

**BLACK DISCRIMINATION**  
**IN SEMBENE OUSMANE'S *GADIS BERKULIT HITAM*:**  
**A DECONSTRUCTION STUDY**

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**Abstrak**

Penelitian ini mendiskusikan diskriminasi yang terjadi pada cerpen *Gadis Berkulit Hitam*. Diskriminasi tersebut karena adanya penindasan orang-orang berkulit putih kepada orang-orang berkulit hitam. Konsep hitam dan putih adalah suatu keterbalikan dimana satu sama lain tidak dapat dipisahkan. Keterbalikan tersebut memberikan oposisi biner dan dapat membentuk makna yang baru dari seseorang. Hitam dan putih merupakan bagian identitas dari post-kolonialis. Dalam cerpen *Gadis Berkulit Hitam*, tokoh utama tersebut yaitu seorang gadis desa yang pergi ke Perancis demi meraih impiannya tentang kemewahan dan kesuksesan yang diidam-idamkan. Namun hal tersebut tidak pernah menjadi nyata karena ia hanyalah seorang gadis berkulit hitam. Melalui pendekatan dekonstruksi, penulis mulai mencoba memunculkan identitas baru tokoh utama dalam cerpen dengan memanfaatkan ketimpangan bahasa. Ketidakpastian ini akhirnya memunculkan absence dari tokoh utama tersebut. Oleh karena itu, identitas seseorang dapat berubah-ubah dan proses perubahan tersebut disebut difference yang berarti untuk membedakan dan menjadi pembeda. Penulis mencoba menerapkan konsep tersebut untuk memunculkan identitas baru gadis berkulit hitam dengan cara mendekonstruksi hierarki yang sudah terbentuk sebelumnya. Kesimpulannya, konstruksi hitam dan putih yang melekat pada masyarakat adalah konstruksi yang kaku dan tidak dapat dibenarkan lagi. Batas-bata yang menjadi identitas dan memisahkan oposisi biner tersebut tidak dapat dipertahankan secara ketat.

**Kata Kunci:** dekonstruksi, hitam dan putih, diskriminasi

**Abstract**

This study discusses the discrimination that occurs in the short story of the *Gadis Berkulit Hitam*. The discrimination is due to the oppression of white people against black people. The concept of black and white is an inverse which cannot be separated from one another. The inverse gives a binary opposition and can form a new meaning for a person. Black and white is part of the identity of post-colonialism. In the short story *Gadis Berkulit Hitam*, the main character is a country girl who goes to France to achieve her dream of coveted luxury and success. But it never came true because she was just a black girl. Through a deconstruction approach, the writer begins to try to come up with a new identity for the main character in the short story by taking advantage of the language gap. This uncertainty eventually led to the absence of the main character. Therefore, a person's identity can change and the process of change is called difference which means to distinguish and be different. The writer tries to apply this concept to bring up a new identity for black girls by deconstructing the pre-formed hierarchy. In conclusion, the black and white construction inherent in society is a rigid construction and cannot be justified anymore. The boundaries that become the identity and separate the binary opposition cannot be strictly maintained.

**Keywords:** deconstruction, black and white, discrimination.

## INTRODUCTION

Literary works can reflect the life of the surrounding community and affect social life, depending on how the reader judges it. When a literary work appears in public, then the literary work is free to be interpreted by the reader.

In the short story *Gadis Berkulit Hitam* by Sembene Ousmane, set in 1958 in the Republic of French, there are differences in civil views between blacks and whites skin. In that year, the people of Africa took up the movement to fight for civil rights in America. Meanwhile, Africa is experiencing mass poverty and oppression that is increasingly acute. Black people became servants in white people houses. Diouna, the main character in the short story *Gadis Berkulit Hitam*, is one of the weakest people among white people.

