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DECOLONIZING IDENTITY AND SURVIVAL THROUGH CULTURAL HYBRIDITY: POST-COLONIAL ANALYSIS OF JOHNSON'S YELLOW WIFE

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the complexities of decolonization of identity and cultural hybridity in a post-colonial context as depicted in Johnson's *Yellow Wife* (2021) using Fanon's theoretical framework from *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963). It also touches upon the themes of cultural hybridity and identity formation aligning with Bhabha's theory on cultural hybridity and in-between spaces within cultures from *The Location of Culture* (1994). It aims at how characters and societies grapple with post-colonial identity complexities, addressing unequal power structures, and negotiating the influences of various cultures. The theoretical frameworks provided by Fanon (1963) and Bhabha(1994) contribute valuable insights to comprehend these dynamics at a deeper level. The method involves meticulous analysis of selected textual excerpts to reveal the intricate relationships between individual and group identities and the exercise of power within societies that have experienced colonization. The analysis underscores how enslaved individuals, exemplified by Pheby, navigate the intricate dynamics of slavery by strategically balancing their availability to white slave owners while maintaining invisibility, revealing the complex negotiation of agency and dignity within the colonial system. In the context of hybridity, it reveals characters' conflicting emotions when faced with kindness from those in authority, highlighting the nuanced challenges inherent in racial discrimination and power imbalances within the enslaved community. This exploration contributes to a broader narrative on racial oppression, emphasizing enduring spirits in colonial systems, enriching discussions on freeing identity from the clutches of colonial power and blending two cultures in historical contexts.

Keywords: Decolonization, Cultural Hybridity, Identity, Post-Colonialism, Enslaved Individuals, Slavery

1.INTRODUCTION

The exploration of Afro-American fiction within a post-colonial framework is a profound journey into the intricacies of identity and its reclaiming. Characters grapple with their identities in or aftermath of colonialism where cultural blending becomes a strategy for survival and resistance. This literary genre serves as a tapestry that intricately mirrors the complex narrative of the African diaspora, imprinted with the enduring consequences of colonialism. At its core, Afro-American fiction delves into the profound exploration of identity, navigating the multifaceted struggles of individuals amid historical oppression and cultural displacement. Guided by the principles of postcolonial theory, this genre vividly illustrates the resilience of marginalized voices, challenging norms, and reshape cultural perspectives.19th century in the United States represents a dark and impactful chapter in history, notably marked by the reprehensible enslavement of millions of African Americans. Afro-American fiction, exemplified through significant works such as Johnson's award-winning *Yellow Wife* (2021), stands as a testament to the enduring struggles for reclaiming identity and survival of marginalized voices.

Decolonizing identity is a multifaceted process that emerges from the historical context of colonization. It involves dismantling external (political, economic) and internal (cultural, psychological) colonial structures. It is a reclamation of agency, selfhood, and cultural heritage. It is a historical process, often associated with the end of the Second World War, where colonies gained independence from their colonial powers. This process was not uniform and took on different forms across the world. In some cases, it was peaceful and negotiated, while in others, it was violent and marked by prolonged conflict. The process of decolonization is intertwined with the concept of post colonialism. Post colonialism is both a theoretical approach and a way of perceiving the world after the end of colonial rule. It involves analyzing, understanding, and responding to the cultural legacies of colonialism and the human consequences of controlling a country and establishing settlers for the purpose of economic dominance.

Decolonization and post colonialism are two interrelated concepts that have shaped our modern world. They have led to a rethinking of many of our fundamental concepts and have given us new tools to understand and engage with our world. They remind us that our world is complex and multifaceted, shaped by historical processes that continue to impact us today.

Cultural hybridity becomes a survival strategy in contexts where adaptation and resilience are essential. Cultural hybridity is a concept that refers to the creation of new cultural forms through the interaction of different cultures. This can occur through various means such as migration, globalization, and colonization. In the context of post colonialism, cultural hybridity is a significant concept as it challenges the binary division of cultures often imposed by colonial powers. Postcolonial theorists argue that the process of colonization did not just involve the domination of the colonized by the colonizer but also led to a mixing of cultures. This resulted in the emergence of new, hybrid cultural forms that combined elements from both the colonizer and the colonized. This cultural hybridity is seen as a form of resistance against the colonizer's attempt to impose their culture and erase the culture of the colonized.

However, cultural hybridity is not just about resistance. It is also about the creation of something new, something that did not exist before the interaction of the two cultures. This new culture is not just a simple combination of the two original cultures, but something unique and distinct. Cultural hybridity is a complex and multifaceted concept. It is about resistance, creation, and the emergence of new cultural forms. It challenges the binary divisions often imposed by colonial powers and offers a more nuanced understanding of the impacts of colonization. It is a key concept in postcolonial studies, offering a way to understand and engage with the cultural legacies of colonialism.

