

## Chapter I: Helga's Quest of Racial Identity

This project focuses on Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928) in the light of search of the protagonist Helga Crane's search of racial identity. The novel unravels the writer's own inflicted life experience of being disregarded in the society as a mixed race women. So, the novel is highly interesting and completely relevant to the then social reality. Her father, Peter Walker, was a black cook from the West Indies, and her mother, Mary Hanson, was a Danish seamstress. Soon after Larsen was born, her father disappeared. Her mother remarried a white man named Peter Larsen. This research also concerns with gender identity along with racial identity. The major character Helga crane tries to adjust in various places like Naxos, Chicago and Denmark etc. but, she cannot find suitable places for her. Helga fails to achieve what she wants. This entire research work will implicate how black racial identity presents with the social, cultural and economic aspects. At last Helga Crane returns to Harlem being depressed and frustrated. Her acceptance everywhere is suspended till the end of the novel.

The figure of the "Tragic Mulatto" was first introduced in American literature as a representation of the mix-raced individuals who struggled with their identity as neither blacks nor whites during the nineteenth century. They tragically dwindled between blackness and whiteness. They were children of white masters and black female slaves or black males and white women, and were confined to slavery as a consequence of the one-drop rule, which stated that anyone with an African American ancestor was considered to be black regardless of their likely light complexion. Some of them found themselves trapped in the hardships of bondage or captivity whereas others tried to escape the South and live in the free states of the North obliging them to deny their black ancestry. The

racial duality they dealt with led them to a living of constant sorrow, distress and resignation that often ended in death or suicide sometimes. The same suicidal situation the protagonist of this novel encounters and she takes the stand of struggle which marks her line of seeking constantly new racial identity.

The major character Helga Crane is from the black community on the basis of race. She is black and her black colored skin has been the burden of great problem. Here, the researcher argues that the racial identity serves as a cognitive template that people use to organize information about themselves and others and that racial identities are influenced by social cultural factors such as parents, family and peers as well as societal factors such as economic and political trends as Helms concerns. In Negro school, the Principal is from the white community and Helga being from the black community she feels very inferior before the white. Then she leaves home and school too. She travels South Chicago, Harlem and Denmark. Everywhere she travels but she cannot find good space for her in any state.

This research contends Helga Crane's discontent with her current place and situation in life. She is half white and half black educated woman who works as a teacher in Negro School of Naxos. Helga leaves home and school too. She tries to adjust in various places but she cannot find suitable places for her because of her black colored skin. Entire research work will implicate how black racial identity presents with social, cultural, psychological and economic aspects.

Nella Larsen, a mulatta herself, wrote her novel *Quicksand* (1928), whose main protagonist Helga is usually dismissed as "Tragic Mulatta". In the novel, the mixed-race female character Helga Crane struggles with her inability to integrate her racial and

cultural duality within a society that barely understands the difficulties encountered by her mixed heritage. The unhappy and distressing ending in the novel's story is the consequence of a series of situations where this woman Helga Crane has to come to terms with her identity and make tough decisions concerning her relation towards her closest circle. She cannot completely belong to any of the two racial communities; black or white. Hazel Carby notes,

The mulatto figure is a narrative device of mediation; it allows for a fictional exploration of the relationship between the races while being at the same time an imaginary expression of the relationship between the races. [...] Larsen's particular use of the mulatto figure allowed her protagonist [Quicksand's Helga Crane] to be both inside and outside contemporary race issues. (171)

The figure 'mulatto' itself is distressing and painful which sets the mulatto character into the findings new recognition for comfort feeling of association. Helga Crane in *Quicksand* faces the same condition of searching comfort zone of seeking identity.

The aim of this research is to provide an innovative reading of Helga Crane as a "Tragic Mulatta" in the light of her complex family background, racial duality and search for identity. Despite her initial apparent strong personality as an independent, ambitious and non-conformist woman, Helga evolves towards a misplaced, unhappy human being who can never find utter satisfaction in her life completely. I argue through this dissertation that her tragedy's starting point is already visible from her childhood, due to the resentment she feels towards both black and white races because of her parents' abandonment. This background situation backs up her into utter search of her better place

of living. I also claim that her racial and cultural duality, which she tries to adjust to every community she encounters, are the reasons why she is unable to establish her own identity which sets her quest of identity into process. As a consequence, she chooses to leave her intellect behind and resigns herself to an unsatisfactory life as a rural housewife that leads her to her tragic outcome leading to never ending act of searching her personality.

