

Dialectics of African Identity and Slavery in Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*

The main objective of the research is to find out the absoluteness of dehumanization that black slaves were subjected within the institution of slavery. It shows the dialectics of African identity and slavery through the main character Cora by analyzing from the perspectives Neo-slave narratives. *The Underground Railroad* shows history especially the memory of slavery, racial, gender, cultural and national identities. Slaves were searching for the meaning of their identity but not within themselves but somewhere else. The slave was afraid of losing their own identity. Cora is the real culprit in the novel. She escapes from place to place to save her identity. She was searching for happiness. She plays different role in the novel. She presents as a slave, female, raped girl, marginalized and so on. Finally her revolt makes her as brave women but physically she is traumatized and cannot totally free.

Whitehead exposes the abusiveness of women as the catalyst for her Neo-slave narratives. Cora, the protagonist faces difficulties between a slave master and an African American. For over four hundred years, African Americans suffered abuse from the slave masters, and whitehead within his novel shares tale of African Americans suffering at the hands of other African Americans. Whitehead specifically shows how African American women suffer through physical, mental and psychological forms of servitude. Generally slavery is any system in which principles of property law are applied to people, allowing individuals to own, buy and sell other individuals. Slave narrative is an actual first- person point of view. It is told from the perspective of former slave. In another hand, Neo slave narrative, however written

typically after world, War II creating tale to explore the essence of enslaved life in the pre-abolition era. Neo – narratives are fictional. Instead of written from personal experience, these stories are created by contemporary authors who use historical information, research, and imagination. These narratives written in the mid-to late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries grapple with the brutality of transatlantic slavery’s history, cultural memory, representation, resistance, identity, race, gender, sexuality and subjectivity. Neo-slave narrative refers to contemporary, fictional stories and accounts of slavery. Neo-slave narratives are written by authors whose focus is not the abolition of slavery, but the amelioration of the wounds it has left behind; they seek reconciliation with a past that still haunts the present. As Ashraf H.A Rushdy suggests that “The neo-slave narrative is concerned with the past; but its implications rest in the present as well as the future” (169).

The United States of America is known as “home of the brave and land of the free” but Africa American were not free. The declaration of independence was established on July 4, 1776. According to Jim Cullen “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” (5). In spite of declaration of independence claiming all men to be free, African Americas were enslaved to the white slave masters for over four hundred years. Whitehead also demonstrates within this novel how the strong and courageous women overcome the adversity of oppression and abuse to survive. The main focus will be on the character Cora. Although Cora’s life story begins in bondage; she is triumphant in the end. Cora is abused by her master however, Cora’s battles throughout her life with the so-called slavery system and with master.

This research deals with the life of Cora, a fictional character, whose story is a

product of imagination which makes the clear vision about slavery. The story is not told in the first-person voice as Rushdy suggests is typical for neo-slave narratives. Instead it is told by an omniscient narrator. Whitehead's narrator leaves Cora's side when he narrates events in the lives of people around her, like Ajarry, Ridgeway, Stevens, Ethel, Ceaser, and Mabel. This is the break of the structure that the original slave narrative used to follow. *The Underground Railroad* includes several fantastical elements and also breaks the structure. The fantastical elements and the intertextual references to the slave narrative genre are both play significant role for transporting the information of the novel. As well as it helps on building up the claim about the situation of black people in the United States throughout time.

Whitehead is an American novelist and the author of the six novels, including *The Underground Railroad* for which he won the 2016 National Book Award for fiction and 2017 Pulitzer books on his summer vacation reading list fiction. It was chosen by President Barack Obama as one of five novel in his vacation. The novel set in a pre-civil war united states, follows Cora, an escaped slave whose journey toward freedom involves a remained underground railroad that is a literal set of subterranean railway track.

*The Underground Railroad* covers the problem of painful experience of the character that has survived in America. Cora is the main character in the novel; long time ago Cora's grandmother, Ajarry was born in Africa but she was kidnapped and brought to America. Ajarry separated from her family and reduced her value on the auction block. Ajarry ends up in the southern state of Georgia on the Randall tobacco plantation. She changes several husbands and gives birth to a handful of children, but none survive except Mabel... The novel presents the clear cut picture of the life of slaves and their enslavement and their quest for freedom. The novel opens with

Caesar's approachment to Cora to flee to north but Cora refused his opinion. Her thought of refusing to escape was inherited from Cora's grandmother Ajarry. Ajarry tried to commit suicide twice on the voyage to America once by denying herself food and then by drowning. Though Ajarry was planned to face death rather she think than about escapism.

Cora stressed that thinking to escape from the plantation life is to invite death. But later, Cora's fear to lead a life under Terrance Randall's enslavement was more and more than the thirst for freedom and so Cora decided to taste the essence of freedom which was inherited from her mother Mabel. Cora and Caesar run away in the middle of the night and are unexpectedly joined by a young girl named Lovey. They are nearly caught by a group of white hog hunters, Lovey is captured and Cora kills a white boy in order to escape. Cora and Caesar reach the house of Mr. Fletcher, Caesar's contact with the Underground Railroad. Beneath Lumbly's house, they find a tunnel with a railroad track and locomotive carries them north.

