha contributed his new idea about the third space and uncanny in addition of the concept of West and East. According to Tyson (as cited in Zohdi, 2017) European culture was sophisticated, civilized, or as postcolonial critics put it, metropolitan. Therefore, colored skins were described as backward, undeveloped, and uncontrolled. Due to their technology was more highly advanced, the colonizers believed that their culture was more highly advanced and they stepped on the people they conquer. By this explanation, the white people feel as the center of the world, the leader of the colored people.

In postcolonial criticism, it mostly studies about the differences among the culture in the literary texts. The problem is usually focused on specific issues such as gender, social class, and sexual orientation. According to Barry (2017), the first characteristic of postcolonial criticism is representations awareness of the non-European as exotic or immoral 'Other' (pp. 161–162). Language is the second concern in postcolonial analysis. The third characteristic of postcolonial approach is the emphasis on identity as hybrid, unstable, or doubled.

While doing a research with postcolonial approach, the researcher should understand the three stages of phases which are 'adopt', 'adapt', and 'adept' because they provided a way of understanding postcolonial information and postcolonial criticism's stages. Barry (2017) stated that the 'adopt' phase of colonial literature aims to maintain the condition as it stands, the assumption being that it has universal validity (pp. 162–163). The 'adapt' phase plans to adapt the white people form to colored people subject matter. In the last stage, which

is 'adept', there is a belief of cultural independence where colored writers remake the form with their own specification, without reference of white people norm.

The postcolonial criticisms rejected the demands to universalism made on behalf of Western literature and search to present its limit, especially the lack of empathize through boundaries of ethnic and cultural differences. They also examined the image of another culture in literature as the way of accomplishing its end. They display crucially silent of literature on problems involved with imperialism and colonization.

The postcolonial criticism also foreground questions of cultural diversity and check their method in suitable literary work. They respect 'cultural polyvalency' and hybridity. It is the moment where groups and individuals belong to many culture. Last, they establish a mindset, not only suitable to postcolonial literatures, where states of marginality, plurality, and perceived 'Otherness' are taken as potential changes and origin of energy. There are many subject of the research that can be analyzed while conducting a research with postcolonial approaches and one of them is the theory of postcolonial studies called 'the uncanny' by Homi K. Bhabha. This theory is going to be discussed further in the next section.

2.2 Definition of Uncanny

Bhabha (as cited in Rostami & Parvaneh, 2016), suggests that the concept of uncanny also as unhomey, too. Bhabha recalls the migrant's experience of uncanniness from familiar ideas like- half-life, repeats the life in the origin country. Someone who feels the uncanny phenomenon does not mean that they are homeless. They feel threatened and worried about their safety despite being inside their own house. This phenomenon often occurs on the immigrant and the colored skin which is identic with colonized people.

In Huskinson (2016), Freud stated

that uncanny is the subject's encounter of unconscious contents (such as experiences, feelings, memories, or ideas) that he or she has attempted to disown and neglect, but which have suddenly reappeared, causing unexpected and often unpleasant surprise. The colored skin who lived in the same place as the westerns tried to be like them. This phenomenon is known as mimicry. In Bhabha (1994), he explained that mimicry means almost the same but not quiet (p. 127). It is the efforts carried out by colonized for the sake of appearing equal and considered as part of the colonialist, but still could not be the part of it.

The colonized who think they were inferiors wanted to be considered as superiors. However, this effort will not be fully the same as the original because the colonized will never be the same as the colonialist. Their true identity could not be removed. Usually, the imitation includes the imitation of language, culture, behavior, and idea. Bhabha (1994) then developed his idea by saying that mimicry is the effort of defining back an identity of colonized by adapting to the colonialist's identity (p. 85). This process is not only equalization but also resistance of colonized toward the colonialist. They often want to be taken as equal. But most of the time, they still feel 'empty' because they do not really understand about their true identity. They want to be identified as someone else, someone who is in the upper social class. They do not want to be in the lowest social class like in the old time.