Diouna is a girl who left her African homeland of Casamance for France because of her desire to change her fate. She is willing to be a servant in a house that has a white master by bringing her beautiful dreams about the French. However, it turned out to be not as beautiful as Diouna imagined. She became a slave who had to serve all the needs of the master and mistress and all his family and relatives without being given the opportunity to rest. As long as she lived in France, she never got and felt the beauty she dreamed of. Racist issues, marginalized positions and caste differences are the themes in the short story.

The problem in this research is how the binary operation is described in Diouna's character in the short story of *Gadis Berkulit Hitam* and how the binary operation hierarchy works on Diouna's character with deconstruction analysis. The main objective of this research is to destroy the construction of understanding about a black girl named Diouna and to create a binary operation that emphasizes breaking the hierarchical label attached to the previous main character.

Based on the facts that occurred that year between Africa and America, in the short story *Gadis Berkulit Hitam* appeared, the writer would like to examine this main character from a deconstruction perspective. Deconstruction wants to reveal the ideology of the binaries that govern a text and open up new paths, reveal opportunities and possibilities, and offer a new way of perceiving the world.

Deconstruction is a reading strategy which is applied in this research to find information in answering the research problem. A deconstruction approach is an objective approach. The approach is centered on the short story by putting aside the author's background. The

concept of deconstruction was originally coined by Jacques Derrida, who clearly distinguishes between "difference" and "différance."

The different between difference and différance (with the same pronunciation as difference) has two definitions. The first one is 'to differ' with means 'to be not like or alike'. The second is 'to defer' which means 'to postpone or delay'. It could be that difference in english word and difference from French word.

Derrida created difference as deconstruction toward Saussure structuralism that specialize 'speech'. Deconstruction is a literary theory that emphasizes ambiguous sentences. Where in a sentence can have its meaning because, according to Derrida, the truth and reading of this sentence is not absolute, so that in a sentence each person can interpret it differently. As quoted from the book *Write About Literature: Deconstruction as a literary theory, deconstructionism produces a type of analysis that sentences ambiguity and contradiction (Writing About Literature, 2003:275)*.

Derrida's deconstruction provides a challenge to think creatively in the game of finding hidden text meanings. According to him, these texts do not have a fixed meaning, so they can be deconstructed continuously. This also demands to think critically about the texts presented in the short story *Gadis Berkulit Hitam*.

This study focuses on the construction of the main character Diouna, *Gadis Berkulit Hitam* then twisted using a binary operation hierarchy using deconstruction studies.

## METHODE

This research is descriptive qualitative research using deconstruction approach. The data collection used is in the form of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, discourses contained in the short story *Girl with Black Skin* by Sambene Omnese which focuses on discrimination against black people in that year. The descriptive qualitative method is very suitable to be used because most of the data contained in the novel is data in the form of words, sentences and conversational dialogues and not in the form of numbers, so it is expected to be able to analyze and explain the existing data (Putri, 2020).

According to Charles E. Bressler (1999:131) from his book *Literary Criticism* says that to analyze a text using deconstruction, then to apply this strategy to a text and several steps can be taken: (1) Discover the binary operation that govern a text, (2) comment on the values, concepts, and ideas beyond these operations, (3) reverse these present binary operations, (4) dismantle previously

held worldviews, (5) accept the possibility of various perspectives or level of meanings on the new binary text, and (6) Allow meaning of the text to be undecidable.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Binary Operation

Binary operation is a system that divides two structurally related categories. In the structure of a perfect binary operation, everything is divided into group A and group B. In this short story, the writer can conclude several binary operations and divide them into category A and category B.

The first binary operation is about skin color. The short story clearly has a striking conflict about skin color, namely the color of black and white skin. Even in the title, it is already implied by the words *Gadis Berkulit Hitam* which at that time the difference in skin color became a sensitive thing for black people.