They are given forged paper with false identities so that they can safely live in south Carolina until another train arrives to take them farther north Where Cora change her name Bessie. Cora enjoys South Carolina so much that she is reluctant to leave and she and Caesar let three trains come and go without boarding them. Later she realizes that some of the women she lives with are being sterilized against their will as part of project to reduce the black population. Ridgeway, a slave catcher who has been chasing Cora and Caesar discovers the dormitory where Cora lives. Cora unable to find Caesar and goes to the station agent. Cora advises her to hide in the railroad station underneath his house. After spending days trapped in the station under Sam's house, Cora is rescued by an engine passing by.

The conductor tells her that he isn't supposed to be carrying passengers and he

leaves her at what appear to be an abandoned station in North Carolina. North Carolina is growing increasingly hostile toward runaway slaves. Martin (a station agent) has no choice but to take her with him and hide her in a tiny room above his attic. Cora stays hidden for months, watching through an attic window. Eventually Cora becomes feverish; Martin and Ethel give their maid and nurse her back to health. Fiona becomes suspicious and alerts the authorities, who search the house during a weekly festival and capture Cora. As Cora is carried off by Ridgeway, she sees Martin and Ethel being stoned to death.

Instead of taking Cora directly back to Georgia, Ridgeway bring her through Tennessee on their way to capture another fugitive slave. Ridgeway enjoy talking to Cora, especially to tell her the fates of Lovey and Caesar. In one town they stop, Cora makes eye contact with a young black man named Royal. That night, Boseman undoes Cora's chains in order to rape her. Ridgeway catches him in the act and knocks him down. While they two are fighting with their weapon, Royal and two of his companions rescue Cora. they shoot Boseman and overpower Ridgeway and Homer, chaining them to their own wagon. They take Cora, to an Underground Railroad station and travel with her to Indiana. Cora starts a new life in a community of black people and former slaves. Tension rises in the valentine community over whether or not fugitive slaves should be allowed to remain there. While the issue is being debated a group of whites' raids the farm, killing Royal and a number of others. Again Cora is captured by Ridgeway and Homer. Cora leads them to the Underground Railroad station, where she escapes by throwing both herself and Ridgeway down the stairs leading to the track.

At each and every step in her journey, Cora encounters the different conditions that slaves experiences in other states. The dangerous conditions result in the death of

Caesar and the eventual capture of Cora by Ridgeway; she manages to escape a second time. Cora proves her independence and determination alone in plantation. She becomes a stray, growing up to suffer sexual assault and social mockery at the hands of other slaves.

*The Underground Railroad* concludes with Cora-free of Ridgeway- travelling West in a Wagon train, presumably to freedom. It shows how people are compelled to be slave in America. Ajarry is sold so many times that she comes to believe she is “cursed”. Being a child and grandchild of slave Cora and her mother also became victim of slavery. But the problem emerges when she compel to leaves her home country then she face multiple hardship and struggles. This leads the character of the novel indifference, deception, suffering and exploitation.

Moreover Whitehead presents the difficulties and struggles faced by Cora when she is enslave by the white in America. Primarily, the whites undermine slavery in massive ways in Georgia as such ornate blacks with offensive words like pick nannies, Negro, buck, and dark. The protagonist initiates her journey to north where as her identity is in flux. At times she camouflages as Peggy, Suekkey and like to hide her true identity. Being a child of slave she faces many hardship and struggle. In effect, Cora is victimized both physically and mentally. She gets her body examined for syphilis test at South Carolina, lynching festival in North Carolina and she is even raped by her master which shows the impact of slavery in her own identity. More precisely, she encounters with massive massacre in Indiana at Valentine farm. Cora always compares and contrasts those framing malice in various form; and she appraises, and reappraises them.

Colson whitehead is an America born African American writer whose forefather migrated from West Indies, Barbados in 1920's. Whitehead's *The*

*Underground Railroad* won a Pulitzer Prize and a National Book award. In his interview with Emma Brockes in an article; *The Guardian*, Whitehead reveals how he was influenced by James Joyce and Thomas Pynchon in plot structure. He says, “I first encountered James Joyce and Thomas Pynchon and a lot of the great boos that I still refer to in term of inspiration and structure” (2). Analogously, Whitehead attributes James Joyce as an inspiration to structural patters about *The Underground Railroad*. Whitehead claims, he spent a long time research to animate it. It reveals that the novel profoundly enjoins an eclectic version. Moreover, whitehead convinces the readers that authentic sources fabricate it. He further claims “ Ploughing through oral history archives, in particular the 2,300 first person accounts of slavery collected by federal writers’ ..., the last survivors of slavery were in their 90’s” (4). He claims maintaining oral history uncovers the historical accounts regarding the issues on history reasonably true. No matter how the novel reflects harsh reality of slavery, at the time of mid-nineteen century far more than 170 years before.