Bhabha in Byrne (2009) saw this uncanny moment, where what was strange becomes familiar, or what was familiar becomes strange, as having a critical role in the histories of the colonized (p. 69). Byrne in (2009) stated that for Bhabha, the attractions of the uncanny as Freud discusses is are that notions of being unhomed, or the unhomey, resonate suggestively with the disturbed relation to home and belonging that Bhabha saw as

characterizing migrant, exiled or refugee experiences (p. 70). Bhabha in Byrne (2009) also explained the unhomely is a paradigmatic colonial and postcolonial condition (p. 70). To feel at home and strange or estranged at the same time, or to feel not at home even when one is 'at home', might be painfully familiar condition for the colonized or postcolonial subject, a condition not limited to the migrant alone. The feeling of uncanny reflected through discrimination and racism.

From the statements above, the researcher can conclude that the uncanny reflected through the environment such as lifestyle, education, or occupation. In lifestyle, the uncanny phenomenon is portrayed through the feeling of not at home although being 'at home'. Although having a house, the people who felt the uncanny feel that they are not at home. Frantz Fanon (1967) stated about a fact that white men consider themselves superior to black men (p. 12). In education, the uncanny is reflected through the division of school for the colored skin and school for the westerns. Fanon (1967) also mentioned that black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect (p. 12). The colored skin has the same thoughts as the whites. They are capable as the whites. Even if they live at the same city, they still could not attend the same school as the whites just because of their skin color. In occupation, the uncanny is reflected through the job that usually the colored skin do is being a help, driver, farmer, and sort of work that doesn't need any special specifications or educations. Meanwhile the westerns can get jobs like being a doctor or a teacher. Fanon (1967) then stated that a Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro (p. 17). It means that they feel pressured around the white men, rather than around their 'kind', which is the colored skin. Although both the

colored and the whites get the same education since they were little, the colored still could not have the same job as the westerns.

Most of the uncanny phenomenon that reflected through the people is caused by the discrimination and racism among people. There are a few previous researches that were related to the uncanny which is going to be discussed in the next section.

2.3 Previous Study

The postcolonial studies about uncanny is still considered uncommon in literary field, but the researcher found that there are a few studies that is about uncanny and also another studies about postcolonial criticism that is related to the theory of uncanny.

The first previous research with the title of "Representing Third Spaces, Fluid Identities and Contested Spaces in Contemporary British Literature" by Fernandez (2009) is one of the many research that is related to postcolonial approaches. The authors believed that a homogenous views of British identity celebrated the 'third space' and provided representation of British society's contemporary. In here, identities are portrayed as space(s) and fluid as frequently bargained. Hence, owning entry to the spaces of representation that literature entrusts grants ethnically diverse female writers such as the ones under analysis to handle the daily experience of redefine social spaces and 'hybrid' individuals which accept their identity as British hybrid.

The second previous research in ALLS journal with the title "The Notion of Unhomeliness in *The Pickup*: Homi Bhabha Revisited" is also related with postcolonial approach. The journal is written by Rostami (2016) and talked about the main characters named Abdu and Julie in novel *The Pickup*. Abdu is an unauthorized immigrant in South Africa and he is dismissed to his motherland in Arab. Meanwhile Julie

comes from rich white family in South Africa met and fell in love with Abdu. She decided to move to the Islamic country. In the story, she found her lost personality in Abdu's motherland and chose to stay in that country. She tried to adapt herself to the Islamic traditions, culture, and laws, while Abdu felt unhomey in his own motherland and even tried to move into the US. The author analyzed the two characters with the notions of unhomelessness, and in-between spaces. Their identity was not determined by the country. The most serious problem that was being studied in this journal is the unhomelessness in the post-colonialism era. The characters are portrayed wandering looking for their true identity. In process of social political oppression, and colonization, many people abandon their motherland because of the unhomey feeling.

