

Exploring The Convergence of Social Disparities and Interracial Relationships in Sue Monk Kidd's *The Invention of Wings*

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Abstract

Slavery is one of the most significant social disparities in human history. It is defined as the practice of owning and exploiting another individual as property or inferior. It is characterized by enforced labor and restraints on freedom. Specifically, slavery was a system that allowed the enslavers who possessed the power to force the enslaved people to work and limit their lives and liberty. In the United States, slavery was solely based on the race and identity of one group of people. However, given their race and skin color, many Black people in America were forced into slavery. Since enslavers considered enslaved people their property, they considered them insignificant. Therefore, this study's primary purpose is to determine how whites dominated Blacks and controlled enslaved people through slavery. Further, it analyses how the interracial bond promotes racial equality in one of Kidd's novels, *The Invention of Wings*. Despite initially holding racist views, Sarah, the white protagonist in the novel, develops a close bond with Handful, a Black character. Through this relationship, Sarah gained a deeper understanding of the struggles faced by Black people and eventually became an abolitionist, committed to gradually freeing them from slavery. In addition, this study also explores how the Black characters in the novel fight tirelessly to attain their independence without losing their faith. Hence, the study results in greater insight into Sarah's Interracial relationship with Handful, including how they got inspired and influenced by each other, thus diminishing discrimination between the two races.

Keywords: slavery, Black people, interracial relationship, racial equality, discrimination

1. Introduction

This study examines the social disparities and interracial relationships in the novel through the lens of power and oppression. Additionally, as implied in the title, the focus is primarily on the interracial relationships that undermine the dominant power structures and how social disparities, based explicitly on race, contribute to an oppressive system that affects enslaved blacks. Therefore, this study recognizes slavery as one of the most profound causes of historical and social inequities. Generally, slavery is structured by the institution and society where a group or individual controls, owns, and exploits another group or individuals. Throughout history, slavery has persisted in diverse forms worldwide for several years, profoundly impacting humans regardless of race, age, and gender. DuBois Claims that "slavery is 'natal alienation'" (DuBois, p. 5). Correspondingly, slavery resulted in the forced separation of Black individuals from their families, leading to feelings of alienation. This system was based on the belief that white people were superior and therefore had the right to dominate Black individuals who were enslaved and forced to work for white people. Thus, Blacks remain inferior. During slavery, a group of people constrained the liberty of another by enslaving and forcing them to work on their plantations. In this case, the white enslavers were the superior figure who controlled the Black people's rights and drove them to work diligently on their land. Many Africans were enslaved between 1500 and 1860 (Williams, 2014). Meanwhile, there was an increase in slave enslavement when the demand for enslaved people increased in North and South America, whereas slave trading peaked during the 1700s. Whites persistently tried to maintain slavery since it brought them enormous profits. Hence, they supported interminably establishing slavery in practice.

The transatlantic slave trade occurred between 1529 and 1850. Over twelve million enslaved people, including women and children, were kidnapped and enslaved throughout this trade and were shipped in a horrific situation (Bertocchi, 2016). The enslaved Africans suffered from starvation due to insufficient food to sustain them. During the voyage, the enslaved individuals were cramped in tight quarters, making it difficult for them to breathe. This led to the spread of infections and injuries, ultimately resulting in many deaths. Due to the absence of proper sanitation and medical supplies, there was no way to effectively treat the illnesses afflicting African individuals. Consequently, over two million enslaved people died of starvation and fungal diseases, and their bodies were thrown into the ocean inhumanly (Muhammad, 2003). Ultimately, African enslavement influenced the economy of white countries as well. It is evident that when whites began to experience economic prosperity, they were more inclined to support and sustain slavery strongly (Bertocchi G, 2014). As a result, slavery was widely acknowledged and supported regionally during this time.