Johnson's novel *Yellow Wife* (2021) introduces us to Pheby Delores Brown, a woman fighting for survival in 19th-century Virginia. She faces the challenge of decolonizing her identity within a system that dehumanizes her. Pheby's journey from the plantation to Devil's Half Acre, where she is purchased by a jailer responsible for human trafficking, mirrors the broader struggle for decolonization. She records the names and stories of those she cannot save, preserving their humanity even within the dehumanizing context of slavery. Her choices often damaging to herself reflect the internal conflict of maintaining dignity for her children while enduring immense suffering. Pheby's survival hinges on cultural hybridity. She navigates the complexities of her mixed heritage, drawing from both African and European cultural elements. Her ability to adapt, negotiate, and blend these influences allows her to survive in a hostile environment. Pheby's resilience lies in her capacity to synthesize diverse cultural practices, languages, and survival strategies. *Yellow Wife* (2021) serves as a powerful lens through which we can examine the complexities of decolonizing identity and surviving through cultural hybridity in the context of slavery.

1.1 Research Objectives

- To investigate how characters in *Yellow Wife* (2021) navigate with their identities as slaves.
- To explore how cultural hybridity becomes a base for survival in *Yellow Wife* (2021).

1.2 Research Questions

- How do the main characters undergo the decolonization process in *Yellow Wife* (2021)?
- Does the main character employ cultural Hybridity as a survival strategy in *Yellow Wife* (2021)?

2. Literature Review

Decolonizing identity and survival can be achieved through cultural hybridity. Cultural hybridity, as explored in various researches, refers to the mixing of cultures and the effects on individuals and communities. It involves the blending of different cultural, racial, and linguistic elements, leading to the formation of new identities and experiences. This concept is particularly relevant in postcolonial contexts, where the legacy of colonialism has shaped notions of identity and belonging. Through the lens of cultural hybridity, individuals and communities can navigate the complexities of their identities, challenge dominant narratives, and develop strategies for survival and resilience. The works of authors such as Bhabha, Massey, and Pieterse provide insights into the multifaceted nature of cultural hybridity and its impact on individuals' lives. The literature examines the antagonistic intersections of African and Western gendered identities and their implications for the postcolonial text. It also focuses on the struggles and resilience of indigenous communities against colonialism, particularly the Afro-American or Black identities. The literature delves into the consequences of colonialism and the change formed by the experience of immigration, highlighting the ability to resist and recreate oneself as a postcolonial, anti-imperialist subject. Additionally, it analyzes the significant themes of identity decolonization and survival through cultural hybridity in Black American literature, emphasizing the fight against racial oppression and the quest for self-pride and identity. Scholars in the field explore these issues, examining the role of identity in postcolonial theory. Overall, Afro-American literature in the postcolonial context addresses the complexities of identity and the strategies employed for survival and resistance.

Authors such as Ralph Ellison in *Invisible Man* (1952), Toni Morrison in *Beloved* (1987), and others explore the fragmented self, mask-wearing, and the struggle for self-realization amidst societal pressures to conform to norms imposed by colonial powers. Postcolonial criticism highlights the evolution of identity among diasporic populations, including the formation of hybrid identities and the challenge to essentialist notions of race and culture. The trope of invisibility versus hyper-visibility in Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) for example, speaks to how marginalized groups may be rendered invisible yet simultaneously hyper-visible when viewed through the lens of stereotypes and prejudice. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) addresses the painful legacies of slavery and the psychological trauma inflicted upon African Americans, revealing the ongoing impact of colonialism on the construction of identity. Morrison's use of memory, or the deployment of the tale, serves to empower African Americans by allowing them to confront and reclaim their history. Fanon's seminal work, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), provides insights into the psycho dynamics of identity formation among colonized peoples, explaining the processes of mimicry and sense of belonging that contribute to identity crises. Bhabha's (1994) notion of hybridity further illuminates the complexity of identity in postcolonial societies, suggesting that identity is fluid rather than fixed. These literary representations reflect the lived experiences of African Americans grappling with the aftermath of colonialism and slavery, offering nuanced perspectives on the interplay between identity, power, and resistance.

Dizayi (2015) explores the issue of identity in postcolonial literature. In the modern world with the increase of immigrant numbers, hybrid nations, and constitutions of countries with different cultural diversities the question of identity comes to the surface. The research presents and discusses theorists' arguments about the issue of identity in the postcolonial world and how they view and present their ideas about constructing identity in former colonized countries and immigrants from these countries who suffer from facing the diasporas and the dilemma of the difficulty to construct their identity. The study investigates postcolonial novelists, especially writers in former British colonies such as V.S.Naipaul, Sam Selvon, and TayebSalih. As postcolonial theorists considered the issue of identity as one of its essential discussions, novelists also exposed and expressed the conditions of identity crises that emerged in the postcolonial period.