Nevertheless, Helga Crane's determination to find herself, her question and confront against the social and racial constructions make the character go beyond the stereotypical figure of the mulatto, and transform her into more empowered woman as a part of identity seeking process.

African American literature is vital to key understanding African-American culture, tradition, values and independence. This approach is a gateway into comprehensive study of the African-American disciplines, society, and culture, historical and contemporary contexts. Same is the case in the study of Larsen's novel *Quicksand*. Therefore, I have used Du Bois, Cornell West, Jante Helms etc. as grand African American theorists for reliable unravelling of the contemporary African American society and this thesis is perfectly successful in the same project as well.

There are several similarities between Nella Larsen's life and that of her protagonist, Helga Crane. It is essentially beyond question that *Quicksand* was highly influenced by her own experiences, and this, along with her captivating way with words, is what makes Larsen's work so memorable. Larsen was born in Chicago; she was the bi-racial daughter of a white Danish mother and a black West Indian father. Because of her own dual heritage, it is extremely likely that she experienced an inner battle similar to, if

not the same as, Helga's. Furthermore, Larsen claims to have lived in Denmark while she was growing up and that she later returned when she attended the University of Copenhagen. However, some argue that there is not any "documentary evidence to support these claims" according to Extravagant Crowd. Regardless of the dispute, Larsen's work went on to win multiple awards – she was the first black woman to receive a Guggenheim Fellowship for creative writing – and she is now recognized as "one of the most important female voices of the Harlem Renaissance" as Extravagant Crowd mentions.

According to Anthony Dawahare in a journal article, "The Gold Standard of Racial Identity in Nella Larsen's 'Quicksand' and 'Passing,'" the "New Negro" most commonly referred to a unique race whose ancestry imparted a distinctive and invaluable racial identity and culture. This novel in particular presents racial identity as something that society, and the modern political economy of capitalism, inevitably shapes for itself as Dawahare opines, and the way Helga was treated in each location respectively supports this claim.

Cornell West in *Race Matters* opines:

Hence, for liberals, black people are to be "included" and "integrated" into "our" society and culture, while for conservatives they are to be "well behaved" and "worthy of acceptance" by "our" way of life. Both fail to see that the presence of predicaments of black people is neither additions to nor defections from American life, but rather constituting elements of that life. (6)

People including black people ever want to be included and assimilated by own fellow people and other people. They think acceptance by other as the precondition of their secured identity as Helga in the novel struggles entirely for the sake of her acceptance by others. Same is the case of Helga in this novel *Quicksand* where she travels from one place to another with an eye to be assimilated and integrated warmly. But, her integration everywhere either in white relatives or in black communities remains suspended. It backs up her continuation of search of racial identity.

Dawahare suggests that the class identifications in this novel appear racial because “the ideologies of modern capitalism reify race as an indicator of self and social worth”. It means people who have money construct race and so-called superior race enjoys privilege over the inferior one; white people create so-called hierarchy and exploit blacks. In other words, the social class system made the “concept” of race more concrete and less abstract. This idea also supports the suggestion that racial identity would be uncontrollably constructed by society. Helga was rejected by her own family simply because of the color of her skin. She was not given a choice; she was forced into the black racial category, despite her connections to the white category, by a higher white member of society.

Bell Hooks in her book *Black Looks: race and representation* writes: “Cultural identity [...] is a matter of “becoming” as well as “being” (5). Helga flees from one place to another in search of her identity for she doesn’t fit anywhere. She flees from Naxos to Chicago: “She had decided to leave Naxos. That was it” (1092). Helga does not feel her secured position, therefore, she sets her journey in search of her racial identity as the process of becoming.

As Helga's time in Harlem was coming to an end, she experienced a significant grasp of her convoluted racial identity. As Hostler portrays Helga's condition, she is seeking her favorable free place for she is feeling suffocated: "Helga has two profound visions of the community of race: one suggesting suffocation and the other suggesting expansion".

Helga represented several identities as Gray mentions: "she is exhibited as black, female, American, English-speaking, and silent--that is, because of the language, at a remove of greater voicelessness. She is seen and not heard". Helga's identity fluctuates from female to American to African etc. which sets her seeking of identity into endless process.