*Para reporter mulai tidak sabaran. Bunuh diri seorang pembantu – bahkan walaupun ia berkulit hitam – tidak sama dengan segunung kacang. Tak ada yang*

Diouna	Madam Pouchet
Poor	Rich

*berharga untuk sebuah berita* (Ousmene:203). This quote clearly illustrates how unimportant the news about black servantss who committed suicide is. In fact, the news about suicide is important, especially for those who migrate to other countries. News about the death of black people, according to white people is not important, because for white people, black people are not human beings who are commensurate and on the same level as him.

*Mahkluk-mahkluk aneh, mementingkan diri sendiri, dan canggih ini tidak pernah berhenti bertanya pertanyaan yang bodoh mengenai bagaimana perempuan Afrika memasak makanan mereka* (Ousmene: 219). The strange creatures (*Mahkluk aneh*) here describe white people who are selfish and don't think about black people especially as assistants. The white people felt that they were superior to their position so that they felt they could do whatever they wanted to the black servants. They didn't even think about how the servants's feelings and interests would be.

*Tanpa sepengetahuan orang tuanya, mereka akan mengalunkan: Gadis Hitam, Gadis Hitam. Ia sama hitamnya dengan tengah malam.*" (Ousmene: 217). White people have been taught since childhood to treat black people differently. The mention of names with racist tones was also said by the children of the white family. These children mocked and ridiculed this black servant. This makes Diouna an object that deserves to be mocked and insulted. The term black connotes darkness at night, creates a bad, negative image and this ridicule made black people feel inferior and more closed.

The second binary operation is about social class. Social class is a person's place or position in a social group, with respect to other groups within a larger group. In this short story social class is divided into 2, rich and poor. The gap between rich and poor can be a problem in social life. The poor have to survive around the rich. While the rich sometimes underestimate and do not consider the poor.

*Untuk tiga ribu franc sebulan, gadis Afrika mana pun akan*

Diouna	Madam Pouchet
Black Skin	White skin

*mengikuti sampai ke ujung bumi* (Ousmene:208). This signaled the African girls needed money, and three thousand francs, she thought, was enough for her to give her loyalty to this money-giver who was none other than a white master. This is because she needs money to survive because her life is poor enough and classified as difficult. Moreover, Diouna is an immigrant from France. She did not have a white family, so she had to fight to survive.

*Diouana ingin melihat Prancis, negeri yang keindahan, kekayaan, dan kebahagiaan hidupnya dipuji setiap orang. Gadis itu ingin melihatnya dan ulang dengan kemenangan. Di sinilah orang menjadi kaya* (Ousmene:206). Diouna wants to go to France because she knows that the western country where white people live is a great country, rich, glamorous, beautiful, and full of hope for a bright future for the poor. In the quote above, *Gadis itu* who refers to the character Diouna thinks that if she can go to France, then she will become a rich and successful person when she returns to her hometown. Diouna did not think that, by going to a western country that is full of luxury and wealth, it would take a strong soul and mentality to face the pressures that would occur while living there. Western countries do look prosperous and provide hope to be a better life for the people of the periphery, but there is no desire to achieve glory in western countries. Problems and pressures that come and go, are

enough to make the soul and mentally shaken if they are not strong enough to survive.

The third binary operation is the difference in position, employer and servant. The difference in position between employer and employer makes a difference in viewing the person. The style of speech was different if he ordered the servants.

“Besok kita akan pergi ke Cannes. Orangtuaku belum pernah mencicipi masakan Afrika. Kamu akan memberi penghormatan kepada kamu dengan masakanmu,” Nyonya berkata.  
 “Viye, Nyonya.” (Ousmene:218)

When an employer orders his assistant, the servants must answer politely and submissively. Viye's words, were words that had the meaning of 'yes' and were affixed with the words “Madam” to make it more polite to address her mistress. It's very rude when this African girl answers so simply.