Nwachuku states that “slavery is an old human institution” practiced differently through the implementation of laws and in various forms in different colonies (Nwachuku, p. 1). By introducing enslaved Africans to European nations, Native Americans’ lives were enormously changed; they also experienced and enriched the white’s economic factors. In America’s southern region, slavery was highly flourished because enslaved people’s contributions to the economy became integral (Gouda, 2017). As a result, Americans could not promote the abolition of slavery since they intended slavery to continue as it benefitted their economic well-being. So, they strongly opposed whitewashing slavery (Williams R. R., 2012). Though slavery existed in both the North and South of America, it was most prevalent in the Southern United States of America. Since whites employed enslaved Black people in cotton industries and worked on plantations, they eventually became relatively wealthy. “In slave societies, the dominant social groups depended far more upon the wealth generated by slave labor” (Drescher, p. 6). Thus, the whites determined and controlled the level of freedom of Blacks. The white supremacist system assigned enslaved individuals extremely demanding physical labor while restricting their ability to claim their fundamental rights. This type of treatment was considered harsh and cruel. Adiele (2017) asserts that whites treated enslaved people as movable and immovable properties. Some whites sold their Black enslaved people to others, while others maintained them as immovable property for profit. Enslaved individuals were mainly prevented from living according to their choices and desires. Their freedom was restricted, and their white owners determined their rights solely (Reece & O’Connell, 2016). At the same time, white clergy members in America influenced enslaved people to believe they were God’s will by defending slavery (Morrison, 1980). Therefore, it is evident that enslaved Africans were forced to obey their white owners and adhere to religious teachings. If they disobeyed or angered their white masters, they faced the threat of severe punishment through whipping. Slavery was not universally practiced across all nations from the beginning. Still, the contributions made by enslaved Black individuals played a significant role in enabling white individuals to accumulate wealth (Drescher, 2009). Therefore, slavery extended extensively with the support of government and law to develop white countries through slave labor (Montgomery, 2001). It was common for enslaved Black people in America to work in all fields, regardless of whether they were talented or low-skilled. Moreover, enslaved people’s contributions to America’s socioeconomic growth have resulted in the country’s existing greatness. Bleich et al. (2019) claim that in the modern world, although slavery was abolished based on the constant opposition inflicted against Black injustice, prejudiced behavior still exists among whites. Consequently, slavery’s legacy structures and reinforces current racial inequities (Reece & O’Connell, 2016). Its traces negatively impact the Black’s economic and social status in the modern world.

Sue Monk Kidd, an American writer who is white, discusses the challenges African Americans faced due to slavery and racism within white society. The white community around her was highly biased and upheld racial segregation and inequity. However, while growing up in Georgia, Kidd witnessed racial tension during voting. Therefore, she writes novels by setting her personal experience with the hardships of Black people serves as the background. Kidd’s childhood memories revolved around African American women who served as a source of inspiration for her. Thus, she concentrates much of her writing on the racial oppressions perpetrated against African Americans. Kidd’s famous work, *The Invention of Wings*, set in Charleston, begins with the narration of the white protagonist Sarah, an eleven-year-old girl who was gifted Handful, a ten-year-old Black slave girl.

Kidd wrote the novel *The Invention of Wings*, intending to explore themes such as woman empowerment, freedom, and identity construction through the context of the abolitionist movement and the struggle for women’s rights in America. In an interview with Oprah, Kidd shared that she was inspired to write the novel after learning about the Grimké sisters and their unwavering commitment to securing freedom for Black people and women. She disclosed that

“In 2007, I went to see Judy Chicago’s exhibition *The Dinner Party* at the Brooklyn Museum. There was a wall of women—a list of 999 who had made significant contributions to history, and lo and behold there were these two sisters from Charleston, the Grimkés. I was living in Charleston then, and I’d never heard of them. Still, after reading about them at the exhibit, I thought, “They should be as well known as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony” (Kidd, Oprah Talks with Sue Monk Kidd About *The Invention of Wings*, 2014).

When Kidd learned about Sarah, a historical figure, she realized that Sarah's story and struggles mirrored her own, which prompted her to write about the revolutionary contributions of the Grimke sisters. Kidd's intention was not only to recount the story of the sisters but also to examine the system of slavery as a manifestation of racism. To illustrate the power dynamics and oppression between two different races, she created parallel narratives for Sarah, the white abolitionist, and Handful, the Black slave maid. In particular, her writing emphasizes the importance of uniting two marginalized groups to fight for justice and equality. *The Invention of Wings* is a powerful narrative that explores self-discovery and highlights how individuals of different races can unite and bring about significant societal change for their fundamental rights and freedom.

One of the novel's central characters, Sarah, makes a great effort to reject Handful, but her protest ends in vain. Yet Sarah's refusal to accept Handful as her working maid continued. On the other hand, Handful's responsibility was to serve Sarah, even if she never required her assistance. So, about this time, Sarah and Handful grew a bond. Their interracial relationship was more like a friendship that helped them understand their identities. Sarah also had become conscious of her underlying racist attitude and felt ashamed about being a part of the racist white race. Eventually, she realized Blacks' pain and misery as enslaved people. Hence, she began to advocate for Black and women's liberation. Sarah educated Handful to free her from the slave culture, which was considered a crime.