*The Underground Railroad* is literally the means of medium or a passage from north to south in contemporary American history in the mid-nineteen century prior to the civil war. But many people do not know about its secret path except for the station agents, blacks’ sympathizers, abolitionists and the like. Whites have heard but do not acquaint with its mystery and grandeur. No matter how *The Underground Railroad* is a ghost tunnel as Cora feels in her experience in which most of runaways pass via it to the North through terrible journey by dilapidated box car. Whitehead informs us in an either ways what some people things about it and others in a way that it is. Some people think that it limits only in language as a metaphor. Whitehead writes, “[m]ost people think it’s a figure of speech,” he said. “The Underground, I always knew better; the secret beneath us, the entire time. We’ll uncover them after

tonight” (359).

Whitehead reveals *the Underground Railroad* through the slave catcher Ridgeway who compels Cora to show the mystery of it. Literally, a dilapidated boxcar works to carry out human cargo to north but Ridgeway himself do not know its dignity. He eagerly waits to view it. The secrecy of *the Underground Railroad* renders through Cora. Whitehead exhibits, “[t]he ones, who excavated...deliverance of slaves like her...the Underground Railroad that Cora found it at last...new person steps out... sweat and blood... keep in your heart” (362). In this light, whitehead outlines the details about The Underground Railroad through Cora. She ultimately finds the true reality of it. She assumes owing to her experience in terminus she falls down with Ridgeway. She finds the way out when she digs the tunnel. Cora assumes the construction of the Underground Railroad initiates by slaves like her.

Michiko Kakutani argues that Colson Whitehead takes the underground Railroad- the loosely interlocking network of black and white activists who helped slaves to freedom in the decades before the civil war-and turns it from a metaphor into an actual train that ferries fugitives northward. He conveys emotional fallout: the fear, the humiliation, the loss of dignity and control. And he conveys the daily brutality of life on the plantation, where Cora is gang raped and where whipping are routine. Over the years, Whitehead writes, Cora “had seen men hung from trees and left for buzzards and crows. Women carved open to the bones with the cat-o-nine tails. Bodies alive and dead roasted on pyres feet cut off to prevent escape and hands cut off to stop theft” (3). In recounting Cora’s Story, Mr. Whitehead communicates the horrors of slavery and toxic legacy rumbling on down the years. At the same time, he memorializes the yearning for freedom that spurs one generation after another to persevere in the search for justice- despite threats and intimidation, despite reversals

and efforts to turn back the clock. He has told a story essential to our understanding of the American past and present.

Similarly, Gary T. Edwards unfolds *the Underground Railroad* frames an instrument of resistance in pre-civil war era. Slavery constricts slave to seize in a gray zones and intercepts the voices African American Slaves' Edwards explores, "the Underground Railroad and underscores the fact that the term itself is a reflection of a pervasive attitude of resistance which permeated antebellum slavery" (258). In this light, slavery exists as fundamental issues of south prior to civil war era traces on the American history. The parameter of slavery clutches the slaves with its grip. The law slavery legitimizes slavery by which harshly exploits the slaves. Edwards tends to emphasize *the Underground Railroad* functions as widespread attitudes to resistance of slaves. Edwards advocates to abscond through the Underground Railroad reminds the insightful attitudes of slaves as a resistance.

More precisely, John David Smith advocates on behalf of African American inborn right to be a human being. Smith underscores, "[t]he African American's innate humanity and abstract right to freedom" (100). Smith contends right through an inborn humanity of the African American people. Right to freedom highlights the fundamental aspect. Whereas the African American people remain underprivileged from humanity and right due to dominant power, law, and whites' supremacy. Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* implies the sense of humanity debunks through Cora. The absence of humanity uncovers the anguish, torment, brutality and frequent predicaments to live up human life at Randall. Those aspects provoke slaves to escape through the Underground Railroad. In a sense, the Underground Railroad functions as passage to freedom. Thus the afore-mentioned aspects construe the Underground Railroad as a tool of resistance and passage to freedom.

Whereas Eileen Batterby provokes He has a natural lightness of touch that invariably balances his polemical objective and the often grim nature of his material. He has important points to makes them well. it is not that Whitehead has ventured towards magic realism- the novel is a realist narrative, with strong characterization and good dialogue (4). Yet he has made inspired use of a famous metaphor: *The Underground Railroad*, the secret network that spirited slaves away from the hate-filled south to a marginally kinder north. Whitehead gives the railroad literally an engine, carriages and tracks. His achievement is making everything so real, so believable. As a writer, the author is difficult to pin down because he always writes a different book. Yet one quality continues to shape his writing-the fluid, physical prose, perhaps not quite as operatic as that Morrison. But Whitehead, too, is a stylist, with his fellow African-American's warmth, if more ease. He has a natural lightness of touch that invariably balances his polemical objective and the often grim nature of his material. He has important points to makes them well.