Davies and Boehmer (2018) investigate the struggles and forbearing of the indigenous communities who have suffered at the hands of colonialism essentially against the Afro-American or well understood in response as Black identities. It is defined as a positive outcome for indigenous and displaced communities in times of historical and current stressors. This characteristic is a unique feature of black indigeneity. The threshold of resilience Afro-Americans have developed to endure the effects of colonialism and

continue to do so is remarkable indeed. In the present context, the entire relative political relations rely on this traditional knowledge of the indigenous people. This is ushering in the dawn of a new era. Only if you are naive enough to believe so, as the Western Euro-American political power and educational institutions are notorious for acknowledging the Indigeneity of these ethnic groups is only superficial as it is a time in the neo-world context where it is impossible shying away from the past of the colonial history it can be seen as reprimanding on behalf of the west to apologize the injustice, they inflicted which resulted in stealing of land, property, and the forests and most importantly for the "Black" identities. In the present study, the emphasis is laid on understanding how the narratives of Black identities evolved in the southern nations globally and especially how the Indo-African and American literary discourse respond to the resilience of African, Afro-American, and Indo-African identities.

Dizayi (2019) investigates the postcolonial theory and its emergence from the fallout of colonial impact on the world after WWII. It reveals insight into historical actualities and traces the sequential line of thought and speculation of the period, how the issue of representation and self-determination is displayed in the theoretical argument. At that point, it clarifies the issue of identity in the postcolonial theoretical line and its critical role as the real issue of postcolonial theory. The study additionally uncovers how scholars explore the situation of recognition and self-recognizable proof. Finally, it clarifies significant theorist contentions about identity independently and in agreement with the sequential course of events, for example, Frantz Fanon, Edward Said. It notes how every scholar viewed and hypothesized the issue of identity and to what extent these speculations are essential in postcolonial studies.

Subari (2020) opines racial segregation and identity crisis play an essential role in Black American literature as well as in American society. The objective of the study is to analyze the significant themes of identity crisis and racial segregation in Richard Wright's novel *Black Boy* (1945). The study focuses on the concepts of racial segregation and identity crisis because these issues were and are still controversial and argumentative in Afro-American Literature. There is also an analysis of the features of post-colonialism. It claims that Black American literature was written to fight against racial segregation, oppression, and aggression to obtain self-pride and identity. It also concentrates on the theme of the problems of Blacks' identity and racial discrimination in American society to prove that racism and oppression are indeed prominent themes in Wight's novel because the book was written during the Jim Crow era at a point when racism was very important in American society.

Khan, W. A., Khan, S. H., & Ali, S. (2020) explored that cultural hybridity has prevailed by penetrating its roots in the globalized world. It has influenced the identity of people, especially migrants of various countries. Identity in the case of cultural hybridity leads to conflict. Migrants wish to grow by absorbing influences from their own 'roots' but new 'routes' also inspire them. Bhabha (1994) is of the view that migrants' cultural world changes after crossing the borders; they have an experience of living in an alien culture and thus learn new ideas. He criticizes the idea of a fixed identity which is developed by the migrants' native culture. Bhabha(1994) argues that identity is 'hybrid'; it is always in a state of flux because it is constantly in motion, pursuing unpredictable routes. Bhabha's (1994) celebration of hybridity ignores unequal relations of cultural power. He also ignores cultural and historical specifics in his theorization of hybridity. The study is qualitative and is based on an interpretive analysis of the novels *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and *The Burnt Shadows* (2009) which celebrate hybridity in cultures. The study unveils unequal relations of cultural power in hybridity.

Abbas and Gohar (2023) investigate the novella, *Another Gulmohar Tree* (2009), written by Hussain, a Pakistani writer. This study aims to analyze the theme of identity crisis by applying the Theory of Hybridity and Third Space given by Bhabha (1994). It has been investigated how the change of culture makes a person hybrid. This research further discusses an individual's challenges while moving from one place to another. Moreover, the mixture of Eastern and Western cultures also has been explained in the study concerning Hybridity. This research shows the collision of Pakistani and British cultures in Pakistani society. The individuals who migrate from one place to another experience a loss of culture, norms, and religious customs, resulting in a change of identity, Hybridity, and third space, along with giving way to a distorted concept of self-realization and adjusting to a new culture. The

research highlights the difference between the cultures, creating a new sense of individuality and their expression.

The current study may fill the gap by analyzing the text of *Yellow Wife* (2021) how enslaved people's identity is influenced and intersects with cultural beliefs and how they make strategies to survive in challenging times and systems.

