

I. Introduction: James McBride and Concept of Identity in regard to Cultural Hybridity.

This research explores James McBride's *The Color of Water* (1996) in the light of cultural hybridity within the text. The term hybridity refers to the creation of new mixed culture within the contact area produced by migration of people to different places. The research also tries to present the loss of identity as consequences of cultural identity and suppose the reconstruction of self of a human being whose identity has been lost. This biography revolves around the cultivation of lost identity, where a character or author himself can benefit with providing tribute to his mother Ruth McBride who came to America when she was a young girl in a family of Polish Jewish immigrants. Ruth married Andrew Dennis McBride, a black man from North Carolina. James Childhood was spent in a chaotic household of twelve children who had neither the time nor the outlet to consider questions of race and identity. Ruth did not want to discuss the painful details of her early family life, when her abusive father Tateh loaded over her sweet-tempered and meek mother Mameh. Ruth had cut all ties with her Jewish family. Moreover, this research also stresses upon the demand of raising consciousness among hybrid female characters after their observation of the painful suffering experienced by female and the children following them.

The plot of *The Color of Water* consist of both the autobiography of the author and tribute to the life of his mother Ruth who is victimized by the evils of cultural hybridity. The main problem of the biography is the connections in cultural hybridity in the Jewish American Society. This problem in the text is addressed by the present research emphasizing the necessity in the level where the following generation author

also needs to reestablish his lost identity. The notion of cultural hybridity by Robert Young, Homi K. Bhabha and Frantz Fanon are taken as insights to solve the problem in the text. It addresses the issues related to the evils of cultural hybridity in the Jewish - American Society. The novel mirrors the situation of loss of self-identity.

James McBride was born on September 11, 1957 in Brooklyn, New York City, New York, USA. James is Ruth's son, and the narrator of *The Color of Water*. He wrote this volume in order to discover himself. By delving into his mother's past, as well as his own past, he hoped to find a better understanding of his racial, religious, and social identity. These racial, religious and social aspects make the main tone and content of the book. James recounts the events of his life and inserts anecdotes and experiences that express his sense of being lost, of not knowing his past.

Questions about his own racial identity plagued James's childhood and early adolescence. James persistently expressed his curiosity to his mother, but saw race as secondarily important. When the racial changes of the 1960s swept through New York, James had difficulty reconciling the rise of black power with the fact that his mother was white. James was constantly embarrassed by his mother's whiteness, because it signified her difference from his peers and their parents. As James grew older, however, he began to accept his mother more easily, embracing her coincidences and eccentricities rather than resenting them.

After his stepfather died, James fell into a phase of drug use and crime. As he matured, he began to understand the consequences of idle time and intelligence. His friends in Louisville, Kentucky, warned him of the potential consequences of his behavior. He had always liked music and writing, and he began to invest himself more

seriously in those activities. James began to mature not only out of concern for his own future, but also because he felt increased responsibility to his family because of his stepfather's death.

Another and most significant character of this memoir is Ruth the mother of James McBride. She was born in Poland in 1921. Her family was a Jewish immigrant to USA. Being a Jew person her father acted as Rabbi, so they had to frequently move around the country. But this way of living was difficult for them. So they finally settled in Virginia, where many black people were already living. There they opened a general store for family income. Her father, Tateh didn't treat blacks fairly. His behavior was racist and most often he overcharged blacks customer for goods in his store. Ruth didn't like her father's prejudice against blacks so she sympathized black people around her. She also separated herself from the white community living in the South. Those days, the white communities were fostering blacks with lots of direct and indirect violence. Her ever sympathy of her child life might have worked, she also married a black man in her adulthood. She even changed her name to Ruth McBride that is the name of her husband. Ruth however, didn't have the good life in Harlem. She was poorly paid and all the privilege of the south life had gone. But the worst came when she was pregnant with her eighth child James and her husband died. We can imagine the suffering of Ruth, but also can figure out that she was able to cope up with all this and was able to give her children an uncompromising life with, food, health and education. Her life moved with religiosity and became immensely involved to churches as she discovered Christianity by herself. Because, for a Jew, Christianity isn't a right choice. With all her

hardships for herself and dedication to her children she is always worthy of this great tribute from her son James.

James McBride's *The Color of Water* has various perspectives of looking at life. It can be judged from different point of views; therefore, the criticism depends on the reader. Different critics have interpreted this biography from different perspectives. In this connection, H. Jack Geiger in The New York Times writes on the issue for identity:

Within the family, questions about racial identity were answered with loving circumstances. When James asked his mother about why she was different from her children, she would say only "I'm light-skinned" when he asked if he was black or white, she said "you're a human. (9)

In the above lines H. Jack Geiger shows the problem of identity of James by his mother to neglecting his questions. Melody Wilson Schreiber views in *Melody & Words*:

An eloquent narrative in which a young black man searches for his root-against the wishes of his mother. McBride, a professional saxophonist and former staff writer for the Boston Globe and the Washington post, grew up with 11 siblings in an all-black Brooklyn, New York, housing project, as a child, he becomes aware that his mother was different from others around him; she was white and she kept secret. When asked where she was from, McBride recalls, she would say something like "God made me"; When asked about her ethnicity. (6)

Jerry Wexler writes in *Memory Writers Network* on the issue of search for identity:

James McBride's mother, Ruth, taught her twelve children to reach for

their dreams. For example, a little-known clause in New York City's educational system allowed her to send her kids to any school. She sent them to best in the city where they were often the only blacks in the class. Despite her intense involvement in their lives, they knew little about her past. When James was a young boy, struggling to understand his racial identity, he asked her, "Are you white?" She evaded the question replying, "I have light skin." He couldn't figure it out and kept hounding her. "What color is God?" he asked. "He is color of water," she said. "He doesn't have any color." James McBride's search for his racial identity intensified during adolescence. While his older siblings were earning college degrees, McBride rebelled so hard he ended up on a street corner, hanging out with punks stealing and dealing on their way down. In their company, something finally clicked and he realized the street corner was a dead end. (13)