Meanwhile, Handful was severely lashed one day after being discovered writing her name. After facing significant challenges, Sarah became an abolitionist by standing up to the white community's stereotype against Blacks. Also, she promised Charlotte that she would free Handful one day, and she started working hard to accomplish this goal. Later Sarah and Angelina, her younger sister, became abolitionists, violating American cultural norms to support women's rights and uproot slavery actively. Consequently, Handful gained independence because of her revolutionary actions. Sarah's friendship with Handful became strong, inspiring Sarah to notice her potential and freeing her. Kidd developed a remarkable interracial friendship bond between Sarah and Handful, where Sarah is a white character historically, and Handful is a mythical Black enslaved figure in the novel.

2. Literature Review

The following studies in *The Invention of Wings* Rump (2015) examine how intersectionality exists even in modern culture by exploring the challenges faced by the characters in the novels *Transatlantic*, written by McCann, and *The Invention of Wings* by Sue Monk Kidd. Furthermore, the study interprets how the protagonists encounter as well as deals with the intersection of racial and gender issues in a similar way. Thus, this study shows that the intersectionality crises that persisted two hundred years ago still prevail. Bailey (2016) explores the real-life experiences of the historical figures Sarah and Angelina Grimke's protest against slavery and advocacy for women's liberation. It also emphasizes how the Grimke sisters devoted their entire lives as abolitionists. Indeed, their contribution to the anti-slavery movement was significant, and their sacrifice for such a revolutionary cause was truly remarkable. Further, Blessing (2015) explains how contemporary white authors revisit the slavery period, address the traumatic experience of Blacks, and feel guilty for the white's superior attitude towards Blacks. So, the author argues that understanding the historical context of African Americans' sufferings and how it affects their current socioeconomic status is essential. Hopkins (2021) identifies how the aspects of racial and gender equality correspond to one another and additionally finds out its great effect on the central white protagonist Sarah and the Black slave Handful's relationship. Lerner (1963) illustrates the actual-life experiences of the remarkable historical characters Sarah and Angelina Grimke. They are the only Southern white women who fought as abolitionists against eradicating slavery and women's rights. The white and Black communities recognized and embraced them in response to their persistent struggle for racial equality.

Given these premises, this current study examines the practices of social disparities and how enslaved Black people were punished and persecuted in the novel *The Invention of Wings*. It specifically analyses the interracial relationship between the significant white character Sarah and her Black slave maid Handful. Finally, the study aims to elucidate how their bond inspired one and the other, which helped them perceive their identity and inner strength. Hence their unique relationship serves as a symbol of their friendship, representing the importance of fostering genuine connections based on empathy and respect within a society that seeks to promote justice and equality.

3. Methodology

This study involves a qualitative approach, specifically thematic analysis, to explore the significant themes in Kidd's novel *The Invention of Wings*, including slavery and its oppressive practices towards Black characters and their resistance to the inhumane dominant attitude of the white race. The novel's central theme of the struggle for identity and self-exploration is analyzed through the experiences of the main characters, Handful and Sarah, as they challenge the brutal system of slavery. The main focus of this study is on the select novel, *The Invention of Wings*, which will be the primary source. In addition, the secondary sources will include various academic articles, books, and internet sources relevant to the research topic. Therefore, by employing the thematic analysis, the study provides an in-depth

understanding of the social and cultural problems, such as slavery, its evil customs, and Sarah's interracial bond with Handful, which helped them discover their true selves. It also offers a comprehensive analysis of the qualities and characteristics of fictional characters in literature.

4. The Oppressive Practices of Social Disparities

In Sue Monk Kidd's *The Invention of Wings*, the Grimke sisters, Sarah and Angelina, are born into a prestigious slave-holding family. Sarah's father, John Faucheraud Grimke, was a member of the plantation society who served as a judge, lawyer, and politician. Over time, he acquired numerous Black individuals as enslaved people who worked on his family's plantation. Indeed, it depicts how their family-imposed slavery on the enslaved people and forced them to work on the plantations they owned. Their childhood exposure to slavery and racial disparities made the Grimke sisters resist its traditional practices and stay away from it. When Sarah was a child, she begged God to help the enslaved people who were being brutally punished. Therefore, Sarah and Angelina opposed the slave system even though other family members embraced it.