3. Theoretical Framework

Frantz Fanon's concept of identity, as explored in his works like *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), delves into the complexities of racial identity, the impact of colonialism, and the struggle for self-definition. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), he delves into the intricate process of decolonization. He portrays the colonial subject as "a being hemmed in," constrained by colonial structures. The native yearns for mobility that can only materialize through forceful dismantling of the stark division between colonizers and colonized. He emphasizes reclaiming physical space, breaking boundaries, and defying oppressive forces. His vision extends beyond mere political change; it demands a profound transformation of consciousness and identity. He guides developing anti-colonial revolutionary consciousness, dissecting colonial structures, and predicting potential distortions in postcolonial regimes."Each generation must out of re1ative obscurity discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it" (Fanon, 1963, p.203).He encapsulates the idea that each generation has a unique role in shaping its identity and confronting the power structure of the time.

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures. And destroys it (Fanon, 1963, p.206). Here, he explains colonialism involves the domination and exploitation of land and people by a foreign group, leading to socio-economic subjugation. It distorts and destroys the history of oppressed people by imposing its own culture and values. Relating his concepts to Johnson's *Yellow Wife*, one can draw parallels in terms of decolonization of identity, internalized oppression, and the complexities of navigating a world shaped by colonial legacies. Johnson's (2021) work may reflect aspects of Fanon's (1963) ideas by delving into how characters grapple with their identities within a post-colonial context, shedding light on issues of power dynamics influenced by historical injustices and systemic inequalities. The analysis through Fanon's theoretical frameworks could provide a lens to understand how characters in *Yellow Wife* (2021) negotiate their identities in a society marked by colonial histories and racial hierarchies.

Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) is a seminal work in postcolonial studies, offering a complex analysis of cultural Hybridity and identity. He emphasizes the idea of hybridity as a means of challenging colonial discourses and creating third spaces for the co-existence of cultures and identities. He argues against the notion of a "pure" culture or identity, highlighting that authenticity is unattainable and that cultures constantly mix in today's globalized world. Cultural hybridity emerges as a powerful survival strategy for the colonized communities. These hybrid identities are forged in the interstitial spaces, where different cultures intersect. Rather than passively imitating dominant cultural norms, the colonized negotiate, selectively adopting elements while retaining their own. This negotiation allows access to resources and opportunities within the colonial system. Ambivalence plays crucial role mimicry is never exact; it contains subtle deviations and subversions. These subversions challenge the colonial order, enabling survival within its constraints. The third space, neither fully colonizer nor colonized, becomes a site of creativity. Hybrid cultural forms, emerge in art, literature, and music that defy easy categorization, challenge traditional boundaries and foster new identities. By transcending fixed identities, individuals find agency and resilience. Through storytelling and art, colonized communities reclaim their histories, asserting existence beyond the colonizer's gaze.

Cultural hybridity defies fixed boundaries, fostering resilience in the face of colonial oppression. "When historical visibility has faded, when the present tense of testimony loses its power to arrest, then the displacements of memory and the indirections of art offer us the image of our psychic survival" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 26). He emphasizes the negotiation of cultural values and identities in interstitial spaces, disrupting fixed narratives and promoting hybridity and liminality as positive values. It highlights the complexity of cultural engagement and the need to move beyond simplistic binary oppositions to understand the dynamic nature of nations and cultures within postcolonial contexts. Bhabha's (1994) work aims to bring together the identities of

the colonizer and the colonized, advocating for a co-existence of their cultures rather than maintaining opposing binaries. According to Bhabha (1994), it is a way to challenge oppressive colonial authority through uncomfortable interactions that resist colonial control. By embracing hybridity, Bhabha (1994) seeks to transcend social binaries of race, nation, gender, or generation and challenge dominant discourses. His approach emphasizes the multiplicities and contradictory nature of postcolonial identities, moving away from essentialist notions towards a more complex understanding of ethnicity and identity politics.

4.Textual Analysis

4.1 Decolonizing Identity in *Yellow Wife*

In *Yellow Wife* (2021) by Johnson, the protagonist's identity plays a crucial role in intersecting with and influencing cultural beliefs. The novel portrays Pheby Delores Brown, a light-skinned girl who promised freedom but was instead forced into a life of servitude as the *yellow wife* of the jailor in 1850s Virginia. This intersection of identity and culture delves into the complexities of race, power dynamics, and societal norms prevalent during the era of slavery. The protagonist's identity as a light-skinned woman in a position of vulnerability highlights the intricate ways in which cultural beliefs shape individuals' experiences. Her struggle to navigate her identity within the confines of slavery reflects broader societal attitudes toward race and gender, shedding light on the dehumanizing effects of slavery on individuals like her.Through her journey, Johnson skillfully explores how cultural beliefs surrounding race, power, and freedom influence not only the protagonist's personal experiences but also the broader societal constructs that perpetuate oppression and injustice.