The above mentioned lines reveal that McBride is trying to understand his color and history because he is not clear where he belongs because his color is between black and white. Heather Remmert writes in *Memphis Reads*:

James McBride opens up a new can of worms with this spellbinding life story of his mother, Ruth McBride Jordan. McBride searches for the truth of his mother's heritage and his own. This enticing true story is told alternately by Ruth and James, yet it is easy to follow. Ruth tries to bury past, chalk everything up to experience, and make the best of life, while James is in the midst of a crisis, trying to find out why his mother is so

hard and stubborn about unleashing her past. James McBride is in for a rude awakening when the truth begins to surface about his family's secrets. (17)

McBride is searching for his mother's heritage to find out his real heritage. So it means the novel is about the search for identity.

Going through these critics' views, many of them have raised the issues of difficulties of amalgamation of two different families' identity. But we do not find any of them scrutinizing the factors that cause difficulty in search for identity for one's own country. The critics have approached the text in many ways, some of the critics point out the issue of identity and others talk about racial problems. So in relation to the reviews of these critics this text can be analyzed where the lost identity is the main priority to be searched. This research tries to study about cultural hybridity, and how it brings identity crisis and state of diaspora in the life of mother and her son who have migrated in the foreign land of America. In this way, Cultural hybridity incorporates with different issues, which are studied in post-colonial theory such as diaspora, migration and identity crisis. Diaspora studies are one of the major areas to study post-colonial theory. The word diaspora is derived from Greek word which means 'dispersion'. Defining upon diaspora, Ashcroft et al write:

Diaspora, the voluntary or forcible movements or people from their lands into new regions is a central historical fact or colonization. Colonialism itself was a radically diasporic movement involving the temporary or permanent dispersion and settlement of millions of Europeans over the entire world. (*Key Concepts* 68-69)

This is to say that the colonized people moving back to the metropolitan centers are the most recent and most significant diaspora movement. Nowadays, many critics have accepted 'diasporic identity' as a positive affirmation of their hybridity. Diaspora is movement of people from known location to unknown location. Hence, diaspora creates a sense of dislocation and alienation because they could not adjust themselves in new location and culture.

Diaspora studies is an academic field established in the late 20th century to study dispersed ethnic population, which are often termed as diaspora people. Initially diaspora was concerned narrowly to the migration of people. But in English literature, it studies its areas along with cultural studies. The new concept of diaspora insists the idea that it explains the complexity, diversity and fixity of migrant identities and experience. It relates the idea of uprooting of migrants from their societies and cultures of origin and given the sense of alienation, displacement, exile and dislocation. Thus, diaspora also causes cultural hybridity in diasporic regions.

Similarly, migration being the subject of post-colonial discourse is not a new phenomenon. It widens its area that migration itself had even in the past had become a significant issue of political studies. It has become more problematized because many people are uprooted and forced to leave their homes behind which also puts humanitarian challenges to the neighboring countries and also to the developed nation to the west. The voluntary and unwanted migration increases speed to challenge the cultural and demographic stability of the western world and other regional area as well. Migration breeds the state of cultural and geographical rootlessness leading to the

feeling of alienation, which are the adverse diasporic effects. In a word migration is also one of the major factor for cultural hybridity.

Finally, the issue of identity is something previously assumed to be fixed or stable but it is to be questioned with the experience of doubt and indefiniteness. One of the reasons that identity is questioned is because of globalization and immigration.

Thus, today's identities are not static and they are not absolutes of nature and culture.

Regarding the factors of changes in identity, Chris Balker writes:

Identity is hotly debated when it is in crisis. Globalization provides the context for just such a crisis since it has increased the range of source and resources available for identity construction. Patterns of population movements and settlements established during colonialism and its aftermath combined with more recent acceleration of globalization. Particularly electronic communications have enabled increased cultural juxtaposing, meeting and mixing. (21)

Thus, the issue of identity is discussed widely. It is affected by the high speed of globalization and mass media etc. which mix different cultures in the same place.

Regarding the issue of identity Clifford says; "Culture and cultural identity can no longer be adequately understood in terms of place, but are better conceptualized in terms of travel" (qtd in Barker 200). It can be said that identity is sketched from various directions because of the emergence of new theories in the recent era. Indeed, identities are not constant. Furthermore, they are influenced by different sectors like economic, political and cultural. As a result, no fixed and constant identity will remain for a long

time, which causes cultural hybridity that mixes necessarily. Once the colonial settlers had arrived in the new place, they involve a binary relationship between the people of the two cultures, languages and races and it created a hybrid and cross cultural society.

Identity is not stable and fixed, and is always fluctuating. The notion of identity is ignored unless it is questioned. So the crisis of identity may happen due to the lack of location to specific culture or notion. Kobena Mercer, quoted by Hall says, “Identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable, is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty” (275). In this way, Kobena Mercer says that the question of identity is only considered when he or she is departed from the fixed and stable culture. Thus, the crisis of identity insists the feeling of alienation, who are dislocated from their known culture or origin.

Cultural hybridity is the theoretical tool to analyze the text. But in doing so, it will not cross the frontier of textual research. It is proved with the supports of different writers and critics from the concerned perspective. The tentative chapters are divided into three divisions whereas the first chapter of this research is about James McBride and his writing with the impression of this project. Also there is a brief discussion about the theoretical concepts like diaspora, migration and identity crisis, which are directly or indirectly related to cultural hybridity. Similarly, the second chapter is about the analysis of the text blending with the theoretical tools. Finally, chapter three will conclude the explanation and arguments put forward in the preceding chapters.