The novel *The Invention of Wings* begins with Handful's mother, an enslaved Black person named Charlotte, recounting the vision of liberation, relating the wings as symbolic of rising from slavery. She said Africans once had wings but lost them soon after being captured as enslaved and transported to America. Charlotte and Handful were caught as enslaved people and forced to serve the Grimke family. Thus, Charlotte described her ancestors' resistance to slavery, assuring Handful that she would soon regain her wings and fly away to reclaim her privilege. Lagerlöf and Petter state that in a slave society, "both humans and land are held as property" (Lagerlöf & Petter, p. 11). Likewise, Sarah's mother, Missus Grimke, held her enslaved people as property and did not want Charlotte to be hired by anyone and earn independently. Since Charlotte was a skillful seamstress in Charleston. The Grimke's wanted the enslaved people to serve and depend only on them. Besides, enslaved people were never called by their actual names; instead, they were named by their white owners. Handful claimed that "Master Grimke named me Hetty" (Kidd, p. 4), although her basket name was Handful. Thus, enslaved Black people were only permitted to use the names assigned by their masters. Handful, born enslaved, was well aware of the systemic racism that drastically impacted her life. Despite knowing the awful truth of her life as an enslaved person, she dreamt about her emancipation every day.

Finkelman asserts that when slavery has widely practiced, the law inherently provided white "masters security in their ownership of slaves" (Finkelman, p. 108). Similarly, in the novel, Missus fiercely stated that Sarah's guardianship over Handful was "legal and binding" (Kidd, p. 16). Slavery extended extensively with the support of government and law to develop white countries through slave labor. Meanwhile, Missus pretended to tell Sarah that "As if owning people was as natural as breathing", For all my resistance about slavery, I breathed that foul air, too" (Kidd, p. 16). Missus said that she despised slavery and enslavement, but whites were bound to uphold it since their white community primarily supported it. But in reality, Missus treated the enslaved inhumanely by punishing and commanding them to work endlessly. Thus, she persuaded Sarah to get Handful back and embrace slavery as a way of life, making peace with it. Once, Handful accidentally set Sarah's room on fire, so she was struck in the head by Missus with her gold tip cane. She could not bear the pain, so she fell, which was the most painful blow Handful had ever endured. Meanwhile, Sarah and Charlotte cried at Missus to stop, but she refused. Shank (2019) claims that if the enslaved people disobeyed the owner's demand to labor diligently or resisted having sexual contact with their white masters, they would be whipped to death. Accordingly, white Americans inflicted such kind of terrible barbarity on enslaved Africans.

Smalls emphasizes that Charleston's "workhouse in particular becomes a highly formalized institution of punishment of enslaved people" (Smalls, p. 8). Further, enslaved people found stealing would be condemned to the torture house, commonly known as the workhouse, on Magazine Street. They were dragged to the torture house and given twenty lashes as mistreatment for their fallacies. Meanwhile, Charlotte stole Missus' green silk fabric and got caught. She intentionally took it to create trouble because Missus was unwilling to hire her, so she robbed the cloth to take revenge. Since Charlotte couldn't pop Missus's head with a cane, she stole her cloth and caused chaos. Charlotte was dragged into the torture house and tied to the floor. A leather belt was tied around her ankle, along with a strap around her throat. She stood with one leg since her other leg was tied to her throat. In this state, Missus let her stand for nearly an hour. The strap choked her throat as Charlotte hit the ground with her tied leg. She struggled to lift her leg and gulped for air. As Handful ran to help her mother, Missus restricted her with her cane, and she felt powerless to pray to God for her mother's salvation. Charlotte's punishment left her unable to return to normal; instead, a cold fire began to burn within her.

5. Enslaved Black People as Inferiors

Enslaved Black people were led to the church and had days off, only on Sundays. The churches were separate for people of color, and they were taught Christianity. Enslaved people were only allowed to sit in the balcony gallery. As it was noisy over there, Reverend Hall threw his shoe off the balcony, which hit a Black lady's hat and severely injured her head. This type of violence depicts how enslaved people were humiliated and treated as inferiors. Then he firmly

ordered the enslaved people to “be obedient to them that are your masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as unto Christ” (Kidd, p. 40). Blacks were influenced by whites who preached Christianity and demanded their allegiance to them, claiming that it was God's will. However, they never taught Blacks how to read the Bible. It was because white Americans wanted Black to be ignorant and uncivilized, so they denied Black people the opportunity to educate themselves. While Sarah taught Alphabet to the enslaved Blacks during Sunday class, Reverend Hall warned her. He opposed Sarah that educating enslaved people was strictly prohibited in America, particularly in South Carolina.

Despite the white principles, Sarah secretly enlightened Handful as a literate. Later, Handful was found writing her name in the sand and was sentenced to severe punishment by Missus. “One lash, missus say. That be all” (Kidd, p. 69). She was tied and lashed to the extent that her flesh ripped and began bleeding. Furthermore, the Grimke family-owned Snow, an enslaved Black person who worked out his soul for the Grimke family, but when he died, no one came to bury him. His body was left in the kitchen for two days without anyone caring. Slavery's brutality was strongly exhibited in this scenario, where no one treated him even as a person to bury his body because he was enslaved. “It's a chance we have to take, or else we gon end up like Snow” (Kidd, p. 100). Due to witnessing the scenario, Charlotte decided she would not die like Snow. Instead, she would strive persistently to gain her freedom.