*Pada akhirnya, tak seorang pun di rumah itu yang bicara kepada pelayan kecuali dalam sebutan “Missie,” bahasa pidgin Senegal (Ousmene:220).* From this quotation, the position of a servant is low social class. No one even wanted to talk to her just to ask how she was or make small talk or say thank you. They would call the servantss “Missie,” then tell her to do something even if it was light work. They would not care whether the servants had eaten or not, tired or not, the important thing was that what they ordered had to be carried out without delay.

“Diouna, kau akan mencuci hari ini?”  
 “Viye, Nyonya.”  
 “Terakhir kali kau tidak mengerjakan rok dalam dengan baik. Setrikanya terlalu panas, dan kerah emeja Tuan hangus. Tolong ya, perhatikan betul apa yang kau kerjakan?”  
 “Viye, Nyonya.”  
 “Oh, aku lupa. Ada beberapa kancing hilang d kemeja Tuan dan celananya.” (Ousmene:220)

Servants is in the low place and always be person to blame. She must accept to be insulted, criticized and ordered. She will be blasphemed and scolded when she had a bad job. When the servant do the good job then they are just silenced.

**Deconstruction of main character *Gadis Berkulit Hitam***

From the various binary operations described in the sub-chapter before, the writer tries to deconstruct them—destroyed afterward to bring up new perceptions of the following meaning. This disassembly of the text refers to existing texts.

The first binary operation is about the skin color. Black skin people are lower in caste than white skin people. Because maybe they think that black skin color is dirty and ugly. In this quote, *Untuk tiga ribu franch sebulan, gadis Afrika mana pun akan mengikutinya sampai ke ujung bumi. Dan diatas segalanya, ari waktu ke waktu, terutama akhir-akhir ini, Nyonya akan memberi Diouana hadiah-hadiah kecil, baju-baju lama, sepatu yang bisa diperbaiki (Ousmene:208).*

Madam gave secondhand goods to an African girl named Diouana to take her heart and then go to France with her, where she was on vacation. She did not hesitate to spend 300 francs a month to take care of her husband and children while in France. Because she has the experience finding a servant in France is very difficult and expensive.

This view is different from Diouana. When the

Diouna	Madam Pouchet
Servant	Employer

Madame gave her used goods, she felt valued as a servant. She feels pretty happy to receive classy goods even though they are used. She is a gullible little girl with the lure of a beautiful and charming French town. If Madam had not given the items at first, Diouana would not have been so happy.

Diouna who is black skin feels very happy to get used goods from her Madam. From this, it appears that Diouna deserves to use the items used by the white people represented by Madam Pouchet. So actually, there are no differences and restrictions regarding the items that black people and white people can use.

Meanwhile, there is a change of power relations here. Where white people needed the black people as assistants or servants, white people can be said to 'beg' to black people. In this short story, it is described by Madam Pouchet and Diouana. Mrs Pouchet has her way of begging and then tying Diouana to follow her where she goes and do what she says. The quote above, "*Nyonya akan memberi Diouana hadiah-hadiah kecil*" is Madame's way of begging to steal Diouna's heart. With this way, Diouna who is still innocent and happy will think that the Madam is really good and cares about her. In fact, there is another purpose behind it all. In this case, white people should beg black people to be her assistant so they can enjoy their living.

The second binary operation is about social class. *Di Prancis ketika ia menyewa seorang pelayan bukan saja upahnya lebih tinggi tetap si pelayan menuntut hari libur*

(Ousmene:207). Servants or so-called helpers are identical to less power or poor people. However, this servants in France had a high standard of wages which made the Madam frown. During her time in Africa, she had never paid such high wages to her servants, and to make matters worse. She was not used to being without a servant. There is always a servant to take care of her children and her needs and part of it.

The poor here can have more power than the rich. The servant in France dared to ask a high price for the salary that made rich people think such a way to hire a servant. Servants in France may already have a more advanced mind than servants in Africa. This caused the Lady, who was the rich, finally, be forced not to hire a servant in France and take care of her own children until she felt that this was not a vacation but hell. Diouana as a servant has a power to control Madam and her family, because Madam needs her to take care of her children. If Diouana rejected to be Madam's servant, so, Madam will be overwhelmed with her children and family.