This study makes significant use of concepts developed in post-colonial theoretical scholarship. The major objective of the study is to demonstrate the search of hidden identity between two so called hierarchical cultures, a comprehensive analysis of

James McBride's issue of the cultural hybridity. This thesis seeks cultural hybridity in the Jewish – American society from the perspective of a black person. The thesis will be a library based research; guidance from lectures, professors, authentic cites will be used to solve the problem. I have taken the issue of cultural hybridity and used Robert Young, Homi K. Bhabha and Frantz Fanon as theorists to examine the text. This thesis seeks special cultural relation between characters which is related to the cultural hybridity.

II. Exploration of searching family root, identity and its formation in *The Color of Water*

This research tries to find the effects of cultural hybridity in the life of mother and son relationship. It also explores their condition of being subjugated from their pasts and that ultimately makes them strong and powerful in such way that they succeed to achieve self-agency through identity formation. Though mother and son are interrelated, but the way of their trouble is different from one another. The origin of their distress might be different but they head towards the same loss of their self, which forces them to re-establish their identity. Here, mother is so much strong that she is able to manage all the requirements of her children. We can assume, life of James would have been worst or at least different if Ruth had not been his mother in such difficult situation. In this study we are visualizing the issues that the evils of interracial or the hybrid condition in culture has to offer in the black-Jewish-American society.

Cultural issues focuses on the most active and disputed term in post-colonial studies, 'hybridity', which commonly refers to the creation of new trans-cultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization. The term trans-culture refers to a process whereby members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture. While subjugated people cannot rapidly control what comes out from the dominant culture, they determine to vary its extents what actually they absorb into their own.

“There are not many of us left,” Aubrey said. “We had maybe twenty-five or thirty Jewish families here at one time, back when your grandfather was around. The older ones died, the younger ones left.

Some went to California, some to Virginia Beach, or just moved. The only ones who stayed had businesses with their fathers that dropped down to them. ... "It was not that easy a place for a Jew to live. I suppose some found it easier to make a living elsewhere." (225)

It was difficult to have resting place for Jewish who were few in numbers. Some people left for California and some for Virginia. Some had small businesses that was transferred from their seniors. As Ruth says, "I believe" in extracts she is not definite that everyone found a suitable place for them live in. None of the people migrated there had inherited land of their own. They were the frequent traveler for a better shelter place.

Hybridization depicts many forms including not only cultural but also political, racial, social, linguistic, etc. It has frequently been used in post-colonial discourse to mean simply cross-cultural exchanges and hybridization is understood as the process by which colonized people mimic the colonizers' language (sometimes in order to subvert colonizers), borrow western ideas and practices and reject their own socio-cultural structures. On the issue of hybridity, Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin write;

Hybridity occurs in post-colonial societies both as a result of conscious moments of cultural suppression, as when the colonial power invades to consolidate political and economic control, or when settler-invaders disposes indigenous peoples and force them to 'assimilate' to new social pattern. It may also occur in later periods when patterns of immigration from the metropolitan societies and other imperial areas of influences (eg. Indentured laborers from India and China) continue to produce

complex cultural palimpsests with the post-colonized world. (*Reader* 183)

Therefore, hybridity concerns various problems in which people are dislocated and displaced from their familiar social environments and indigenous culture when they are compelled to assimilate to new social pattern. As we can see in the following extract;

Sometimes without conscious realization, our thoughts, our faith, our interests are entered into the past. We talk about other times, other places, other persons, and lose our living hold on the present. Sometimes we think if we could just go back in time we would be happy. But anyone who attempts to reenter the past is sure to be disappointed. Anyone who has ever revisited the place of his birth after years of absence is shocked by the differences between the way the place actually is, and the way he has remembered it. He may walk along old familiar streets and roads, but he is a stranger in a strange land. He has thought of this place as home, but he finds he is no longer here even in spirit. He has gone onto a new and different life, and in thinking longingly of the past, he has been giving thought and interest to something that no longer really exists. (151)

This is the condition of losing the familiar environment, but in fact, it's the loss of identity along with the loss of familiar environment. It was different in Harlem than in her father's house. It was difficult in Harlem. She had to work at difficult conditions and poorly paid jobs. This is the diasporic feeling. She had really difficult condition so it has created the feeling of nostalgia. Anyone who tries to enter the past again has to be

disappointed because, even the birth place is long gone and the new is still to be coped much “in fact that’s what I liked about black folks all my life: They never judged me. My black friends never asked me how much money I made, or what school my children went to, or anything like that. They just said, “Come as you are.” Blacks have always been peaceful and trusting.” (52). This point shows that though She socialized exclusively with black people, and essentially lived the life of a black woman but still there was the violence, suffering and hidden secrets to cope with. “It was always so hot, and everyone was so polite, and everything was all surface but underneath it was like a bomb waiting to go off. I always felt that way about the South that beneath the smiles and southern hospitality and politeness were a lot of guns and liquor and secrets.” (49). Despite the goodness this guns, liquor and the secrets are the hidden preparedness of the hate against whites and the civil rights movement that was about explode soon.

Regarding the term ‘hybridity’, prominent post-colonial critics as Homi K. Bhabha, Robert Young, Frantz Fanon point out basically suppressed experience of dominated people. The colonialist are the settlers and who are displaced from their own points of origin, and have to establish their identity in a new place. Thus, hybridity presupposes the power relation between the subjugated culture and the dominant one. So far hybridity occurs producing new kind of sharing the ideas, and beliefs of both culture but more under the pressure of the influential culture.

Similarly, immigration causes hybridity and this in turn leads to identity crisis creating displacement and sometimes cultural deformation of subjects. Thus, Homi K. Bhabha, quoted by Ashcroft et al, defines hybridity as “the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects”

(Reader 34). Hybridity as shared post-colonial condition as a part of the tendency of discourse analysis to dehistoricize and dislocate the cultures from their temporal, spatial, geographical and linguistic contexts. Hybridity here mainly concerns with racism here. Ruth came from Poland to USA as a white Jewish girl. She definitely had a mixed culture of both Jewish and White American. But unlike the other white immigrant Jewish girls she had a sympathy and love for blacks. Hierarchy in hybrid community turned her against the theme of the hybrid practice where one would be superior to the other. Rather than having inclination towards the culture of the whites American, she choose to be a beloved of a black person. However, her selection created her as an unstable person in her life.