Paul affirms that “slaves were part of the population or merely property” (Finkelman, p. 117). In slavery, it was common for enslaved people to be treated as property and valued based on their worth. Their freedom can be obtained once they earn money. Yet, ironically, they were neither hired nor paid by their masters. Therefore the enslaved people felt hopeless about breaking free from slavery and could not free themselves. While Handful sneaked inside Master Grimke's room and found the book where each enslaved Black people worth were written in prize money. Further, Handful found that she was worth five hundred dollars, and her mother was five hundred and fifty dollars. This made her speechless, thinking that earning that money would take nearly ten years. Having lost all hope, she gave up on achieving their liberty. Nevertheless, Charlotte valiantly stated, “Ain't nobody can write down in a book what your worth” (Kidd, p. 112). Therefore, because of the injustice and discrimination they had suffered, she firmly believed they would rise and fly with their wings away from the ruthless customs of slavery.

Sarah's sister Nina learned about the torture chamber and the violent, inhuman racist treatment of whites towards enslaved Black people from the Smith girls who lived next to the workhouse. In fact, she had been told that the cries she heard in the torture chamber were the cries of enslaved Black people being whipped. Blacks were tied to planks in the crane and had their hands clasped above their heads as they struggled. Additionally, they described the “stories about the splitting of ears and the removal of teeth, about spiked collars and some sort of birdcage contraption that was locked over a slave's head” (Kidd, p. 135).

6. Black People's Struggle for Freedom

Handful bled terribly when Missus smacked her with her cane for creating a fire in Sarah's chamber. At that point, Handful recognized the inner voice that urged her to defend Missus fearlessly. As she listened to the voice, she stood on her feet and stared at Missus thinking “My eyes said, Hit me, I dare you” (Kidd, p. 24). In consequence, Missus was confounded and dropped her cane. In the state of oppression, Handful and her mother never gave up on their goal of achieving freedom. Being enslaved, she believed in her ability to escape her mother and herself from slave society, so she sought relief in nature amidst this chaos. While serving the white community, they were silently battling for emancipation. Charlotte knitted the quilt to maintain her family's legacy, narrating stories about how the Blacks were born with wings and would fly away from the evil grasp of the white community one day. In addition, they both created a spirit tree, worshipped it, and believed their souls were hidden inside it. Furthermore, Charlotte asked Handful to carry her soul away from the spirit tree when she escaped the Grimke house. According to Handful, the spirit tree protected her, so she worshiped it. Eventually, Charlotte and Handful's belief in the power of nature and their hope of gaining sovereignty through it inspired Sarah.

After being severely wounded for stealing Missus's cloth, Charlotte became rebellious and asked Handful to write, “This slave is allowed to travel” (Kidd, p. 72). Thus, the letter was written and signed as Mary Grimke by Handful. Eventually, Charlotte began to sneak out and work with a white lady for money. When Charlotte was caught by an enslaved person working at the Grimke family, she told him, “I gon give you half of a dollar if you get me back in there safe. You owe me, Tomfry” (Kidd, p. 75). Moreover, when Sarah compared her sufferings with Handful and said they were similar, Handful got offended. Upon hearing this, Handful became outraged and argued that Sarah enjoyed certain privileges in her society, while Handful, as an enslaved person, was forced to live her life the way the whites forced her. In addition, she questioned Sarah, “so we just the same, me and you? That's why you the one to shit in the pot and I'm the one to empty it?” (Kidd, p. 89). Hence, by highlighting Sarah's white privilege that Handful lacks, she indicates that her sufferings and circumstances as an enslaved person were different and cannot be compared. Charlotte also protested against giving way to two white ladies when asked. The white ladies were hit by her basket as she swung it. Though the

white guards commanded Charlotte to apologize for her attitude toward the white ladies, she refused. Therefore, the guards dragged her like an animal to punish her.

The white neighbors claimed that the Black's meeting in the colored church was a nuisance, and they were annoyed, so the white guards arrested the Black people. Handful was also arrested in the group, and she was imprisoned. Her body was confined to a treadmill and repeatedly punished and tortured. Consequently, her leg was disfigured, and she had trouble walking. She was shocked by the incident when an enslaved mother suffered from nursing her baby, so another slave woman fed the baby. When the white guard saw this, he whipped the slave woman badly and killed the child. This shocked Handful and made her worry about the murdered baby. Killing a Black baby is the most horrific condition of white discrimination and the depth of slavery. When Charlotte's quilt was burned, Handful revolutionarily decided to leave the place or die trying. Finally, she found her way of protesting against the white's suppression.