Regarding the issues on human dignity Ramsey Clark claims that white supremacy attributes the cause of racism. Racism degrades the dignity of African American slaves. More often, racism provokes an inferior and a superior by which deteriorates dignity of inferior. Clark contends, “[t]here will be no human dignity in America while there is racism here... central issue of our times” (322). Clark starkly unfolds the absence of human dignity in term of racism. Racism germinates self and the other from which generates discrimination. Discrimination promotes uneven power rules by which strangle human dignity. The ends of the in discriminatory values shield the human dignity. Racism ruptures and intervenes to integrate social bond between people. In this light, Cora's journey through the Underground Railroad as the key issue of discrimination towards slave owing to white supremacy in cotton plantation

Georgia. The cause compels Cora for the quest for human dignity. Moreover Clark advocates on equal justice and honor to exist as human beings. He argues, “I think integration is essential to human dignity, to reverence for life; we do not have it. We do not have equal justice in America because of racism” (316) For Clark, integration values the human dignity to cherish and equal justice maintains the solidarity. In a way, he contends racism as the central issue in America that hinders the equal justice and human dignity.

Numerous critics have examined *the Underground Railroad* from multiple perspectives. But none of them thread from Neo Narrative Slavery in Colson Whitehead’s Novel *The Underground Railroad*. Many of the critics viewed the text from several angles. Some critics and reviewers, explore the Underground Railroad as a historical, psychological point of view, passage to freedom, racism, human dignity and the means of resistance. However, none has till the date, analyzed from the issue of Neo Narrative slavery. My position contends whitehead’s *The Underground Railroad* possesses from dialectics of African identity and slavery.

The study examines *The Underground Railroad* as Neo-slave narratives. The author reveals slave history in this novel. Although the novel deals with neo-slave narrative; it closely identify with history of African American enslavement. The author expresses through his work in many ways African American women lived in bondage during slavery. Here, characters speak volumes to the miss-treatment of African Americans.

Neo-slave narratives are contemporary works of fiction. Whitehead chosen to illustrate the horrors of slavery as it relates to African Americans. The novelist demonstrates the realities of slavery in America through the portrayals of their characters. It depicts the dehumanizing experiences of African Americans suffered

from their slave owners as well as family members. As Alex Preston views that “*The Underground Railroad* is a Neo-Slave narrative. It is certainly a “contemporary fictional work substantially concerned with depicting the effect of new world slavery” (533). Whitehead’s main character Cora, who endure sexism and racism as if they are enslaved by white slave masters- Their slavery arise from male dominance. Cora also suffers at the hands of slave masters. Cora is born a slave and escapes but yet fourteen years later she is still not free because of the psychological effects caused by slavery. As a result, her mind is damaged and she lives in and out of reality.

In spite of the long history of slavery, we cannot make the absolute definition of slavery and we fail to determine who actually is slave, and what slavery is. We do not find consensus of everybody on any definition of slavery. It is a difficult term, but because it is complex in use and observation. In different contexts, one can be seen as a slave on one side, and on the other the same can be observed as a free person. So the slave or slavery cannot be defined in absolute form. After all we are slave if we are working for others, but we don’t like to be so usually.

Moreover Mikhail Bakhtin is clear that dialogism is implicated in the history of modern thinking about thinking. The goal of a dialectic process is to merge point and counterpoint into an other state of argument via conflict and tension. Whereas he said that “ Dialogism argues that all meaning is relative in the sense that it comes about only result of the relation between two bodies occupying simultaneous but different space, where bodies may be thought of as ranging from the immediacy of our physical bodies, to political bodies and to bodies of ideas in general” (32). With base on this, the novel also shows the bitter experiences of Cora. As being an African Slave she struggles in order to get her fixed identity with slave masters. She struggle a lot to make her own identity as well as she is a marginalized female. Thus, these two

distinction slavery and identity are observed which affects her personal, national as well as group identity. Whitehead being the whites' writer very clearly depicts the conditions of female black slavery history and shows how female body struggle to make her identity.