Post-colonial critics have been influenced by the issue of hybridity, creolization, in betweenness. They argue that each culture either of colonizer or of colonized loses its identity in colonized society. And this situation emerges a new culture that is neither purely the culture of colonized nor purely that of colonizer. Thomas B. Macaulay presented such new culture in his treatise “Minute on Indian Education” at the British Parliament on Feb. 2, 1825. According to him, British government has given European education to Indians to create an intermediate class of people.

On this issue, Macaulay argues that by training certain Indian elites in English or western education, language and culture, the British rulers would be able to create and “intermediate” class of people who would be distinguished from the general mass of people or native population. Macaulay means “a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals, and in intellect” (61). Such ‘intermediate’ class of people would be as interpreters between the British and millions

of Indian they ruled. It means that, these ‘intermediate’ classes of people would be ‘brown’ in terms of their skin only but they would be ‘almost’ white in terms of their cultural training, manners, languages, mode of speech and accent. The “construction” of these kinds of people was necessary because he thought that few hundred thousand British subjects would be unable to rule and regulate millions of native of native Indians. The production of this ‘in between’ class, ‘white but not quite’, in fact, would protect British interest and help them to rule a vast and potentially unruly land.

A key theorist, Frantz Fanon, viewed that the colonized behaviors which they thought as superior to the native ones. “The Negro comes in many colors. Dark. Black. Blacker. Blackest. Blacker than night. Black as hell. Black as tar” (139). The use of comparative adjective and even the comparison of it to tar is the metaphorical presentation as blacks being objects rather than humans. Like Macaulay, he also developed his idea of ‘comprador’ class or elite who exchanged rules with white colonial dominating class and argued that these “comprador” were ‘masked’ by their partnership with the value of white colonial powers. In *Black Skin White Masks*, he studied how colonial authority works by inviting black subjects to mime white culture. He further stresses:

Every colonized people – in other words every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality – finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation that is, with the culture the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his

adaptation of the mother countries cultural standards. He becomes white as he renounces his blackness his jungle. (18)

So, Fanon argues, the colonized people suffer from inferiority complex; they feel that there is a lack of something within themselves in comparison to what the westerners have the civilization when they are away from the colonizers. A similar situation can be found in *The Color of Water*. James had started to feel his Jewishness that had come to him from his mother. Ruth, the mother of James had been his mask for the outer world. James had go to white school, though initially he didn't enjoy much. Later he had the feeling of whiteness in himself. The whiteness that came from the Jewish mother, who married black man and had black children and was able to cope with all the difficulties of life. Though quite not exactly the same, but we can assume that his mother's white skin had become the white mask in his genetically black skin. His mother, let's say white skin had always been his confusion. His confrontation of among his mother and his mother always put him into the question whether or not he was adopted simply because he didn't look like his mother. The "color of water" got this place also form his mother, who frequently used to say that water has no color, and we are equally "colorless". Had his mother clarified the matter already, James, would never had searched his identity. His mother's regular intervention as we are all "colorless" and "God loves all of us equally" might have forced him to search for his self-identity. "It occurred to me then that you is everything you are in this life at every moment. And that includes loving somebody. If you can't be your own self, how can you love somebody? How can you be free?" (196). So now, here occurred the necessity that with love he had to find his self. Because it was only with love that was possible. Also loving and find

the self was more necessary before loving others and finding the self of others. Maybe mother had done the same. To love herself she loved her children and vice versa. Let's see a quote from *Black Skin, White Mask*, "Superiority? Inferiority? Why not simply try to touch the other, feel the other, and discover each other?" (186) So superiority and inferiority are in question here, as they prevail almost everywhere. But fortunately, it was different in the life of Ruth who always had ignored such things. She even ignored the color of skin. It was natural and she could have described it as a natural phenomenon, rather she injected pure equality as the pure color of water into the mind of young James and eleven others. "She couldn't stand racists of either color". (30) Ruth was at the same time troubled from both sides, like a Jew with low status and a white wife marrying a black man. But she taught her children to ignore racism. Later her children succeeded with respectable status in life. Some became, doctors, professors, teachers and with other professions as well, though their father, "The man died without a penny" (251). Some of them even worked in civil rights movement. Their mixed color of white and black and their educational background supported them strongly to go beyond the color line in the racist American society.

Moreover, colonialism has left an adverse effect in the downgrading the female race where effects of colonialism has been prevalent. Ruth's family became the victim of European persecution and had to flee to America. Colonialism that begun with the motive of ruling the world, it made the people of colonized countries suffer a lot both physically and mentally. Among the sufferers, it is the females that has been doubly victimized. It is very much contextual to mention how Benita Perry in her *Postcolonial*

Studies mentions about the double oppression of third world females relating the concept to that of Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak:

What Spivak uncovers are instances of doubly oppressed native women who, caught between the domination of native patriarchy and a foreign masculinist-imperialist ideology intervene by ‘unemphetic, ad hoc, subaltern rewriting(s) of the social text of Sati-suicide.’ (Can the Subaltern Speak? 129)

As Perry explains that females are already victimized part of the society, females have been double victimized by the adverse effects of colonialism. It has added as the fuel to fire to the burning flames of suppression, victimization and dehumanization. The extreme amount of dehumanizing situation can be seen in the life of Ruth.