Helga's travels in search of self-discovery reflect those which were common in America during that time. For blacks, it was generally a movement from the South to the North, and for whites, it was a movement to Europe.

Helga as Dawahare further mentions, "ensconces herself in his Southern working-class community as a way to escape the reifying gaze of both racist whites and bourgeois blacks". She was so desperate to escape the objectification of her race – which she faced throughout the entire novel – that she settled, despite her unhappiness. Helga feels uneasy from her Southern status as a black working class female. The next causative factor for her dissatisfaction is that she is treated as usable thing and this scenario develops her tendency to escape from the place in search of better place to erase her unhappiness. According to Gray, "She tries, in fact, to relinquish the very idea of herself as object but only to find herself objectified anew." In her "surrender" to the racial complexity of her

life, she fell into the typical life of a black mother in the south and fell into that racial category, losing her independence.

Helga's desperate reach toward "a religion constructed by whites for blacks" as Hostetler proclaims additionally represents a society constructed by race. And in this religious conversion, she sacrificed her ways of thinking to become generic and ordinary in that time and place. As Hostetler put it, she betrayed herself. This attempt to find contentment proved a failure as she both physically and mentally deteriorated from this point forward. Helga had finally given up and was engulfed by a racial quicksand.

During the time in which this novel *Quicksand* was written, racial identity was a considerable controversy that African American writers and artists were working diligently to define.

On a more personal level, Larsen portrays Helga as the "'tragic mulatta,' a melodramatic form in which the mixed-race character is seen as a split subject, tragically flawed by 'nature' and trapped in a narrative trajectory inevitable leading to rejection or death" as Scheper writes in her article "The New Negro 'Flaneuse' In Nella Larsen's "Quicksand". She is mixed race causing her suffering condition which sets her into endless quest of favorable condition causing secured racial identity. I believe Larsen did this in order to give her audience a clearer understanding of her own "tenuous sense of identity".

The evolution Helga goes through from her resentment against unfavorable places and people to the forgiveness and understanding of their reasons to behave as they did demonstrate and that her willingness to learn from her experience and its application to



her growth as a woman, wife and mother also is related to her process of seeking racial identity.

Helga Crane eventually becomes a tragic character by the end of the novel, yet her personal development and awareness of the social constructions she has had to learn to disregard hackneyed traditional structure of belief system and practice clearly corroborate her role as a non-traditional “Tragic Mulatta” which is a part of her quest of racial identity.

Helga is treated as exotic in Denmark and it sets her identity into search. Her Danish family sees her skin as a feature that must be highlighted, as it concludes her exoticism and sensuality. Olsen, specifically, observes her warm impulsive nature of the women of Africa, but, his expression as his lovely, he fears, the soul of a prostitute suggesting the sexuality implied in her complexion. Olsen describes her in white male’s stereotypical sense. Helga truly ends up abhorring their white relatives’ fixation with the embellishment of her complexion when she is in Denmark. Yet one of the reasons she abandons Naxos lies behind their disagreement towards those bright colors were fitting and that dark-complexioned people should wear out from the place. They don’t think she is in the spirit of the work. She means suppression of individuality and beauty is Naxos’s religion. It sets her into perpetual search of racial identity.

Besides their production of equal human beings that are not encouraged to think by themselves in the whites’ psychology. Helga also condemns Naxos’ opposition to the visual enhancement of the race. Although this fact makes her become, to some extent, complicit in her own criticism against black bodies’ objectification, her concern towards her external appearance seems to actually allude to her sexual repression. Many scholars

observe this constraint is originated after the exploitation of black sexuality throughout history, which led to African American females' denial of sexuality and desire. It is evident in Helga. She rejects love and marriage everywhere in fear of being sexual object. It sets one mixed raced woman's sexual identity into investigation. Larsen negotiates between two traditions of representation of black women's sexuality: whereas the black representation regards it as disgusting, the white representation pictures it as promiscuous and dangerous. The implication is that whatever a black woman does, society will disapprove it. This disapproval puts Helga into continuous process of searching racial identity.

Helga not only distances herself from her blackness but also rejects her sexual nature and desire due to the social assumption that relates the latter with the color of her skin. Larsen illustrates how racist and sexist projections can penetrate the psyches of both the subject and the observer, preventing Helga from reinventing herself and transcending race. Either with James Vayle in Naxos, Dr. Anderson after meeting him in Harlem, or Olsen in Copenhagen, Helga is unable to display her real feelings and rather emphasizes her sensuality through her good-looking self-embellishment. By sending mixed messages to herself and everyone else, she reinforces once again her incapability to build her own identity. This shows her identity making as a continuous process.