Pheby's mother recognizes the limited agency available to enslaved women. She acknowledges her own fate—that she will likely die in bondage but she places her hopes and dreams squarely on Pheby's shoulders. Her love for her daughter drives her to make sacrifices, endure suffering, and work tirelessly to ensure that Pheby has a chance at liberation. "Ain't many choices for a slave woman. Just know everything I do is for you. I'm a die a slave. I knows that. But you, baby, you are meant to see freedom"(Johnson, 2021, p. 18). These lines encapsulate the harsh reality faced by enslaved women and the sacrifices they make for their children's future. In the context of the novel, these lines reflect the limited agency and options available to enslaved women like Pheby Brown, who are bound by the constraints of slavery but strive to secure a better life for their offspring. Pheby's mother's words convey the intergenerational struggle of enslaved women who endure the brutality of slavery with the hope that their children will one day experience freedom. Despite knowing her fate as a slave, she emphasizes her dedication to ensuring a brighter future for her daughter, emphasizing the enduring love and sacrifices made by enslaved mothers for their children's well-being. These lines highlight the resilience and determination of enslaved women in navigating their circumstances and striving to protect and provide for their children despite the oppressive system of slavery that restricts their choices and freedoms. The quote underscores the profound strength and maternal instinct that drive enslaved women to persevere in the face of adversity and oppression, embodying a poignant narrative of survival and sacrifice within the context of slavery depicted in *Yellow Wife*. This also reflects the enduring struggles and hopes of enslaved women like Pheby, resonating with Fanon's (1963) call for decolonization and Bhabha's (1994)discussions on resistance within oppressive systems. It underscores the interplay between individual agency, cultural identity, and aspirations for freedom within contexts marked by systemic oppression and marginalization.

Here is another line from the text where Ruth reminds her daughter that she is nothing more than a pawn in the institution of slavery. "You the gran-daudder of Vinnie Brown, who was the gran-daudder of a Mandara queen. You a slave in name, but never in your mind, chile"(Johnson, 2021, p. 25). This quote is spoken by Pheby's mother, who is passing down a sense of pride and connection to their Mandara queen ancestry. By acknowledging their shared heritage, she is instilling a sense of dignity and strength in her daughter, encouraging her to hold onto her identity and not be defined solely by her enslavement. These words are a stark example of the concept of decolonization of identity. The mention of being the "gran-daudder of Vinnie Brown, who was the gran-daughter of a Mandara queen" highlights a lineage that predates the colonial era.This lineage connects Pheby to her African heritage, emphasizing an identity beyond the confines of slavery. Decolonization involves reclaiming pre-colonial identities and recognizing the richness of cultural

heritage. Ruth's assertion that Pheby is "never in your mind, chile" underscores the resilience of the enslaved mind. Despite physical bondage, Pheby's mental freedom persists. Her thoughts, dreams, and aspirations defy the oppressive system. Decolonization involves breaking mental chains, challenging imposed narratives, and asserting autonomy. Ruth's words become a form of resistance. She refuses to let her daughter's mind be enslaved. Pheby's journey her longing for freedom, love for Essex, and determination becomes a quest for liberation. Decolonization is about reclaiming agency, rewriting narratives, and envisioning a future beyond oppression.This aligns with the perspectives of Fanon (1963) and Bhabha (1994) both scholars emphasize the importance of cultural identity and the role of individuals in challenging dominant narratives and asserting agency within oppressive systems. This quote from *Yellow Wife* underscores the power of maintaining a connection to one's heritage and identity in the face of adversity and oppression.

At another point, Johnson refers to the tragic loss of two lives, Essex and his son, and Pheby's actions in dealing with their deaths. Decolonization requires recognizing the shared humanity of all, even in the face of oppressive systems. "Two beautiful souls lost on the same day. I carried the boy up to the storehouse, removed a shove, and then went back to the spot where I had burned Essex's clothes and started digging a grave for his son"(Johnson, 2021, p. 53). Essex is Pheby's lover. Their relationship is a source of hope and comfort for her amid her enslavement. The loss of Essex and his son represents a significant blow to her, as it not only takes away her lover but also highlights the brutal realities of slavery and the constant threat of violence and death faced by enslaved individuals. Her actions in carrying the boy to the storehouse and digging a grave for his son demonstrate her resilience and determination to provide a proper burial for the child, despite the difficulties and risks involved. This act also serves as a symbol of her commitment to preserving the dignity of the deceased and honoring their memory. The sentiments expressed resonate with Fanon (1963) and Bhabha (1994) as they emphasize the significance of personal empowerment and strength when confronting oppression and challenges.