From the First person point of view, the book reflects the racial prejudice upon the character, mother Ruth. James is also not dry from the same water of discrimination. Ruth’s life experienced persecution from both Russian and Germans for which her parents had to flee from Poland. As a child she tasted the strong pathetic exile due to fear of being murdered. The fear of Europe constantly occurred in the family as a whole when Rabbi Shilsky threatened them to send back to Europe. This was a type of constant terrorism family faced even in America. Though they were white in looks, young Ruth continuously got bullied and humiliated in school for being a girl from a runaway Jewish family. Since her childhood Ruth experienced distaste, so she developed a strong sympathy for the blacks who came to her father’s shop and had to be treated differently than white; such as they had to pay much to the same product for being black. The situation of black gradually went wrong and worse than she would

imagine, like the Ku Klux Klan would go to the black community and murder young boys and girls, whose bodies would later be found in the river side. Because of the strong sympathy she had for blacks she continuously develops relationship with a black man and finally gets pregnant from him. So she has to run away to New York for an abortion. Otherwise she and her boyfriend would have get killed. For this reason Ruth had a strong dislike towards her family. She even says, “You want me to talk about my family and here I been dead to them for fifty years.” (1)

In modern times going back and trying to find a cultural identity is rather a difficult task. Ever changing cultures and the solely form of individuality has made it difficult to trace the track of ancestors. Also better than a cultural and family root, a person would try pursue for those identities that would negate discrimination, hierarchy, biasness and more. This is a highly politicized form of an identity searching. Most importantly, the projection on identity can be seen on the apartheid movement and women’s struggle in the form of resistance against the patriarchal society. This liberation of women and blacks produced a different life for them with new independent identity. Because of this, the identity became ambivalent. Homi. K. Bhabha also claims on the indirect position of ambivalence in the act of cultural interpretation by saying that the production of meaning in the relations of value systems requires in cultural difference space in the world. Regarding third space for interpretations Bhabha says:

By stressing the process by which we know and can know cultures and totalities, the term ‘cultural difference’ emphasizes our awareness of the ‘humanizing effects of cultural symbols and icons’ and places the

emphasis on questioning attitude towards 'the authority of cultural' synthesis in general. (20)

Culture possibly is identified in relation to the culture different to it. Our culture has different roles for us in the society. Every person has multiple positions in the society which is shaped by our culture's interest for us. So identity always have at least dual roles that brings ambivalence in the identity formation. Such spaces are the land of diaspora in cultural studies where meaning and identities of diverse cultures are interpreted. Just like this, in *The Color of Water*, James exposes the family revelations and search for identity embedded on it.

The Color of Water is mainly the biography of the author James Mc Bride but it primarily revolves around the dual identity of his mother who is on the one hand a runaway Jewish and on the other hand a loving mother. The first identity of a runaway Jewish consists of a painful past from where she had to leave everything and try to reinvent herself in the New York City's black community. Her renounced Jewish life is reflected while she takes the responsibility of raising her children. This part of her life, despite many ups and downs makes her home as a place of learning. Though there were lots of chaotic fragmentations in her household, she was able to maintain strict rules and high expectation in her family environment both intellectually and ethically. Her second identity, the other of the duals, is indeed the delighted religious life and though peculiar it might seem but very much loving mother is there who is able to convince her children that she is the fair and light skinned black woman. This powerful mother sustains her children even in deep crisis through both individual capacity and religious faith. However, even this strong character has layers of sorrows and regrets of her childhood.

James is the trouble but curious son of Ruth. James has the intention of recovering his mother's past at least through the art. By this James Mc Bride wants to establish his own identity. As his mother is in deep grief, the author wants to relieve pain by releasing through this novel. At the same time author is a black child, different from his mother's fairness. This two aspects, mother's grief and his being different from his mother allows the author to reconcile the different aspects of personality. One most important thing to notice here is that, James has started to feel Jewishness in himself as he goes on exploring his mother's past in order to recover from pain. It was now more a necessity than merely a curiosity of mother's past, which a boyhood James was always deprived of.

“As a boy, I never knew where my mother was from---where she was born, who her parents were. When I asked she'd say, "God made me." When I asked if she was white, she'd say, "I'm light-skinned," and change the subject. She raised twelve black children and sent us all to college and in most cases graduate school. Her children became doctors, professors, chemists, teachers---yet none of us even knew her maiden name until we were grown. It took me fourteen years to unearth her remarkable story---the daughter of an Orthodox Jewish rabbi, she married a black man in 1942---and she revealed it more as a favor to me than out of any desire to revisit her past. Here is her life as she told it to me, and betwixt and between the pages of her life you will find mine as well.”(17)

In his childhood, James was curious of his differences from his mother. “I asked her if I was black or white. She replied “You are a human being. Educate yourself or you’ll be a nobody!” (27) It was merely a curiosity that with his age and understanding turned into a necessity not only about mother but also to establish his own self. This overwhelmingly loving mother was necessary to be uncovered. James expresses it took him fourteen years to unearth the remarkable life of great mother.

As James is between the two different races, it is necessary for him to understand both races; the African American and his white American identity. And he was necessarily understanding his world:

“My siblings had already instilled the notion of black pride in me. I would have preferred that Mommy were black. Now, as a grown man, I feel privileged to have come from two worlds. My view of the world is not merely that of a black man but that of a black man with something of a Jewish soul. I don’t consider myself Jewish, but when I look at Holocaust photographs of Jewish women whose children have been wrenched from them by Nazi soldiers, the women look like my own mother and I think to myself, There but for the grace of God goes my own mother—and by extension, myself.” (74)

James had started to realize and take pride in his black being. He belonged to the Jewish, his preference was if mother had also been a black woman. However, his world doesn’t only consist of the black family line as it seems, he is somehow to with more extent a Jews also. When James sees the photographs of the holocaust, he feels injured

as the real sufferers there. So is the necessity that he create a great tribute to his mother Ruth.