7. Interracial Interaction

Interracial interaction is a concept that potentially eliminates implicit bias and discrimination among groups. Essentially, it refers to integrating one group with another, enabling them to identify and recognize each other's misery and pain, thereby promoting equality (Shelton, 2006). A more effective method of interracial contact results from two groups sharing their hardships and experiences, eradicating the socially imposed norms and stereotypes against African Americans. Most research indicates that interracial interaction lessens bias and racial disparities, but some researchers believe that one group's superior attitude causes them to avoid interracial contact with another group (Herek & Capitanio, 1996). Despite contradictory findings, Pettigrew and Troop (2006) clearly state that the majority of the studies reveal that interracial interaction is an effective approach to reducing intergroup bias.

Interracial interaction influences whites' racial attitudes by enlightening them about the difficulties and identities of Black people in society. Therefore, the concept called interracial contact inspires white people to pursue efforts to reform their attitudes by minimizing or disregarding their racial bias (Sigelman & Welch, 1993). If not, whites would have focused more on the stereotypes that society has created against Blacks, which never inspired racial animosity among them. In interactions with African Americans regarding racial conflicts, whites embrace the concept called interracial contact to exhibit more unprejudiced manners and also to express that they truly understand and desire to affiliate with them. Holoien (2016) states that historically White Americans were stereotyped and prejudiced, but during interracial interactions, they strived to avoid being projected as racists and remain conscious of their bigotry nature. Thus, this concept effectively allows whites to treat African Americans equally while appearing unbiased.

A positive relationship between members of the ingroup and outgroup is exceptionally built through interracial contact, which develops a powerful understanding of each other (Onyeador, 2020). The superior racist behavior naturally ingrained in whites, intentionally or unintentionally, can be reduced when they follow interracial relationships. Similarly, by accepting Blacks as their partners, whites become more unprejudiced and treat them as equals; therefore, that affects Blacks' economic and social well-being can be eliminated. Sigelman and Welch underline that "Interracial integration is understood as the elimination of legally imposed racial barrier" (Sigelman & Welch, p. 786), which nurtures whites to socialize with African Americans truly.

Despite slavery being abolished and laws granting rights to Blacks, whites refused to accept African Americans as citizens (Kollmann, 2018). However, during interracial contact, it is implied that both white and Black groups try to accomplish a positive change within themselves, which is a highly effective way of creating an egalitarian society. To identify the sufferings of enslaved Black people and the interracial bond between white and Black characters, the current study includes Kidd's popular work *The Invention of Wings*, in which the enslaved Black people were tormented and whipped to death inhumanely. Further, the study employs interracial interaction as a significant approach to examine how the white protagonist, Sarah develops a friendship with her Black slave maid Handful and helps her escape the oppressive clutches of slavery.

8. Sarah's Interracial Bond with Handful

The interracial bond developed between Handful and Sarah is explored in the novel *The Invention of Wings*. Initially, Sarah did not play a prominent role in the injustice perpetrated against enslaved Black people. Sometimes, she unconsciously acted dominating toward Handful and remained superior to her. This was evident when Handful used Sarah's bathtub; Sarah felt offended and claimed that Handful had violated her privacy. In contrast, Handful told Sarah that she also found using Sarah's bathing tub harmless. Later Sarah regretted that her anger proved how she was convinced of slavery's horrors. Meanwhile, she recognized the ingrained racial attitude induced by white society on her. According to Sigelman and Welch (1993), interracial interaction encourages a positive racial attitude. Apparently, white people undertake the initial attitude to avoid prejudice, which is immensely appreciable. Similarly, in the novel, Sarah was initially constrained by the laws of the white community. Still, when she outlawed them and developed a bond with Handful, she learned about the oppression Blacks endured in various forms and protests against it. Additionally, she

learned about the racial issues and society dehumanizing the enslaved people through her encounter with Handful and her experience as an enslaved person.

Through their experimental study, Onyeador et al. (2020) firmly highlighted the role of interracial contact in contributing to lower racial discrimination. Correspondingly, in the novel, Sarah discovered her passion and goal in life through her interracial contact with Handful. Since she was connected personally to Handful, she widely understood Handful's sufferings as an enslaved person. When Handful was severely beaten and wounded, Sarah could not bear the pain, so she decided that her purpose in life was to fight for African Americans' rights. She became empowered when she fought for Handful's liberty and helped her escape from the slave-owning white community. Furthermore, she felt strong inside, knowing her abilities and power after bonding with Handful. There was no superiority between Sarah and Handful. Thus, their bond was pure. Sarah and Handful's interracial relationship began to deepen when Handful asked Sarah to call her basket name instead of her enslaved name. Rather than considering Handful as an enslaved person, Sarah treated her as a sister and a friend.