Although many scholars like historians, anthropologists, politicians, economists and sociologists and other have interpreted slavery in different forms and structure, nevertheless slavery can be agreed only on the basis of a certain agreement and understanding. In the history of slavery we find different ways to make one slave. One of the most famous ways was through capture in war. In ancient age, people who were kidnapped were dealt as slaves and their crimes and debts. Many of the children were sold into slavery by their parents/relatives to escape from starvation. Some of the parents started to sell their uneducated children just to escape from them. In the same system, some were self-sold, and it was very common in primitive age. Slavery was formed in the early days due to the two reasons-labor shortage on one side and availability of the open resources. But the common type of slavery is the domestic slavery, which include farming and harvesting. Even there is legal right to any owner to kill the slave for his own benefit. Assault and brutality are the concerns of the law of slavery. In this way, the issue of slavery has been projected as the form of slave narratives. The following lines present pitiful situation of the slavery:

The noxious air of the hold, the gloom of confinement, and the screams of those shackled to her contrived to drive Ajarry to madness. Because of her tender age, her captors did not immediately force their urges upon her, but eventually some of the more seasoned mates dragged her from the hold six weeks into the passage. She twice tried to kill herself on the voyage to America, once by denying herself food and then again by drowning. The sailors

stymied her both times, versed in the schemes and inclinations of chattel.

Ajarry didn't even make it to the gunwale when she tried to jump overboard.

Her piteous aspect, recognizable from thousands of slaves before her, betrayed her intentions. Chained head to toe, In exponential misery. (4)

Literary authors and critics Ashraf H.A Rushdy, Bernard Bell and Toni Morrison define the term Neo-slave Narratives. Another important source is Kaa Vonja Hinton, who is, the scholar had written on the topic Neo Slave Narratives that are specially aimed at a young adult audiences. Ashraf H.A Rushdy declares "what I call 'Neo-slave Narratives' that is, contemporary novels that assume the form, adopt the conventions and take on the first-person voice of antebellum slave narrative" (3). In other words, Rushdy is focusing on one form of contemporary novels that share the stories of pre-civil war period concerning slavery. Rushdy writes:

I am able to explore in some detail the social logic of the literary form of Neo-slave narratives: its origins in the social, intellectual and formation of the sixties, its cultural politics as these texts intervene in debates over the significance of race, and its literary politics as these texts make statements on engagements between texts and between mainstream and minority traditions. The Neo slave Narratives make sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit comments about white appropriations of the slave's voice and challenge white authors who attempt to contain and regulate the first person representation of fugitive slaves (3-6).

Rushdy discusses the different forms of the narratives deal with cultural and literary politics. Munoz- valdivieso shares Rushdy's definition of Neo-slave Narratives in her article "Neo-slave Narratives in contemporary Black British fiction. She conveys that "Neo-slave narratives are recreated stories from former slaves sharing their life

experiences in written from former slaves sharing their life experiences in written form. She says that the authors take the real life stories of former slaves and use them in their novels with fictitious characters and narrators.

Rushdy explores the psychology of slaves and how that plays a role in identity construction in his book *Neo-slave Narratives: studies in the social logic of a literary form*. Rushdy examines Charles Johnson's *Oxherding Tale*. Rushdy writes:

In almost all his fiction, and in much of his critical writing, Johnson has articulated and worked out his concerns with the problematic of race and personal identity; conceiving "identity" itself as a "theoretical concept", he nonetheless believes that it is deeply implicated in the politics of racial inequity in American society. Johnson notes that "black subjectivity" is produced through the "intentionality" of white agency...(167)

Rushdy makes an important point about how race plays a role in the construction of personal identity. He argues that identity is a "theoretical concept" and that the politics of race help to shape this concept." Considering the politics of race help within the system of slavery, it stands to reason that this model for examining construction of identity presented by Rushdy applies well to whitehead *The Underground Railroad*. If "black subjectivity" were contingent upon "white agency" then the practice of slavery would be the penultimate form of white dominance over the formation of black identity. Since in the case of Cora she refuses to see herself through the lens of white society or even that she refuses to conform to the dominant discourse of slavery. Cora is able to create her own identity through her rebellion.

According to the author and critic, Bernard Bell Neo-slave narratives are, "residually oral, modern narratives of escape from bondage to freedom" (289). Bell's describes characters within a text that escape to freedom that were once in servitude.

In the research, researcher defines what a “Neo-slave Narrative” is, it is also important to define “slave narrative” as they are closely related. Bell refers to the mindset of African Americans as they struggled to release the atrocious memories of their past. He defines “Neo-slave narratives” as the fictions of slavery and the impact of going from bondage to freedom while Rushdy defines it as a particular kind of slavery fiction stemming from tales of former slaves written in first-person narration. According to Henry Louise Gates, Jr, “ the slave narratives is a unique creation in the long history of human bondage, designed by a small but exceptionally gifted group of men and women who escaped and who went on to write books about the severe conditions of their bondage” (289). Gates describe how former slaves wrote books about their life of enslavement by the slave master.

African Americans suffered through the trials and tribulations of slavery for almost four hundred years. The emancipation proclamation Act of 1863 abolished slavery, but many African American still suffered from racial injustices related to slavery. Whitehead explores the effects of slavery through his neo-narrative writings *The Underground Railroad*. Whitehead expose the cruelty of slavery through Neo-slave Narratives because the history of African American people has been hidden too long. Although the Emancipation proclamation Act of 1863 abolishes slavery, African Americans still suffer from the psychological, economical and social effects of slavery as Whitehead’s Neo-slave Narratives expose the plight of slavery through the female experience.