Both mother and son have related but own part of troubled past. These mother and son recover their past by digging their own past through the journey of self-discovery. In the sense of understanding, McBride writes the context of 20th century American situation where the story links with his family's personal story of Jewish migration to America. More to this, the Great Depression, and the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements of the 1960s also has the huge impact in the life of these son and mother. Love, war and conflict and persistent inequality between men, women and races are among the dominant themes where the prejudices and prosecution has flourished among the people. Ruth's struggle to free herself from the circle of racial and patriarchal prejudice is clearly seen in the novel. Apart from this, post-colonial female's endeavor is an intervention of both colonial and feminist studies. It is the intersection of colonialism and neocolonialism with gender, nation, class, race and sexuality in the different contests of women's lives, their subjectivities, work, sexuality and rights. It is identified with work of female writers of the third world origins located in the metropolitan university and the agendas set by them to define a recognizable postcolonial feminism. Interlinking females' subjugations with postcolonial aspect, Aschroft in the *Postcolonial Studies* writes:

Both Feminism and Post Colonialism have after concerned with the ways and extent to which representation and language are crucial to identify formation and to the construction of 'subjectivity'. For both groups, language has been a vehicle for subverting patriarchy and imperial power

inheretical and have thus attempted to recover to a linguistic authenticity through a precolonial language and a primal feminine tongue. However, both feminists and colonized people like other subordinate groups have also used appropriation to subvert and adopt dominant language and signifying practices. (76)

The female subjugation and postcolonial studies get involved into a mutually investigative and interactive reaction with each other. But when people like our protagonist Ruth are subject to blind perspectives and issues related to colonialism and the international division of racism through color, the postcolonial studies fails to include the gender in its analysis, and also any related theories fail to co-relate with each other to address the lives of women victimized simultaneously by patriarchy and racism. (Ruth has been victimized in such a way by both patriarchy and racism that her identity as a human being is almost lost and this also has negative effect on the children that come from her.

I remember when a white man shoved her angrily as she led a group of us onto an escalator, but Mommy simply ignored him. I remember two black women pointing at us saying, “Look at the white bitch,” and a white man screaming at Mommy somewhere in Manhattan, calling her a “nigger lover.” (31)

These are the humiliations that young James saw his mother suffering for being a white woman and embracing black children. She was angrily shoved for keeping black children with her. White people treated blacks as the curse and would not want to be near them. Even the blacks themselves did not stop from disrespecting Ruth and overtly

neglected her saying a “nigger lover” (31). The loving mother simply maintained peace until the insults were hurled at her. James remembers she would fight back only if “the insults threatened her children” (32).

The theme of the biography moves beyond the title with equal presentation of problems in white communities. The title color of water suggest only the prevalence of racism, but the author takes it also into the different realm by talking about the psychological grief both mother and son had to endure. We can see how James was bullied in the childhood school days. As he says:

But as a kid, I preferred the black side, and often wished that Mommy had sent me to black schools like my friends. Instead I was stuck at that white school, P.S. 138, with white classmates who were convinced I could dance like James Brown. They constantly badgered me to do the “James Brown” for them, a squiggling of the feet made famous by the “Godfather of Soul” himself, who back in the sixties was bigger than life. I tried to explain to them that I couldn’t dance. I have always been one of the worst dancers that God has ever put upon this earth. (122)

James didn’t preferred black side because he was black but because of bullies that he had to face from his friends at schools. Perhaps someone called James Brown was a black dancer by then, young James was compared to him. The similarity in color between two James made it easier for the comparison of their dance. Maybe or may not be this young James was a good dancer, however he was psychologically harassed due the comparison. As young James tries to explain to his friends, we can see the pain that he has to go through. “I tried to explain to them that I couldn’t dance. I have always

been one of the worst dancers that God has ever put upon this earth.” (95) Normally, kids have the tendency to brag for something better, but his bragging rights for being similar to James the dancer was purely a harassment for being a black boy. He couldn't change what already had come to him but at least he tried to make a preference of not to be among whites. Instead, he had a safer place among blacks:

in fact that's what I liked about black folks all my life: They never judged me. My black friends never asked me how much money I made, or what school my children went to, or anything like that. They just said, "Come as you are." Blacks have always been peaceful and trusting. (52).

This is also what mother had always faced in her life. Her black friends had been more polite to her. They never judged her with anything she had. Money never was the matter of discussions among her black friends nor was the type of school for her children. Though she was white, she was still inferior white. Her family had migrated from Poland and we know, Jewish never had the equal status as other white Americans. What she always had was the peaceful environment among blacks but never with whites. Even the inferior Jewish never treated so called inferior blacks equally.

Issue of identity is worth mentioning here. Identity has been human beings main focus in order to understand the sense of life. When one understands himself, then he is able to understand the others. Cultural plays an important role defining one's identity. Human beings identity comes from where they have come from, grew up and currently residing. Identity has lasting impact in life. But when it becomes temporary and changing, life is lost in the chain of undefined past. So cultural and racial information becomes crucial to establish one's connection into identity. Everyone has the tendency

to associate oneself to their own culture, race or group so it fulfills their lineage. From distant past humans have been divided into different groups according to the place they live. Later they separated their own type according to the place and group they have come from. Every different groups have their own cultures and rituals, even they have different understanding of life. People from different cultures even look different biologically, that's why they are called different race. So each group of people claim that they have different and distinct identity and character because of their separate cultural background. Identity becomes a severe issue when something already believed to be fixed becomes blur and without certainty. Then the question is raised to solve the difficulty of belonging. People express and even seek to establish their connection to the source culture in order to establish their identity. Scholars like Koben Mercer believe it as crisis everywhere. Identity crisis has become the global issue and the factor is itself the globalization. People migrate to different places and some smaller groups or relatively so called the inferior people and culture are overruled by the powerful culture. This situation hybridization because one is under the influence of both cultures at the same time. Hybridization sometimes causes loss of identity because it creates dual nature in a human being.