At the novel's beginning, Sarah kept a silver button as a fortune. When reprimanded for illegally entering her father's library, she felt her dream shattered and threw the silver button. Nevertheless, Handful saved the button and turned it into a symbol of freedom, inspiring Sarah as well as awakening her dream and goal in life. Additionally, Charlotte believed Sarah's dream of saving enslaved people from the dominating white society could help Handful live a peaceful life, so she stitched the button in her dress to make Sarah realize her ability as an abolitionist. Likewise, the button was restored by Handful for Sarah to achieve her goal of spreading equality for women as well as liberating Handful from slavery. "My body might be a slave, but not my mind. For you, it's the other way round" (Kidd, p. 201). Even though Sarah's body was free, her mind was controlled by her family and society, just as they enslaved Handful's body. So, Handful fearlessly said that though the white masters enslaved her body, anybody could never subjugate her mind. Hence, Handful's determination to achieve freedom was unstoppable. Meanwhile, she encouraged Sarah to grow rebellious and fought for enslaved Black people. In response to Handful's words and her wounded body, Sarah rose against patriarchal and slave-owning society.

Sarah strongly decided to save Handful and Charlotte after witnessing the scars on their bodies. Slavery made Sarah guilty of being part of a community that treated enslaved people as objects and humiliated them. Meanwhile, her feelings developed as she worked relentlessly for Handful's freedom. In supporting Handful and Charlotte's dreams, Sarah found her desire along with them. "What I need is you swearing to it. I nodded" (Kidd, p. 31). At first, Sarah promised Charlotte that she would free Handful. But whenever she failed, she felt guilty and worked endlessly to keep her promise. As such, Sarah's brother Thomas discussed his opposition to colonization which promoted independence for Blacks and sent them back to Africa. But Sarah said, "Yes, I am against colonization" (Kidd, p. 144). According to her, rather than returning the enslaved people to Africa, she believed they should be emancipated and treated equally to whites. She sought ways to free Handful and abolish slavery, so she adopted the practices that attacked and opposed slavery. Sarah became a Quaker because Quakers believed torturing Blacks and slave enslavement was a horror and fought against its eradication. The voice in Sarah's mind that urged her north was Handful. Correspondingly, Handful was the one who reminded Sarah about her uniqueness and its purpose. So, she followed Handful's voice throughout her life. Sarah, in all instances, remembered Handful's body as a means to evoke the revolutionary attitude hidden inside her.

In the end, Sarah's sister Nina also traveled to the North and supported the abolition of slavery. Thus, their riotous anti-slavery actions infuriated whites in the South. So, Charleston's Mayor disclosed to Missus that Sarah and Nina were not permitted in Charleston and would be arrested and imprisoned if they entered the city. The white people in Charleston showed their aversion towards Sarah by throwing stones at her when she returned to her home and also referred to her as a "Slave lover. Nigger lover. Abolitionist. Northern whore" (Kidd, p. 255). Sarah and Angelina dedicated their lives to the anti-slavery movement. They made a significant contribution to the struggle for Black people's liberation. They believed Blacks were humans like anyone else and should be treated as such. Consequently, they left people and nations against slavery, like their families, friends, and religious leaders.

9. Conclusion

Kidd's novel *The Invention of Wings* focuses on how Black people have been tortured and dehumanized as enslaved people. In contrast, the two central characters have developed an interracial bond that drives them to fight for each other's rights and individuality. Throughout American history, slavery has played a central role. As a result of enslaving Blacks, Americans were liberal enough to influence the social and political development of the nation. "Slavery was not born racial as some kind of original sin" (Shuster, Jeffries, & Blight, p. 8). Shuster et al. describe that slavery was not a race-based concept or an original sin. Instead, it is a socially constructed notion fundamentally rooted in economic, political, racial, and religious aspects. Enslaved Black people served under the constant supervision of white owners and were brutally punished if they disobeyed. Additionally, white Americans deprived Black's identity and treated them as

movable and immovable properties. In general, Black people were treated as others, like they belonged to someone. Moreover, as part of their responsibilities, they were implemented for hard work but were not provided a penny in return. A similar situation is presented in the novel when Handful and Charlotte were forced to serve Grimke's family without being paid throughout their lives. Though Charlotte was skilled at stitching, she was restricted from getting hired and earning individually. Whenever they disrespected their masters, they were lashed mercilessly. As punishment for learning, Missus hit Handful with the cane. Moreover, Handful endured the torture chamber's cruel punishment for participating in the Black church meeting. Besides stealing Missus's clothes, Charlotte was severely whipped, just as the enslaved Blacks were violently punished in several other instances.