The third previous research that is related with postcolonial approach is written by Farahbakhsh (2016) with the title "Bhabha's Notion of Unhomelessness in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*: A Postcolonial Reading" in the *IJSELL* journal, described that the behaviors, actions and interactions from the characters were explored based on Bhabha's concepts of unhomelessness, ambivalence and hybridity. The author analyzed that *Foe* is an anti-colonial novel which Coetzee pursues to portray the colonial discourse's ambivalence condition. The feeling of unhomelessness is discernable in the main characters' cultural identity as an aspect of hybridity. As discussed, Friday, Susan, and Cruso experienced unhomey moments and felt torn between the two identities and cultures. They do not feel at home and live on borders in both culture. As the result, the feeling of unhomelessness made them experienced the feeling of unable to find their sense of culture or identity. According to the author, this situation reflects Bhabha's demand about pure cultural identity

does not occur; rather, they appear from the hybridizing methods. During the flow of the novel, Friday, Susan and Cruso experienced ambivalence because of their unhomelessness feelings.

The fourth previous research which is related with postcolonial approach too, titled "Bhabha's Notion of 'Mimicry' and 'Ambivalence' in V.S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River*" by Kumar (2011) from *RW-JASCR* journal is about how Bhabha thinks about the mimicry, ambivalence, and in-betweenness. The author explained about the impression to interpret the typical postcolonial 'halfness'. In postcolonial studies 'mimicry' is considered as a crave to sever the ties with 'self' to move towards 'other'. The natives feel confused about their origin and it makes them embrace the other culture, fashion, languages, and social life, only to experience the tormenting and prevailing ambivalence which destabilises their lives.

The fifth previous research titled "The 'unheimlich' in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*: A Reading Along the Lines of Homi K. Bhabha's Idea of 'Uncanny'" is also related with postcolonial approach and it is written by Bhandari (2013). This journal used the concept of 'unhomey' and 'uncanny' to the situation in the Eugene's household. The punishment he got from his childhood from the missionaries led himself to maintain the same measures of control in his home. Therefore, Eugene often punishes his children and also his own wife every time they make small mistakes. The home then became 'unhomey' under Eugene's control, who has conflict in the battle of his native self with his projected self. His inherent goodness is in battle with induced values developed as the influence of his education. This gap between the familiar values and assimilated unfamiliar values (acquired through education) recalls his uncanny sensation.

The sixth previous research titled “The Cultural Relationship between English’s and Indians as Reflected in ‘A Passage to India’ by EM Foster; A Postcolonial Analysis” in Menara Ilmu journal, written by Robby Satria. This research talks about the image of colonization situation at the certain time. The writer in here analyses about the relationship between India and English in the colonial period in A Passage to India written by EM Foster which was issued in 1816. The data in this journal is taken from other sources from web and library research method. The writer applied the postcolonial theory by Edward Said called Orientalism to “The Passage to India” and found that the relationship between India and English was good but in the end it clashed and eventually formed the scene between two countries.

The similarity between the previous studies and the research that is going to be analyzed by the researcher is the studies used the postcolonial approach and this research is intended to identify the uncanny phenomenon that occurred as the problem. The phenomenon is also related to the one of the three phases in postcolonial criticism according to Barry (2017, pp. 162–163) which is ‘adapt’.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

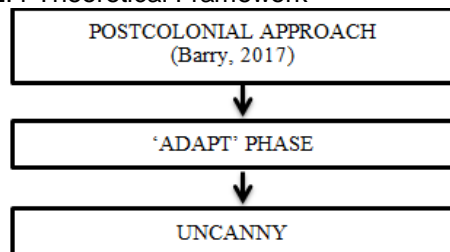


Figure 2.4.1 Theoretical Framework

By looking at the framework above, the researcher will conduct the research by analyzing the The Help by Kathryn Stockett with postcolonial approach. The focus of the study will be using the theory of Homi K. Bhabha, which is the theory of uncanny. This uncanny phenomenon

will be identified through the differences of using restrooms, eating utensils, eating etiquette, etc.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The qualitative method is applied in this research in analyzing the data. The researcher used postcolonial approach and also theory of uncanny phenomenon by Homi K. Bhabha to analyzed the data in this research. First, the researcher read the data and then wrote down the data that is related with the uncanny phenomenon and postcolonial approach.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research question explained about the uncanny phenomenon that is found in Kathryn Stockett’s The Help. The data will be analyzed using theory of uncanny phenomenon by Homi K. Bhabha (1994).