Apart from this first introductory chapter, I have associated theoretical framework in Chapter II along with relevant theorists and some critics. Similarly, I have supplied sufficient textual analysis to justify the theme of this thesis in the same chapter. In final Chapter, I have mentioned sound conclusion of this dissertation.

In brief, Helga feels suffocation in single place. She plans immediately to flee another place. She flees from Naxos to Chicago. From Chicago, she goes to Harlem, New York. From Harlem, she goes to Denmark and again returns back to America. Helga makes such escaping from one place to another means she wants adjust at anywhere. But, till last of the novel, she doesn't get settled. This shows her endless search of identity.

## Chapter II: Quest of Racial Identity in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*

Identity itself is the matter of self-recognition. It is desire of self-respect and value in the society. Identity is the name of process and not the name of exactitude. This process is never completed. This is like incomplete mission which goes on infinitely. Racial identity is the matter of same domain which remains always incomplete no matter how one strives for the completion.

Gerzina has rightly said, "Racism at individual level involves a misguided personal belief that an entire racial group is deficient or superior because of a set of moral, intellectual, or a cultural traits that are thought to be indicated by the group's biological origin" (126). Racism is founded on the belief in one's racial superiority over other. It encompasses the beliefs, attitudes, behaviors and practices that define people on racial classification. It involves a generalized lack of knowledge or experience as it applies to negative beliefs and attitudes. It uses the inflexible assumptions that differences are biologically determined and therefore inherently unchangeable. It doesn't take place in a vacuum, but rather is enacted and reinforced through social, cultural and institutional practices that endorse the hierarchal power of one group over other. Such situation backs up debunking force against that biased belief system of unjust hierarchy that problematizes racial identity under progress.

Louis Tysonavers: "Everyone's identity is a product of differential racialization" (369). She means to say that identity is made out of difference in races. The condition of happening many races is the prerequisite for the formation of identity.

Louis Tyson further writes:

I choose these two examples – slave resistance and Harlem Renaissance – because I think they illustrate most clearly the political motives that lay behind the exclusion of African Americans from American history. A conscientious history of slave resistance would have blasted the racist stereotype of the contented, dim-witted slave who was grateful for the paternal guidance of the white master, without whom the slave would have been either a lost child or a dangerous savage. And a conscientious history of African American literary genius would have blasted the myth of African American inferiority on which so many racist policies and practices rested. (360)

Certain power or so called superior people ever try their best to craft designation of other people. It means powerful people always try to establish certain identity of other people so that they could ever rule and use them under their will. In above Tyson's lines, so called superior Americans ever strived to limit black ones providing stereotypes and erasing from American history. But, blacks' movement like Harlem Renaissance and their resistance have fluctuated the Whites' attempt to limit them. They have crumbled their myth of inferiority. This movement has set their identity formation under process.

Hart et. al. define identity as: Identity is the 'style of one's individuality' (123). He means to say that everyone has own sort unique individuality and that is identity. Some people are black and some are white and some are yellow. They have own sort of belief system and such phenomena determine identity. If identity is connected to race and that is racial identity.

Luis Tyson again writes on the optimism of blacks. She mentions in the book *Critical Theory Today*, Langston Hughes's lines from "Good Morning" (1951). The speaker laments the dashed hopes of people of color, in search of a better life, who've "come dark/wondering/ wide-eyed/dreaming/out of Penn Station" in New York:

The gates open-  
 but there're bars  
 at each gate.  
 What happens  
 To a dream deferred?  
 Daddy, ain't you heard? (364)

In these lines, Hughes shows that black people have dream of freedom but it has been delayed. It shows the black people are under suffocation. They have extreme desire of self-respect. It shows dynamism in the direction of identity formation for suffocation as a reserved energy is going to burst one day. Such burst wipe away any type of restriction regarding identity setting identity under mobility.

Du Bois mentions about the concept of racial identity:

What, then, is a race? It is a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together for the accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life. (The Conservation of Races, 44)

Like other race of people, blacks have also own history, language and tradition. Racial people always strive to achieve certain ideal. It is related to perfection of identity. It is

never completely achieved but more or less it can be achieved. So, one always keeps on his/her attempt to have further progress in the direction of better identity achieving.