In a similar vein, Johnson highlights the complex relationship between beauty, identity, and the experiences of enslaved women in the context of slavery." Beauty was a curse for a slave girl"(Johnson, 2021, p. 152). In the novel, the protagonist Pheby is described as a "beautiful" slave girl, which can be seen as both a blessing and a curse. On one hand, her beauty grants her some privilege and protection within the plantation's white society, as she is often used as a symbol of her owner's wealth and status. However, her beauty also makes her more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, as she is often desired by the white men who own her and those around her. The quote reflects the theme of the double-edged nature of beauty within the context of slavery, where physical attractiveness can be both a source of power and a tool of oppression. It also highlights the complexities of identity formation for enslaved women, who must navigate the intersection of their physical appearance, their enslavement, and their sense of self-worth. Fanon (1963) & Bhabha (1994) both accentuate the importance of understanding the complexities of identity formation and the role of power dynamics in shaping individual experiences postcolonial context.*Yellow Wife* underscores the complex and nuanced relationship between beauty, identity, and the experiences of enslaved women, highlighting the challenges they face in asserting their agency and dignity within a system that dehumanizes and objectifies them.

"Oliver Twist, my friend deep into the night, helped me to cope" (Johnson, 2021, p. 112). Author reflects the protagonist's use of literature and storytelling as a coping mechanism to deal with the harsh realities of slavery and her own experiences of oppression. In the context of the novel, she finds solace in the story of Oliver Twist, a fictional character from Dickens'(1838) novel of the same name. The quote suggests that she identifies with Oliver's struggles and finds comfort in his story, which allows her to escape the harsh realities of her own life for a brief moment. The significance of narrative and cultural manifestation in resisting empowering individuals with oppressive frameworks holds good standing among Fanon (1963) and Bhabha (1994). It underscores the resilience and resourcefulness of enslaved individuals in finding ways to assert their agency and maintain their dignity in the face of dehumanization and exploitation.

Johnson (2021) forcefully highlights the intricate interplay of power and control within the framework of slavery, examining the tactics employed by enslaved individuals to navigate these intricate

dynamics. "Mama always said the way to keep peace with white folks was to be available and invisible at the same time"(Johnson, 2021, p. 8). Pheby, learned from her mother that the best way to avoid conflict and maintain a semblance of peace with white slave owners was to be both available and invisible. Being available meant being at their disposal and fulfilling their demands while being invisible meant not drawing attention to oneself or challenging their authority. Decolonization involves questioning imposed norms. The quote highlights the pressure to assimilate to conform to white expectations. The struggle lies in reclaiming agency within oppressive boundaries. Enslaved individuals sought ways to assert their humanity while avoiding punishment. The tension between availability and invisibility shapes identity. It reflects the negotiation of selfhood within a dehumanizing system. Fanon (1963) and Bhabha (1994) both endorse the understanding of the questioning of imposed norms and reclaiming agency within oppressive systems and the role of individual agency in challenging and resisting these dynamics.

4.2 Cultural Hybridity and Survival in *Yellow Wife*

Pheby navigates a challenging postcolonial context. Born on a plantation in Virginia, she faces the harsh realities of slavery and is forced into the infamous Devil's Half Acre jail, where she must endure unimaginable hardships. Despite the atrocities she faces, her story highlights themes of determination, hope, and resistance against oppression. Her journey serves as a poignant reminder of the strength and resilience of those who endured slavery, shedding light on the struggles faced by enslaved individuals and their quest for freedom and dignity. Through her character, Johnson portrays the complexities of relationships, the dehumanization of enslaved individuals, and the transformative power of education in empowering individuals even in dire circumstances. Her narrative in *Yellow Wife* encapsulates the multifaceted nature of survival strategies in a postcolonial setting, showcasing how individuals strive to reclaim their identities and navigate through adversity with courage and resilience.

"A grateful heart served as a magnet for miracles"(Johnson, 2021, p. 121). Pheby embodies cultural hybridity. She navigates her identity as a mixed-race woman born to an enslaved seamstress and a white plantation owner. Pheby's upbringing and education set her apart. She has privileges not afforded to most enslaved women. Pheby's survival involves a delicate balance. She adapts to the expectations of both worlds,learning to be available and invisible, as her mother advised. Her grateful heart becomes a survival strategy. It allows her to find moments of solace, connection, and resilience. The quote hints at the miraculous moments that sustain Pheby a glimmer of hope, a connection, or an unexpected act of kindness.

Furthermore, the phrase hints at the characters' reliance on faith as a source of resilience, aligning with themes of perseverance and hope amid oppression. From Fanon's (1963) perspective, the line highlights the power of the human spirit in the face of oppression. From Bhabha's perspective, the line can be seen as an example of the hybridity and ambivalence of culture. Bhabha's (1994)work explores the interplay between different cultural identities and the construction of meaning. The line suggests that a grateful heart, which is a cultural construct, can serve as a magnet for miracles, which could be interpreted as a metaphor for the transformative power of cultural hybridity and the negotiation of cultural identities.