Miss Hilly talk slow, like she spreading icing on a cake. “You just tell Raleigh every penny he spends on that bathroom he’ll get back when y’all sell this house. She nod like she agreeing with herself. **“All these houses they’re building without maid’s quarters? It’s just plain dangerous. Everybody knows they carry different kinds of diseases than we do.** I double.” I pick up a stack of napkins. I don’t know why, but all a sudden I want a hear what Miss Leefolt gone say to this. She my boss. I guess everybody wonder what they boss think a them. **“It would be nice,” Miss Leefolt say, taking a little puff a her cigarette, “not having her use the one in the house. I bid three spades.” I’m surprised by how tight my throat get. It’s a shame I learned to keep down a long time ago.** (Stockett, 2009, pp. 8–9)

In this passage, Hilly suggested Elizabeth to convince her husband, Raleigh, to build a separate restroom for

maid. Hilly said that the negro in general (especially the maid) carry different kind of diseases than most white people do. Aibileen was surprised that her boss (Elizabeth) was agreeing with Hilly about the separate bathroom ideas.

I look at Miss Celia Rae Foote hard. **I've never in my life had a white woman tell me to sit down so she can serve me a cold drink.** Shoot, now I'm wondering if this fool even plans on hiring a maid or if she just drug me all the way out here for sport. (Stockett, 2009, p. 33)

This passage is from Minnie's point of view and takes place during Minnie's first visit to Celia's resident to find a new job as a maid. The uncanny phenomenon is seen by how surprised Minnie is due to Celia's attitude towards her by asking her to sit down so she can serve her drink. Minnie is feeling uncanny because it's usually the whites who sit and get served drink by the maid instead of the other way around.

"Rule Number Four: **You use the same cup, same fork, same plate every day. Keep it in a separate cupboard and tell that white woman that's the one you'll use from here on out.**" "Rule Number Five: **you eat in the kitchen.**" (Stockett, 2009, p. 40)

This conversation happened between Minnie and her mother when she was a child as her mother was trying to teach her about rules being a maid. The uncanny phenomenon can be seen by how the maid can't use the same eating utensils as the whites and must eat in the separate room from the whites.

I want to yell so loud that Baby Girl can hear me that **dirty ain't a color, disease ain't the Negro side a town.** I want to stop that moment from coming—and it come in ever white child's life—**when they start to think that colored folks ain't as good as whites.** (Stockett, 2009, p. 98)

This passage is from Aibileen's point of view after Mae Mobley was scolded and spanked by her mother, Elizabeth, while attempting to use the colored toilet in the garage. The uncanny phenomenon here is reflected in the difference using the toilet when Aibileen is just so upset and she wants to explain to Mae Mobley so bad that colored people are not what her parents taught her.

"I push open the metal door, get a cart and put Mae Mobley up front, stick her legs through the holes. **Long as I got my white uniform on, I'm allowed to shop in this Jitney.**" (Stockett, 2009, p. 102)

This passage is from Aibileen's point of view when she goes for shopping to prepare dinner for the Leefolt's. As can be seen, the uncanny phenomenon is shown when Aibileen should wear her white uniform so she can enter the white's store.

"**They raise a white child and then twenty years later the child becomes the employer. It's that irony, that we love them and they love us, yet ...**" I swallowed, my voice trembling. "**We don't even allow them to use the toilet in the house.**" (Stockett, 2009, p. 109)

This is the part where Skeeter is being called by Elaine Stein, and Skeeter explained to her what makes her want to write a book by interviewing domestic keepers. The uncanny phenomenon is showed by how Skeeter is kind of trembling when discussing this matter with Elaine Stein.