Louis Tyson rightly proclaims:

In other words, racism has many pay-offs for whites. This is why interest convergence is sometimes referred to as *material determinism*. The desire to advance oneself financially or to feel better about oneself psychologically-determines the ways in which the dominant society practices racism. (371)

Racism is constructed by whites' interest of keeping blacks under their controlled setting. If white people can trap blacks under racially inferior cloak, they can handle the blacks cheaply in every work. Mankind doesn't tolerate domination at any longer. Karl Marx had once noted down that capitalism has its own destroyer within itself. Similarly, domination has its own destroyer and destruction can be taken as search of identity.

Bell Hooks in her book *Black Looks* indicates the blacks' resistance as the tendency of identity's search:

Concurrently, all social manifestations of black separatism are often seen by whites as a sign of anti-white racism, when they usually represent an attempt by black people to construct places of political sanctuary where we can escape, if only for a time, white domination. (15)

Actually, blacks have perfectly shown the sign for emancipation. They are anti-white supremacist. They want to correct political system that would be inclusive attaining blacks respectfully. They want to escape from whites' domination which means they want to seek new bold existence of identity.

According to Louis Tyson, identity is not simple moving on linear line:

*Intersectionality* – No one has simple, uncomplicated identity based on race alone. Race intersects with class, sex, sexual orientation, political orientation, and personal history in forming each person’s complex identity. “Everyone has potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances”. (376)

Identity moves on many curves having complex roots. It is emerged through intersectionality of many discursive lines like class, gender, politics etc. Such intersectionality sets individual into confusion which sets one into endless search of identity.

Du Bois further writes:

We did not want our journey to be filled with snapshots of an antique land. Instead, we wanted to rediscover our clothing in the context of a different culture. Was it possible, we wondered, to express our style in an unaccustomed way, surrounded by Egyptian colors, Egyptian textures, even bathed in an ancient Egyptian light? (29)

In this extract, a sense of cultural identity of black people is fervently desired. Rediscover of own clothing by the black people is longing for seeking new unique identity.

Louis Tyson adds that identity is constructed by society:

Many of the problems, issues, and concepts we’ve encountered so far in our discussion of critical race theory have implied a belief in *racial idealism*: the conviction that racial equality can be achieved by changing people’s (often unconscious) racist attitudes through such means as



education, campus codes against racist speech, positive media representations of minority groups and the use of the law. In short, if our attitudes toward race are constructed by society, then society can reconstruct them. (382)

When identity is constructed, why it cannot be reconstructed. It can definitely reconstructed. Racial identity also can be taken in the same light. Racial identity can be changed but, for that racial attitude among people should be changed. Media, education system, effective law should deal racism effectively. Such practice can change racial identity into positive terms setting identity into investigation.

As a conclusion, what we can confidently say is, in reality there is no identity only identification, either with the institution itself or with other subjects by the intermediary of the institution. Identity is only the ideal goal in the process of identification. Identity is an imaginary referent. It is not the matter of conclusion instead it is the matter of process; ongoing process whether it be cultural identity or racial identity.

This research attempts to show lucidly the search of racial identity as an incomplete process. It is made and remade continuously. It is an outcome of several twisted cultural fabrication. It is not only difficult to unravel but also impossible to do so ultimately. I have used African American literary theory and criticism to rightly unravel the suppression and suffocation of the novel's protagonist Helga Crane.

Luis Tyson writes, "For *Eurocentrism* is the belief that European culture is vastly superior to all others" (361). Race concept is backed up by the hunger of European

superiority. To quench that thirst of superiority, whites have constructed black identity. Black people later on express their dissatisfaction of inferior identity. This situation develops the foundation of searching racial identity. Helga crane, the protagonist shows the same characteristics in the novel *Quicksand*.

Cornel West says in regard to identity:

Identity is fundamentally about desire and death. How you construct your identity is predicated on how you construct desire for recognition; quest for visibility; the sense of being acknowledged; a deep desire for association ... then there is profound desire for protection, for security for safety, for surety. (15-16)

He defines identity as the matter of life and death that anyone's desire constructs hi/her identity to protect herself/himself. Identity is the yearning for recognition and the will for visibility. Identity gives anyone the involvement in social activities and it is acknowledged by society. Security, safety and surety can be obtained only through identity.