In the novel slaves face difficult situation in life they are humiliated and punished like animal. They have no right to talk with master and even their friend. Descriptions of pitiable situation of slave are of the important characteristic of neo-slave narratives which find in this novel through the narratives Cora. The neo-slave

narratives also have more freedom to introduce female perspectives to the genre. One of the key themes in the neo-slave narrative is escape. The women that feature in neo-slave narratives are strong characters, who manage to find freedom. In the slave original slave narratives, the protagonist was usually male, but most of the neo-slave narratives that is used female as a protagonist and written from female perspectives. Looking at the categories and characteristics of neo-slave narratives that Whitehead has outlined in his novel. It contains many elements that are often part of the neo-slave narrative genre that sorrow's journey leads to freedom.

The notion of gender plays an important role in the Novel. In the original slave narrative genre, the transition to freedom was different for woman in comparison to men. The men slaves stages were literacy, identity and freedom whereas for the female slaves family, identity and freedom. The neo narratives slaves have broken the tradition. Alice Walker shed a light on everyday aspects of female slaves' life which is disregarded for a long time. With regard in *The Underground Railroad* there is all about the pain, sorrows, hindrances faced by the female character especially Cora.

Through the depiction of Whitehead, the people would understand the reality of Afro-Americans that is the African had no home to live. As we know that Cora does not have the language yet. She is kept in ignorance. What she does is her experience and she uses that to contextualize the language she hears. For example, not knowing what optimism is and instead thinking it means trying. She lacks the very language to articulate her unfreedom. She cannot be optimistic because it is not a part of her language. American treated Africans as other in a sense the Afro- Americans are farm animals to Americans. Cora consciousness of being a slave shakes the perception of identity when she is in new country. She cannot speak but think to be happy there and she could feel that only the master would be happy there not the

slave. So, the question of identity is linked to the sense of happiness. It also can be said that with the identity of a slave, she sees outside a white band playing colored songs in a Friday festival and encounters a minstrel show. Even in their leisure activities, North Carolinians traffic in white dominance. For their entertainment the identity of black people is stolen, misused and mocked.

According to Ashraf H.A Rushdy, there are social causes for, and implications of, the neo-slave narratives genre. He writes “Having shown that slaves perform their racialized role, and that the way for slaves to avoid having their texts appropriated or their racial identities entirely subject to the hegemonic racial formation is for slaves to produce narratives that are just as performative as their lives” (128). Rushdy argues about the certain element of the neo-slave narrative. The neo-slave narrative comes from a tradition of slave narrative, where a discourse of freedom is unavoidable. He explores the psychology of slavers and how that plays a role in identity. He is focusing in one form of contemporary novels that shares the stories of the pre-civil war period concerning slavery. He examines how people are discriminated by their racial identity. Whereas Whitehead illustrates “Did you all have a pleasant day?” Gloria said when the room quieted. “I was down in the root cellar all day and then I come up to see what a gift God gave us today. That sky. And them hogs...” (296).

Whitehead represents the racial identities of the people where Gloria apologized for her husband’s absence. How she was humiliated in valentine where his master gave an amen and turned to nod at his allies in the meeting house. It raises the violence between two opposite sides. Whitehead presents how racial identity affects people’s life. Cora’s identity is formed as a means to escape the oppressive condition of slavery. She brings the voice of Afro-American females on the novel. Whitehead has tried to explore the identity of African American females as the medium of

slavery in *The Underground Railroad*. Racism and slavery are interrelated within each other. Thus, black woman have to go through double marginalization.

Whitehead reveals how true identity hinders the slave people and compels to stay fluid identity as conceal through Cora. At South Carolina, Sam hands over the forged blue papers in which Cora and Caesar have been changed their names. This identity agonizes of their self respect. Whitehead writes: “The names are wrong,” Caesar said. You’re runaways,” Sam said. “This is who you are now. You need to commit the names and the story to memory” (109). These lines illustrates the fake names demonstrate beyond their real identity. The real identity proves them in the strand of entrapment due to the runways and murders in the eyes of whites. Through the novel the writer sets out to show the unjust and cruel treatment of people of color in the USA through time and does so by including intertextual references to heal historic events. Even today, freedom and equality for black people have not been accomplished.