The third binary operation is about the position, employer, and servant. The analytical explanation of this position may not be far from the explanation of the binary operation of social status because this binary operation is related to one another.

Generally, a servant is a person who needs work, so she finally chooses to become a servant to get wages from her work. The employer can only order, nag if the work is wrong and give her salary. *Di Prancis ketika ia menyewa seorang pelayan bukan saja upahnya lebih tinggi tetap si pelayan menuntut hari libur* (Ousmene:207). From this quote can explain, the position between the servant and the employer began to change. The servants have full control over the salary to be given to her, and with other demands. If Madam is not able to fulfill her wishes then Madam could not give an order to the servant and does not have the power to this servant.

However, in this short story, the rich young woman who prefers to spend her vacation time outside rather than taking care of the child is again hit by the harsh reality.

*Pelayan itu menjawab Nuonya ini untuk itu. "Siapa saja yang mampu mempunyai anak harus menyediakan waktu untuk mereka. Saya tidak bisa tinggal didalam. Saya juga punya anak-anak untuk diurus dan juga suami." Katanya.* (Ousmene:207)

From the quotation above that from Diouana's words, she was teaching her Madam a lesson to care for her child. Anyone who is able to have children, which means mothers who give birth to their children, must make time for the children. No matter how busy you are, a mother

is still a mother who has to take care of her child, from waking up to going back to sleep. It is an obligation of a mother, regardless of the presence of a servant or not.

However, this is not the case for Madam. Taking care of children is a servant's duty. It means that the servant has the full right to teach and shape what Madam's child will look like if the parents or the madam don't want to interfere. *Karena biasa disediakan semua keperluannya, Nyonya dulu meninggalkan tugas-tugas rumah tangga dan dengan canggung berperan sebagai ibu* (Ousmene:207).

The relationship of power that was initially dominant to the employer, from this quote it can be seen that Madam is very dependent on her maid Diouana. Because, everything madam needed, Diouana prepared. He took care of all the needs of Madam and her children. When Diouana commits suicide and dies, Madam becomes distraught to take care of everything herself. Because she doesn't have the ability to do that. This dependence is a symbol that Diouana has complete control over the comfort of Madam and her family's life. Without Diouana, Madam couldn't do anything.

## CONCLUSION

The construction that has been formed and attached to society regarding black people is a rigid construction and is no longer justified. Because the boundaries that form the identity and separate the two binary oppositions cannot be maintained strictly.

Black and white is the opposition side that cannot be separated from each other. From that opposition side deconstruction from Derrida can be applied in this study. Black and white is also a problem in Africa that happens in the postcolonial era. Being black or white skin, they cannot choose to be born as white or black people.

Through the short story, *Gadis Berkulit Hitam* does not just present the polemic between blacks and whites. Many polemics are implicitly presented in this literary work. With a deconstruction study, the writer can find extraordinary polemics.

The main character is Diouana, a black African girl who commits suicide due to a change in her employer that makes her depressed. The background of various events that can shake this girl's anger until she decides to end her life. The pent-up anger of the Diouana girl is able to deconstruct herself as a black girl, who is poor and works as a maid to the white lady.

There are the breakdowns of hierarchies of ruling whites, the ever-excessive rich and the bosses who are always free to govern. Diouana's character through courage because of her anger was able to destroy the thick wall between her and the Madam who took advantage of

her. Diouna initially had sweet dreams about France and ended up becoming a servant to a white people, Madam who overpowered her with her arrogance. Until finally, the courage that Diouna had was to end her suffering by committing suicide. This suicide is the turning point for Diouna's character in this short story. Social inequalities and arbitrariness of white people became the focus of the death of black servants.

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