In Nella Larsen's novel *Quicksand*, the protagonist has same desire of self-pride and acknowledgment. The protagonist Helga flees from one place to another merely with an eye to find respectful identity.

As the novel goes on, Helga starts to feel something gloomy experience in her state:

Helga Crane sat alone in her room, which at that hour, eight in the evening, was in soft gloom. Only a single reading lamp, dimmed by a great black and red shade, made a pool of light on the blue Chinese carpet,

on the bright covers of the books which she had taken down from their long shelves, on the white pages of the opened one selected, on the shining brass bowl. (1086)

Her loneliness in her separated room suggests that she is feeling isolated as trifle character. Evening shows that her inferior position has reached on the verge of ending. Now, new morning with fresh identity is necessary. The following lines also deserve same meaning: “So large that the spot where Helga sat was a small oasis on a desert of darkness” (1086). Though extant situation is dark like desert, now is the time of fertile land amid desert like oasis. Helga feels possibility of emergence of her identity anew.

Helga “A slight girl of twenty-two years” (1087) starts to feel educational practice in Naxos is problematic:

Helga Crane tried to think of her work and the school as she sat there. Ever since her arrival in Naxos she had striven to keep these ends of the days from the intrusion of irritating thoughts and worries. Usually she was successful but not this evening. (1087)

School days have been irritating; monotonous devoid of novelty and creativity. The school where black children are taught where the children are kept far from their realization of potentiality as a practice of exploitation. It shows that white people do not value blacks’ creativity.

Helga is irritated with the conduct that color people like herself should go through every day: “She wanted forgetfulness, complete mental relaxation, rest from thought of any kind (1087). She wants to forget and not to recall those painful moments. Color people like Helga should encounter with many unpleasant happenings: “For the day had

been more than usually crowded with distasteful encounters and stupid perversities” (1087).

Helga starts to think differently: “She had counted on a few spare minutes in which to indulge in the sweet pleasure of a bath and a fresh, cool change of clothing” (1087). Her thinking in novel way is suggested by ‘cool’, ‘bath’, ‘change of clothing’. She wants to take off old parameter of identity and wear new ones.

The protagonist Helga Crane of the novel *Quicksand* gets anger while thinking about whites’ misunderstanding upon black people:

Sitting there in her room long hours after, Helga again felt a surge of hot anger and seething resentment. And again it subsided in amazement at the memory of the considerable applause which had greeted the speaker just before he had asked his God’s blessing upon them. (1088)

She imagines God’s blessing as a hope of betterment of her identity during her resentment. It lessens her anger and she sees potential completion of her desired identity.

Louis Tyson sees institutional practice of racial prejudice:

This kind of behavior is especially destructive when it occurs in the classroom, when schoolteachers and college professors assume, often unconsciously, that students of color are in some way inferior: “less intelligent ... lack[ing] ... cultural sophistication ... work ethic, or social skills”. (370)

The white schoolteachers and college professors by heart think that black people are inferior by birth. They do not think black children also can learn as white ones and they also have certain potentiality. It is because Helga Crane hates Naxos school in the South:

“The South. Naxos. Negro education. Suddenly she hated them all. Strange, too, for this was the thing which she had ardently desired to share in to be a part of this monument to one man’s genius and vision” (1088). White teachers do not think that black children also are replete with genuine quality, they also could be genius in future. This arouses Crane’s hatred against Naxos education practice.

Her temper due to hatred against Naxos education parameter continues: “The minutes gathered into hours, but still she sat motionless, a disdainful smile or an angry frown passing now and then across her face” (1088).

Gilroy proclaims: “Racist ideologies and practice have distinct meaning bounded by historical circumstances and determined in struggle” (20 - 23). Racial identity is the matter of struggle against racial ideologies and practices. It is through struggle, one can determine better secured racial identity. Now, Helga determines herself for struggle not only limiting herself into mere hatred and anger to set herself into the quest of better racial identity: “At last she stirred, uncertainly, but with an overpowering desire for action of some sort. A second she hesitated, then rose abruptly and pressed the electric switch with determined firmness, flooding suddenly the shadowy room with white glare of light” (1088). Her rise and lighting light symbolizes that struggle or action is the hopeful way of securing respectful racial identity.