Whitehead’s *The Underground Railroad* structures the internal journey of Cora by awakening her Self realization of absences in the contemporary American society. Assault and brutality are the concerns of the law of slavery. Even in Neo-slavery practicing societies, sadistic murder and brutality of slaves by the owners are rarely condemned. There is no record creating fear against the injustice towards slaves. Rape and pregnancy of the slave women by the owner have become the common practice of the slavery. Of course, there has been more cause of sexual relation between master and slaves. In the same way Whitehead argues:

His suit was made of the whitest cloth she had ever seen. Rings set with colored stone flashed on his fingers. When he pinched her breasts to see if she was in flower, the metal was cool on her skin. She was branded, not for the

first or last time, and fettered to the rest of the day's acquisitions. (6)

These lines shows that the history of slavery has clearly shown that there is no legal among slaves, but there has not been always good relationship between the slave and owners. The owners have made a provision to recover or recapture the runaways. They have used most imposed sanctions on owners who steal others' slaves. Other rules they have demanded and implemented are the rules for the slaves from one generation to another. American master want the African as a weaker and want to whatever they like. Especially women are more victimized; masters always look at the lady who were grown up and want to entertain with them. None of the African lady who are begin slave can safe their virginity.

According to Britannica among the slave employment, the worst form of employment was prostitution and occupations demanding hard physical labor. The slave generally remains as an outsider and also outsider and also different race from his owner. Even from the ancient time, it was the rule of slavery, "no society could withstand the tension inherent in enslaving in own members" (293).

The slave needs to be outsider because he is enslaved against his will in one society and then taken by force to another. Usually, a marginal person becomes the slave in every society and it helps the owner disregard the origin of his slave. Some owners knowingly ignore the clan and tribe of the slave to exploit freely different perspective. Moreover whitehead states, "That summer young Terrance Randall assumed duties to prepare for the day he and his brother took over plantation. He bought a bunch of niggers out of the Carolinas, six of them, Fanti and Mandingo if the broker was to be believed, their bodies and temperament honed for labor by nature" (20).

These lines shows when Blake arrive Terrance Randall voice bloomed through the rows. The man had a miserable personality but the sounds that came from his body

made labor fly. The entire nigger is behaved like animals. The life of the slaves in the plantation was to kill the slaves slowly. The quest of freedom and selfhood is lost by Americans power holder. There is not fix place for slave to stay and work; they are transform from one place to another.

In ancient Rome, both the master and slave belonged to the white race, but later the African race replaced the slaves. The slave is given any occupation according to the need of the owner. The job assigned to the slaves is innumerable in their services and responsibilities. The variation of the work depends upon society to society. Here the Cora grandmother states her situation as:

Ajarry died in the cotton, the last of her village, keeled over in the rows from a knot in her brain, blood pouring from a knot in her brain, blood pouring from her nose and white froth covering her lips...liberty was reserved for other a person,...to escape the boundary of the plantation was to escape the fundamental principles of your existence: impossible. (9)

In the novel the cotton field defines the framework of the lives of slaves. Being a slave labor Cora's grandmother is completely inescapable: her death takes place in cotton fields. It present how she faces challenges being a slaves women; several times rapes; gives a children from several husband; no fix occupation transform from one place to another; cruel manner; not behaving like human beings. It shows the daily life style of slave.

Role of imagination is important in Neo-slave narrative. In this narratives Cora imaginative description play important role to establish plot of the novel. Cora fictionalizes the historical fact though imaginative narration and descriptions which Martin spoke in a whisper:

As the slave owners' enforcers, the patrollers were the law: white, crooked,

and merciless...Slaves caught off the plantation need passes, unless they wanted a licking and a visit to the country jail. Free blacks carried proof of manumission or risked being conveyed into the clutches of slavery; sometimes they were smuggled to the auction block anyway. Rogue blacks who did not surrender could be shot. (194)

These lines show the horrific situation of slave under the custody of master. Here whitehead presents the historical fact through his writing. They are behave like animal and frequently punishes by humiliating, beating and abusing. Their life is beyond their control; they have to watch passively watch what happen to them by their control; they cannot have will and desire within them. If anyone raises voice upon their master they were directly stone to death. Here in these lines also presents the situation of the runaways' slaves who want to free but if they were catch their result is to face their death. So, this horrific situation presents the history of America as well as Africa.

Blood and tear is the main features of slave narratives which can found in this novel by Cora's action. Here the Cora's rebellion action can be seen by, "The boy yanked Cora to the ground. She rolled over and bashed her head against a stump. He scrambled to her, pinning her. Her blood was hot- she reached out and camp up with a rock that she slammed into the boy's skull. He reeled and she repeated her assault. His groans ceased" (71).

Above lines show dark and ambiguous relationship between Cora and the boy which shows the controversial relationship between them. It presents the situation when Cora is trying to escape but the boy came first in her way to block so she need to clear her way and walk forward so, her first action begin with blood where as she has to lose her friend Lovey with also give her a tear. Thus it reflects the feature of slave narratives.

The novel delineates features of dehumanization by showing the slave narrative of America which is more associated with racial discrimination. The dehumanization can be seen from these lines:

BOSEMAN, for his part had been riding with Ridgeway for three years. He was rambler out of South Carolina and found his way to slave catching after a hardscrabble sequence dockhand, collection agent, and gravedigger . . .