With this we can figure out the related theme of duality which is suggested both in mother and son's individual understanding. The two identities of the mother and son connects them to the black and white communities, however both of them are mutually interrelated. Though it is not necessary that they have to exist for one another but here it happened that indeed they existed for one another. Both mother and son ultimately realize their own identities that cannot be separated from them. This was the cultural

identities that they have realized, however, beyond this story, we cannot overrule the larger and extraordinary story of the woman who by many difficulties never backed down but always was able to raise her children in the best possible. So along with the self-search this biography becomes the great tribute to his extraordinary mother with great values for wisdom, religious faith and education and family.

James initially places respectful tone towards his mother. Although he is quite sure most of the times mother has mortified him with strict and bizarre values, but the image he has for his mother is strong woman with big heart. With this James makes clear about the adjustment of his mother in the difficult and adverse environment. She chose all this for herself going against the mainstream and negating the cultural boundaries. So all James did was to strengthen the character of that gracious mother.

I don't remember the name of the town where I was born, but I do remember my Jewish name: Ruchel Dwajra Zylska. My parents got rid of that name when we came to America and changed it to Rachel Deborah Shilsky, and I got rid of that name when I was nineteen and never used it again after I left Virginia for good in 1941. Rachel Shilsky is dead as far as I am concerned. She had to die in order for me, the rest of me, to live.

(2)

This is the image of the bold mother who killed her own name in order to establish a new one. Through her childhood as her family changed places from Poland to USA, so was her name changed to perhaps match the context of American society. But later as she had her own choice of love to a black person she was able to kill her own identity to establish the new one. So and by showing such daring character.

While going ahead James establishes his own narrative voice to observe and create stories about mother. His way of narration runs throughout the novel where he is able to arrange chapters in such a way that a reader is fully aware of son's condition while understating mother's story. His way and pattern of narrativizing the story helps him to clarify about mother and himself respectively about the same age of their lives.

When I was fourteen, my mother took up two new hobbies: riding a bicycle and playing piano. The piano I didn't mind, but the bicycle drove me crazy. It was a huge old clunker, blue with white trim with big fat tires, huge fenders, and a battery-powered horn built into the middle of the frame with a button you pushed to make it blow. The contraption would be a collector's item now, probably worth about five thousand dollars, but back then it was something my stepfather found on the street in Brooklyn and hauled home a few months before he died. (5)

James describes the events and the stories in details. Here he describes about his most adorable hobby of riding the bicycle. Though his hobbies are directly taken down by his mother James seems to be in an unending love with them. James frequently recalls the significant part of his life and tries to make comments about how they were actually mastered. And most often significantly delves in describing about Ruth's past life. So, here we find frequent interwoven of narration which is we say must be for interweaving of two inseparable lives of mother and son. So we can assume, the intermingled events are not only about the cleverness of storytelling art but the necessity of understanding past for the sake of present as well as to establish the identity from the disappeared or blurred one.

Also worth mentioning here, James recounting of the story doesn't follow the chronological path. Only in a less extent or her followed chronology in a loose manner. He jumps back and forth in order to explain the story of himself and mother. James directly narrates the story and indirectly reflects and integrates in himself.

James here again presents his and his siblings' early belief about Judaism and its effect on his mother. Judaism obviously didn't have significantly positive background in Ruth, rather it appeared as a vague notion that had often the misconception at least with Ruth's present life. "I thought Jews were something that was in the Bible. I'd heard about them in Sunday school, through Jesus and such. I told Ma I didn't know they were still around." (85) James even didn't know that imaginary people which he thought only existed in the Bible was his own mother. Yet, sometimes James would see his mother insistently apply where she had been from that is the Jewish society. Because we knew unlike others only Jewish people in their community prioritize learning and study. James and his siblings had to study for long hours. "It was in her sense of education, more than any other, that Mommy conveyed her Jewishness to us. She admired the way Jewish parents raised their children to be scholastic standouts," (87). All things happened because Ruth had more or less some impact of Jewish motive on her life. This also impacted on the racial injustice created by hybridity because James and his siblings were the only black students in the school of dominantly white people.

Negativity of racism often can be seen when Ruth had to secretly see a black boy named called Peter. Prevalence of racism in the south denied her to have relation with any black man. "They would kill a black man for looking at a white woman in the

south in those days. They'd hang him. And the girl, they'd run her out of town. Who wants trouble like that? (107) Interracial marriage and love was denied in the region. Ku Klux Klan was the main culprit for the violent threats, however, as we learn from Ruth that even Southerners weren't free from such attitude that included violent threats. "Not just the Ku Klux Klan but the regular white folks in the town would've killed him. Half of them were probably the Klan anyway, so it was all the same." (111) Worst was to come to Ruth when she was pregnant with Peter's child, but her mother came to her rescue at this point. Ruth's mother found Ruth's bracelet in Ruth and Peter's secret meeting place, but cautiously saving her girl from the coming tribulation, mother sent Ruth to New York. Ruth's mother acted as if she knew nothing but Ruth was aware of mother's knowledge. That's the reason, Ruth was always and deeply grateful to her mother.

At the time of 1940s Ruth recounts how she was harassed as she decided to stand as an interracial couple. Dennis and Ruth attended Metropolitan Baptist church and decided to fully embrace faith and live a good life. Though Ruth and Dennis were living together, they had not legally married. Ruth became an active church member and finally in a small ceremony was allowed to take legal steps of marriage with Dennis. They lived in a small room as long as nine long years with four of her children. Though it is obviously difficult to adjust in such a narrow space, but Ruth describes that as the beautiful and happiest years of her life. Within this period of time Ruth pulled herself to be more social and became friend with a Jewish woman named Lily who was a communist. This Lily however, betrayed Ruth's friendship and never spoke to her again. Ruth was treated so badly even in such beautiful relation. Despite the difficulties

Ruth and Dennis became successful to establish a New Brown Memorial Church after Dennis achieved his divinity degree in 1953. Very soon their struggle didn't leave behind good memories as Dennis died and Ruth was left alone to suffer with eight children. Dennis died in her high time of pregnancy and Ruth had to go through the extreme mental and physical pain. Also the revealing of her husband's death being lung cancer added fuel to her inner fire. So we can figure out Ruth went through incredible pain both, emotionally and financially. Luckily, the community she was residing by then had provided their support for this poor lady, but that wasn't enough because of eight infants and lack of family support. In great despair Ruth contacted her family but some of them simply slammed the door and some hurled revengeful words against her.