"I did not know if I should be relieved by the gentleman's kindness or frightened to death" (Johnson, 2021, p. 76) reflects the conflicting emotions and uncertainty experienced by the protagonist in response to unexpected kindness from a white gentleman. In the context of pervasive racial discrimination and power imbalances in *Yellow Wife* the protagonist's reaction highlights the complexity of her situation and the constant tension she faces as an enslaved individual. The conflicting emotions of relief and fear reveal the challenges arising from encounters with white individuals who hold authority and control. Fanon (1963) emphasized the psychological impact of colonization on identity. Pheby's inner conflict aligns with Fanon's (1963) exploration of the fractured self the struggle to reconcile different aspects of identity. It highlights the ambiguity and fear that can arise when navigating relationships with those in power. Bhabha (1994) discussed the concept of the third space or in-betweenness. Pheby occupies this third space neither fully white nor fully enslaved. Her identity is shaped by this liminal position.

Furthermore, the line "Who could whip a woman until she lost her child? Only a monster" (Johnson,

2021, p. 114) expresses the profound cruelty associated with forcefully separating a mother from her child through physical punishment. This line serves as a poignant condemnation of the dehumanizing practices inflicted upon enslaved individuals. It highlights the emotional and psychological impact of the cruel punishment, emphasizing the heart-wrenching experience of a mother being forcibly separated from her child. This line resonates with Fanon's (1963) delving of the dehumanizing effects of colonialism and the psychological trauma it can cause. "To survive this, I could not let my mind succumb to the misery that threatened to strangle me" (Johnson, 2021, p. 64). The quote hints at the negotiation of identity and survival. She grapples with external misery while protecting her inner self. The struggle lies in maintaining a sense of self within oppressive systems. The mind becomes a battleground a space where cultural influences clash.

The refusal to succumb to misery suggests resilience. She seeks survival by preserving her mental and emotional well-being. Bhabha's (1994) concept of the "third space" aligns with the quote. Pheby occupies a liminal position neither fully oppressed nor fully liberated. The mind's refusal to succumb represents the in-betweenness the tension between colonial narratives and personal agency. Bhabha (1994) emphasizes agency within this third space. Her refusal to be strangled by misery is an act of resistance.

"The line kept my despair quiet, close to my heart" (Johnson, 2021, p. 67) showcases Pheby's strategy for survival, the burden she carries, and the internal battles she faces within the context of racial discrimination and identity crisis. Her quiet despair reflects an inner struggle an emotional hybridity. The act of keeping despair quiet is a survival strategy. It allows her to navigate oppressive circumstances without drawing attention. The speaker's hybrid identity caught between enslaved and free worlds requires emotional resilience. Bhabha's (1994) concept of the third space aligns with the quote. She occupies this liminal position neither fully oppressed nor fully liberated. The quiet despair exists in the in-between spaces the tension between colonial narratives and personal emotions. Her choice to keep despair close to the heart is an act of agency. It resists complete submission.

"Additionally, Mama always said the way to keep peace with white folks was to be available and invisible at the same time" (Johnson, 2021, p. 14). The quote reflects a pragmatic approach to survival within oppressive systems. Being "available" implies compliance, adaptability, and the ability to meet white expectations. Simultaneously, being "invisible" suggests minimizing one's presence, avoiding confrontation, and blending into the background. She navigates a delicate balance being present enough to avoid punishment while avoiding undue attention. The survival strategy involves adapting to both cultural contexts. It requires understanding the expectations of white folks while maintaining dignity Bhabha's concept of the "third space" aligns with the quote. She occupies this liminal position neither fully oppressed nor fully liberated. The tension lies in balancing availability and invisibility. She negotiates her existence within this third space. The choice to follow Mama's advice becomes a strategy of survival.

Rubin Lapier embodies contradictions. He both loves Pheby and subjects her to non-consensual sexual encounters. His wealth and position allow her certain comforts, but she remains at his mercy. Pheby's fierce love for her children, especially Monroe, whom she shares with Essex (another enslaved person), complicates her situation. Monroe lacks an ivory complexion, making him vulnerable. "No respectable man would marry his daughter off to the owner of a slave pen. Even though Lapier is wealthy, high society southerners consider traders dishonorable, call them the pariahs of men"(Johnson, 2021, p. 104). This quote highlights the social norms of the time: respectable men would not marry their daughters to slave pen owners. Such traders were considered dishonorable by high society Southerners. Her predicament exemplifies the intersection of race, power, and gender. Her identity as a light-skinned woman places her in a precarious position, torn between love, survival, and societal expectations. Her existence embodies hybridity. She straddles two worlds: the plantation where she was raised and the slave jail where she suffers. Her education and privileges as the owner's daughter create cultural hybridity that defies rigid racial boundaries. Yet, her vulnerability as an enslaved woman disrupts this hybridity. She navigates survival by negotiating her identity within oppressive structures. Pheby may appreciate any kindness shown to her, especially in the harsh environment of Devil's Half Acre. However, she is also aware of the

danger inherent in her situation. Lapier's kindness might be a facade, concealing darker intentions.