Ridgeway's gang numbered five when Boseman joined, but his employees drifted off one by one. The reason was not immediately clear to Cora. (244)

Above lines shows the situation and circumstance of slavery system and portrays the relationship between master and slave. This is the situation when Cora is capture in the way where her master did give her a death but before her he want to know something more about the hidden road of the slaves. The Boseman want to know more and to catch more slaves and give them a pitiful death in front of his master so, he did not clear Cora. It shows the horrific situation of slave living the custody of their master.

Morrison trails back to past Afro-America culture and history in order to find the identity. Haunting occurs because of history and is inextricably linked to culture and past. It is age of Gothic America, he states that "America literature...is both burdened and constituted by its racial history". (156)

In the novel, knowledge of family history is passed from generation to generation as its quest for racial identity. The history becomes the figure of the ghost and Morrison's characters try to assimilate the history with present. Morrison's novel always deals with both racial and gender issues. Morrison's writing is profoundly concerned with the ways in which ideas of the feminine and the masculine are constructed in society within the periphery of racial issues of Afro- American society.

Thus, it is inevitable to trace out subordinate position of racial and gender identity in her writings. It can present through:

There was no mistaking the identity of the trio, given the specificity of the bulletins. Two of the hog hunters tackled the smallest of the party, pinning her to the ground. After being so quiet for so long-the slaves to escape the detection of hunters, and the hunters to escape the detection of their prey-all of them cried out and shrieked with their exertions. Caesar grappled with a heavysset man with a long dark beard....has been in the grave long ago. (70)

This line delineates about dehumanization by showing the slave narrative of America which is more associated with the racial discrimination. The runaway slave tastes the brutal nature which grew brutality more virulent and senseless with every passing day. The hunter or the slave catcher use to hunt the slave anytime in anywhere by this situation African American did not have their selfhood where they lost their originality and identity in American land. Thus in the novel Caesar also victim of his identity as well as the cruel manner of slave hunter which shows the pitiful manner.

Mystery and confusion are the main feature of slave narrative which is guided by emotional appeal of the narrator. Narrator tries to convince reader by using emotional appeal. In this regard narrator shows, "Cora and Caesar climbed into the car and Lumbly abruptly shut them in. he peered between the gaps in the wood. If you want to see what this nation is all about, I always say, you have to ride the rails. Look outside as you speed through, and you'll find the true face of America" (87).

Above lines shows the problem, overview and mission of the nation which can see the emotional appeal. Being a developed country the nation must have one thing but inside it is guided by another thing which can see the emotional appeal of the reader. Race is one of the main elements of slavery in which this slave narrative try to capture

the sentiment of the reader.

Slave's people restrict inside of certain territory. Moreover education does not access to slave if slave intends to study he/she victimizes the come-uppance what the master wishes. Slaves have no choices of freedom to learn. Whitehead reveals the act of violence of Randall. He writes, "Connelly once put out a slave's eyes for looking words" (114). Whitehead's points out the cultural context of the pre-civil war era in which slaves victimizes the atrocity of the master's persecution. Slaves deprives of learning education which Cora witness the pathetic condition of Jacob who wishes to have a freedom of choice of education.

This research paper shows the African Americans slaves dehumanizing situation and human treatment. Cora's relationship between slaves and masters present the crucial situation of dehumanization. *The Underground Railroad* presents contemporary American history in the mid-nineteen century prior to the civil war era. Finally, Cora gains her identity through the process of rebellion as being a slave, female and marginalized. Whitehead reveals the condition of slavery faced by African American people. White supremacy victimizes Cora in each and every step of life. The inequality, racial discrimination injustice suppresses blacks. Everyone wants self-respect in his/her existing society. Unless and until, an individual lives a common place life, he requires have self-respect. In this sense, self-respect determines the dignity for human beings. More precisely, the whites' law exists on every aspects of blacks' life. African American slaves, including Cora, lack self-respect. She faced various obstacles, have fight against the white supremacy in order to obtain self respect.

After taking a closer look at *The Underground Railroad*, it became clear that the novel can definitely shows the dialectical overtone of the Cora from the

perspective of neo-slave narrative. It shows like time travel towards marginalized people and be changed too. Throughout the novel, Whitehead keeps reasserting the freedom and equality for people of color have not been accomplished. Cora somehow revolt but psychologically traumatized. Cora is the main character of the novel victimized by slave system. The novel presents the situation of Cora which is pathetic in itself. She shares the strong physical resemblance with slave master. Here the researcher shows the Cora's identity as female, slave, victimized, marginalized, and weak and her loss of identity caused by the conflict between whites and blacks. Cora, somehow being a slave against inhuman, cruel and brutal treatments of master but psychologically haunted time and again. Due to slave identity Cora cannot realize herself as equal to other people and feel humiliation in life. The white writer often explores the dehumanized pictures of Cora by presenting different situation and place. Which can makes her as a distinct people and shapes her own identity.

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