I was so desperate I went back to my Jewish family to ask for help. I looked up my Aunt Betts who had gotten married to a rich man and was living in a fancy building on the East Side in Manhattan with a doorman. I had to talk my way past the doorman to get inside. When I knocked on the door of her apartment, Aunt Betts opened the door, saw who I was, and slammed the door to my face. (246)

Ruth didn't get support even from her own people. It was a great despair in her life.

Ruth went to her previous family to ask for help; to her aunt Betts, but she slammed the door to her face. Ruth was totally negated by her own family.

Ruth finally met her second husband, Hunter, who promised as well as kept his word to take care of her and the children.

For Ruth family love is not the enough shelter so that she outcasts it for the sake of the love a black man. Ruth is able to risk her family bonding for a mixed race love of

her husband Dennis. Her family even performs a dead ceremony for her, but with courage and devotion she manages to take her stand in the choice of her life. This impacted in her life so much that she even had to hide it from her children. The only supportive person she ever had was her mother and the end of support also happens when her mother dies. Now her only selection left is to reborn as a new-self becoming a Christian but in constant fear of prejudice of an interracial marriage. And at the same time household and economic difficulties are so rude to her. Never enough money, always hungry children, sleeping four in a bed, all was “like slabs of meat” (10). The thing that is painful other than staving for food is to stave for love and consolation. “We had no family life,” she says, “that store was our life” (41). Fishel Shilsky’s cruelty made her children run away from home. Sam was “like a shadow” and ran away from home at fifteen. (61) Ruth left at eighteen due to fear of her father and however her mother and a sister had been supportive to her. The chance of getting back to the family was null and yet she tried to go knock the door of her aunt and still gets rejected even at the difficult time of being widowed. James recounts those days better than the food that the hungry person needs. He takes the learning as the real food that satisfied his real need of being a man in himself. He says, “We thrived on thought, books, music, and art, which she fed to us instead of food” (94). We did not consider ourselves poor or deprived” (95). But the unity of house was so good that the children were the best friends to themselves. They shared their belonging such as clothes, toothbrush and musical instruments. And at the same time the chaotic environment was just like the unity of their good relation “three-ring circus” (68), which created lack of privacy in between them. But even the chaotic environment there was talk of creativity, of coming

black revolution music, games and so on. These, however became the lasting legacy for the two, Ruth and Dennis. They remained with it for sixteen years until Dennis died of cancer. Dennis was the love for Ruth's life. All she needed was Dennis. Ruth claims him as the talented violinist that turned into a preacher and she also claims that "he was the kindest man I've ever known" (236). Though whites considered she degraded herself, but Ruth was happy as she says, "It was a lovely reception, just the five of us. I didn't need a million roses and a marching band. My husband loved me and I loved him, that's all I needed" (237).

III. Conclusion: Identity as a tribute to James' mother Ruth

The path of individual life is filled with several issues and factors that determine and subordinate one's identity and family root. Identity has become one of the main reasons to restate human being's essence for which everyone is desperately looking for. For some, it becomes easy to establish themselves as unique among and within community. But for a woman like Ruth and son like James it's a difficult task to long for an easy revival of an identity. That's only possible when an extraordinary outcome from their life comes out regardless of certainty of time.

The hypothetical ultimate freedom from all the discrimination, bias, torture and tribulation relies upon the valorization of mother's love above all else. The biography of mother comprises the difficult scenarios and hatred even from biologically own family members. Ruth's wisdom, struggle, love and care for her children eventually becomes a true source of identity of a black son of a white mother. The love and relation always becomes as clear as the color of water between mother and children. Children never learned the dark side racial distinction for which a great tribute was developed to a great mother.

Similarly, James, the son of Ruth tries to restructure his identity by delivering a warm tribute of mother's life in the form of biography. The novel at the same time shows the heart-rendering picture of Ruth and Jewish women as a whole. The same would happen to every marginalized woman in USA. Jewish are considered as the subordinate white group in America. The situation is difficult for them as well, but at the same time they don't leave their stand of being white and suppress blacks. Ruth is a present world woman that is wants liberation from the tradition patriarchy. Ruth's

attitude is a form of feminist philosophy which centers around the idea that racism, colonialism and the long lasting effects through economy, politics and culture of colonialism in the post-colonial setting, are inseparably bound up with the unique gendered realities of non-white and non-western women. Post-colonial feminists criticize the western feminist because the main stream western feminist have the tendency to generalize the history of women's issues and their discourses to global women community. It is also believed that the majority of western feminist simply ignored the values and voices of non-white and non-western women. Such type of behavior from them ignites anger to the feminists from developing nations. Unlike the particularly western feminist the post-colonial feminist address the issue of female and gender oppression and isolation as well as the empowerment of women and gender issues. Women like Ruth are vulnerable to marginalization and suppression because they head into the direction of liberation and freedom from patriarchal institutions weather or not the colonialism enters. For a long time, patriarchy has remained as a black spot to on women's self-development and existence. It is true that in the third world and the undeveloped countries the female race is still in trouble and victimization. But the developed nation like America are also not free from the female domination. Developed nations are able to remove superstitions and humiliating submission, but still the marginalized and color group are exploited and dominated. So people like Ruth are victimized at least by their rituals and expression of freedom. The racial prevalence has negated and made her life a living hell when she chose to find love outside of her community. Ruth has been double marginalized, once as the daughter of the Jewish immigrant and other times as the wife of a black man.

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