"I did not know if I should be relieved by the gentleman's kindness or frightened to death" (Johnson, 2021, p. 76) reflects the conflicting emotions and uncertainty experienced by the protagonist in response to unexpected kindness from a white gentleman. Her reaction highlights the complexity of her situation and the constant tension she faces as an enslaved individual. The conflicting emotions of relief and fear reveal the challenges arising from encounters with white individuals who hold authority and control. From Fanon's (1963) perspective, this line reflects the complex emotions and psychological turmoil experienced by individuals in oppressive situations. The narrator's conflicting emotions towards the gentleman's kindness suggest a blending of emotions and responses that are not easily categorized. This ambiguity reflects Bhabha's (1994) concept of cultural liminality, where individuals exist in between fixed cultural categories.

"She encounters the jailer, Rubin Lapier, who is both kind and menacing. Who could whip a woman until she lost her child? Only a monster" (Johnson, 2021, p. 114) expresses the profound cruelty associated with forcefully separating a mother from her child through physical punishment. The quote encapsulates Pheby's internal conflict. She faces a dichotomy between kindness and fear. It highlights the emotional and psychological impact of the cruel punishment. This line resonates with Fanon's (1963) probing of the dehumanizing effects of colonialism and the psychological trauma it can cause. This line reflects Bhabha's (1994) concept of cultural liminality, where individuals exist in between fixed cultural categories.

"To survive this, I could not let my mind succumb to the misery that threatened to strangle me" (Johnson, 2021, p. 64). This reflects her inner struggle for survival. She faces immense suffering and despair, yet she refuses to let it consume her. Her determination not to succumb to misery demonstrates her resilience. She fights to maintain her mental strength despite the harsh circumstances. The word "strangle" evokes a visceral image of suffocation. Her mind is under siege, threatened by the weight of her experiences. She embodies hybridity but her enslavement disrupts her hybridity. Survival for Pheby involves negotiating her identity while facing the brutality of slavery.

5.Findings

The following are three main findings that support Pheby's successful decolonization:

Reclaiming Pre-colonial Identity: Pheby's mother instills in her a sense of pride and connection to their Mandara queen ancestry. This lineage connects Pheby to her African heritage, emphasizing an identity beyond the confines of slavery. This act of reclaiming pre-colonial identities is a key aspect of decolonization.

Mental Freedom: Despite physical bondage, Pheby's mental freedom persists. Her thoughts, dreams, and aspirations defy the oppressive system. Decolonization involves breaking mental chains, challenging imposed narratives, and asserting autonomy.

Asserting Agency within Oppressive Systems: Pheby learns from her mother that the best way to avoid conflict and maintain a semblance of peace with white slave owners is to be both available and invisible. This reflects the negotiation of selfhood within a dehumanizing system. Decolonization involves questioning imposed norms and reclaiming agency within oppressive boundaries.

The following are three main findings that support Pheby's successful survival through cultural hybridity:

Negotiation of Identity: Pheby's survival strategy involves a delicate balance of adapting to the expectations of both worlds—being available and invisible. This reflects the negotiation of selfhood within a dehumanizing system and aligns with Bhabha's concept of the "third space" where she occupies a liminal position—neither fully oppressed nor fully liberated.

Mental Resilience: Despite immense suffering and despair, Pheby refuses to let it consume her. Her determination not to succumb to misery demonstrates her resilience and mental strength. This resilience is a key aspect of cultural hybridity, allowing her to maintain her mental and emotional well-being despite the harsh circumstances.

Connection to Heritage: Pheby's mother instills in her a sense of pride and connection to their Mandara queen ancestry. This lineage connects Pheby to her African heritage, emphasizing an identity beyond the confines of slavery. This act of reclaiming pre-colonial identities is a key aspect of cultural hybridity.

These findings align with the perspectives of Fanon (1963) and Bhabha (1994), both of whom emphasize the importance of cultural identity and the role of individuals in challenging dominant narratives and asserting agency within oppressive systems.

6.Conclusion

In conclusion, Pheby's journey in *Yellow Wife* is a testament to the power of decolonization and cultural hybridity as survival strategies. Her ability to negotiate her identity, maintain mental resilience, and reclaim her pre-colonial identity in the face of immense suffering and despair showcases her strength and determination. These strategies reflect her ability to challenge dominant narratives and assert her agency within oppressive systems, aligning with the perspectives of Fanon (1963) and Bhabha (1994). Her story serves as a poignant reminder of the resilience of those who endured slavery, shedding light on their struggles and their quest for freedom and dignity. It underscores the transformative power of cultural hybridity and decolonization in empowering individuals to navigate adversity with courage and resilience.

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