In the meantime, Handful and Charlotte refused to be submissive and stood unique by discreetly protesting against the whites' unfair treatment of Blacks. Despite being tortured and abused, Charlotte suffered immense pain to get hired by someone and save money for her and Handful's sovereignty. "Don't be telling me- can't be done. That's some god damney white talk, that's what that is" (Kidd, p. 111). Her determination to escape from slavery agitated her, even though she realized it was impossible to save a thousand fifty dollars to rescue herself, Handful, who was her daughter. "My body might be a slave, but not my mind" (Kidd, p. 201). Though white owners owned Handful's body, she assured Sarah her mind was free and could not be enslaved by anyone else. Also, Charlotte instilled in Handful the African heritage, spirituality, and connection with the nature of her Black ancestors, so Handful stood against white superiority in a rebellious manner. As long as her mind was not influenced or enslaved by white masters who carried a superior and dominating attitude, she never lost the desire to escape slavery. Thereby, Missus Grimke could not stop Handful's revolutionary actions because she had her mind under control.

Sarah unintentionally exhibited white prejudice toward Handful in some instances. Instead of caring for Handful, she emphasized her feelings. Consequently, she utterly forgot her promise to Charlotte to free Handful from slavery. "It was some other growing gulf, one that had been there long before I'd left (Kidd, p. 108). In the meantime, following William's betrayal, Sarah realized that the distance that separated her and Handful wasn't due to her focus on William and Nina but rather to her self-centered thoughts and white racist ideas that distanced her from Handful. After her realization, Sarah got inspired by Handful's brave acts and spirituality. Sarah understood that the appropriate solution to reunite with Handful and regain their bond without any restrictions was to risk her life by freeing Handful from slavery. To accomplish this, Sarah found her true self and battled against the disparities faced by Black people and females.

Sarah and Handful, through their interracial bond, realized their value and inner strength, which represented a great symbol of their friendship. Both were inspired and empowered by each other. The novel also portrays that even though their skin colors differed, they found more similarities than differences. Their bond helped them overcome their barriers together, and at last, they realized that their relationship was friendship. Ultimately, Handful risked her life to escape from Grimke's house. Meanwhile, Sarah also helped Handful be free from slavery; "it was the last triangle on the quilt" (Kidd, p. 359). Having felt relieved, Sarah felt motivated to continue fighting for Black people. Using historical and fictional characters, Kidd effectively depicts African Americans' sufferings and realities. Lerner (1963) mentions that Sarah and Angelina Grimke were the southern white women who fought as abolitionists against slavery abolition and women's rights. They were adored and respected by many white people who cared about African Americans' rights. Together, they brought change and justice to the world, which helped Handful discover her independence and identity.

The major objective of this study is to examine how whites widely adopted slavery to dominate Blacks and enslave them. Further, it illustrates how interracial bonds lower racial disparities between two groups. In Kidd's one of her masterpieces, *The Invention of Wings*, it is evident in several incidents that Black enslavement ruined African Americans' socio-economic condition in society. As a result, their fundamental rights and living were disregarded, and they were humiliated and tormented physically as well as mentally. Moreover, the study explores the relationship between Sarah and Handful, one of the novel's main characters. Together, they broke free from injustice and stereotypes that restrained their power and aspirations. Therefore, bringing two diverse groups together will inevitably enable them to appreciate and understand each other's abilities and identities without stressing their racial differences. Through this, the current study introduces cross-racial interaction that will lead to societal equality. This will resolve the race-related issue that Blacks continue to encounter in modern society. Seemingly, Sarah finally fulfills her promise by liberating Handful from the cruelties of slavery. As well as discovering their individuality and power, they invented a new kind of relationship that lasted to the end.

In *The Invention of Wings*, Kidd vividly depicts African Americans' hardships through the characters of Handful and Charlotte, highlighting the evils of slavery and injustice. In her writing, Kidd creates two distinct and powerful voices expressing the issues that black people and women face. The novel is a masterpiece that seamlessly integrates the experiences and resistance of these two women against the oppressive systems that aim to silence and subjugate them. Overall, Kidd's work provides a moving and insightful analysis of the social and political landscape of the period and pays tribute to the perseverance and courage of marginalized communities.

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