Loud voices shout in the street and both our eyes dart toward the window. We are quiet, stock-still. **What would happen if someone white found out I was here on a Saturday night talking to Aibileen in her regular clothes? Would they call the police, to report a suspicious meeting? I'm suddenly sure they would. We'd**

be arrested because that is what they do. They'd charge us with integration violation—I read about it in the paper all the time—they despise the whites that meet with the coloreds to help with the civil rights movement. This has nothing to do with integration, but why else would we be meeting? I didn't even bring any Miss Myrna letters as backup. (Stockett, 2009, p. 148)

This passage is from Skeeter's point of view during her first visit to Aibileen's house to write the book about colored help. The uncanny phenomenon is seen reflected through discrimination by how the colored is not allowed to talk with the whites outside their working hour, moreover if it's about civil rights and if both parties are caught doing so, they will be reported with integration violation.

On our fifth session, Aibileen read to me about the day Treelore died. **She reads about how his broken body was thrown on the back of a pickup by the white foremen.** "And then they dropped him off at the colored hospital. That's what the nurse told me, who was standing outside. **They rolled him off the truck bed and the white men drove away.**" Aibileen doesn't cry, just lets a parcel of time pass while I stare at the typewriter, she at the worn black tiles. (Stockett, 2009, p. 156)

This passage is from Skeeter's point of view during her on-going interview with Aibileen for the book's material. The uncanny phenomenon is reflected by how Aibileen's son was ill-treated even after his death by the whites due to the fact that he's colored.

CONCLUSION

The uncanny phenomenon was found on *The Help* written by Kathryn Stockett and it was analyzed with the theory of Homi K Bhabha. Since long time ago, the power and social class of whites tend to be superior. The cultural diversity

between the whites and colored created this uncanny phenomenon. The treatment that the colored people get is caused by this power and discrimination. The researcher also found that uncanny phenomenon is not only about racism and how things work through the colored people's point of view. Uncanny phenomenon is also about the discomfort in one's identity. It can be seen from the difference in using toilet, eating utensils, discrimination, yet people still think that it is normal to act like that.

REFERENCES

- Barry, P. (2017). *Beginning theory: An introduction to literary and cultural theory*. Manchester University Press.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
- Bhandari, D. (2013). The "unheimlich" in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*: A reading along the lines of Homi K. Bhabha's idea of "uncanny." *American International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences*, 135–137. www.iasir.net
- Byrne, E. (2009). *Homi K. Bhabha*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fanon, F. (1967). *Black skin, white masks*. Grove Press.
- Farahbakhsh, A., & Ranjbar, R. (2016). Bhabha's notion of unhomeliness in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*: A postcolonial reading. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, 4(7), 112. <https://doi.org/10.20431/2347-3134.0407017>
- Fernandez, I. P. (2009). Representing third spaces, fluid identities and contested spaces in contemporary British literature. *AEDEAN: Asociación Española de Estudios Anglo-Americanos*, 1(1), 160.
- Huskinson, L. (2016). *The urban uncanny: A collection of*

interdisciplinary studies. Routledge.

- Kumar, S. (2011). Bhabha's notion of "mimicry" and 'ambivalence in V.S. Naipaul's a bend in the river. *Researchers World: Journal of Arts, Science & Commerce*, 2(4).
- Liliwari, A. (2018). *Prasangka, konflik & komunikasi antarbudaya* (Second). Kencana.
- Madiong, B. (2014). *Sosiologi hukum (suatu pengantar)*. CV. Sah Media.
- Rostami, A. A. M., & Parvaneh, F. (2016). The notion of unhomeliness in "The Pickup": Homi Bhabha revisited. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 7(1), 160.
- <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.7n.1p.157>
- Stockett, K. (2009). *The Help*. Penguin Books.
- Sussman, R. W. (2014). *The myth of race: the troubling persistence of an unscientific idea*. Harvard College.
- Zohdi, E. (2017). Lost-identity; a result of "hybridity" and "ambivalence" in Tayeb Salih's season of migration to the north. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 7(1), 146. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.7n.1p.146>