In Naxos, school is merely used to turn black children into machines:

This great community, she thought, was no longer a school. It had grown into a machine. It was now a show place in the black belt, exemplification of the white man’s magnanimity, refutation of the black man’s inefficiency. Life had died out of it. It was, Helga decided, now only a big

knife with cruelly sharp edges ruthlessly cutting all to a pattern, the white man's pattern. Teachers as well as students were subjected to the paring process, for it tolerated no innovations, no individualisms. Ideas it rejected, and looked with open hostility on one and all who had the temerity to offer a suggestion or ever so mildly express a disapproval.

(1089)

Whites have conducted school in Naxos merely to produce Lilliput; small size of black people in terms of potentiality those can be used under whites' desire as required. The school merely crushes possibility of novel genius within black children. It does not bear with innovation, experimentation and creativity. Helga's sense of struggle and revolution is apparent when she uses the term 'knife' with which she wants to cut all whites' parameters. It means she wants to revolt against whites' practices of producing merely destroyed black children in terms of their ingenuity and end their hackneyed practice. Whites' parameter is worse for they do not even tolerate ideas of any people to renovate Naxos school. They evoke enmity against those people. Actually, Helga wants to end such whites' shabby practice. This means she wants better status of identity developing genius quality among blacks.

Luis Tyson mentions appropriation of whites' standard by the blacks creates great obstacle in search of racial identity:

*Internalized racism* results from the psychological programming by which a racist society indoctrinates people of color to believe in white superiority. Victims of internalized racism generally feel inferior to

whites, less attractive, less worthwhile, less capable, and often wish they were white or looked more white. (362)

Blacks accept by unconsciously the whites' parameter and it eases whites to rule blacks constructing in their desired position. Helga wants to shake whites' restriction as a sign of her betterment of identity whereas other blacks have molded their attitude that the whites want:

Helga Crane had taught in Naxos for almost two years, at first with the keen joy and zest of those immature people who have dreamed dreams of doing good to their fellow men. But gradually this zest was blotted out, giving place to a deep hatred for the trivial hypocrisies and careless cruelties which were, unintentionally perhaps, a part of the Naxos policy of uplift. Yet she had continued to try not only to teach, but to befriend those happy singing children, whose charm and distinctiveness the school was so surely ready to destroy. Instinctively Helga was aware that their smiling submissiveness covered many poignant heartaches and perhaps much secret contempt for their instructors. (1089)

Other blacks except Helga are regardless of their own fellow children's novelty and individual distinct quality. Whites' parameter of conducting academic institution is merely crushing students' capacity. The blacks have internalized that and unconsciously accepted but that Helga stirs boldly. Her desire to seek better identity strengthens continuously. In such situation, only Helga's attempt to correct whites' domineering parameter becomes feeble:

But she was powerless. In Naxos between teacher and student, between condescending authority and smoldering resentment, the gulf was too great, and too few had tried to cross it. It couldn't be spanned by one sympathetic teacher. It was useless to offer her atom of friendship, which under existing conditions was neither wanted nor understood. (1089)

Vast gap between whites' patronizing authority, teacher, students etc. was created in Naxos that Helga would know clearly. She has will power to correct that but only her effort does not suffice that initiation. It would be better to leave Naxos in search of better place as quest of better racial identity. Her intent of leaving Naxos is more evident in the following extract:

Helga's essentially likable and charming personality was smudged out. She had felt this for a long time. Now she faced with determination that other truth which she had refused to formulate in her thoughts, the facts that she was utterly unfitted for teaching, even for mere existence, in Naxos. She was a failure here. She had, she conceded now, been silly, obstinate, to persist for so long. A failure. Therefore, no need, no use, to stay longer. Suddenly she longed for immediate departure. How good, she thought, to go now, tonight! – and frowned to remember how impossible that would be. (1089-90)

In Naxos, Helga only wants to adapt corrective measures for teaching. Other blacks do not know how they have been ideologized. Helga thinks that to be futile her attempt is to be failure in Naxos. This situation proves her as unfit to exist in Naxos. Therefore, she longs for her leaving Naxos as soon as possible in search of finding her comfortable place



as quest of racial identity. Her notion of unfit existence in Naxos is more intensified as she says:

A short, almost imperceptible silence, then a deep voice of peculiarly pleasing resonance, asking gently: “You don’t like Naxos, Miss Crane?” She evaded. “Naxos, the place? Yes, I like it. Who wouldn’t like it? It’s so beautiful. But I – well – I don’t seem to fit here. (1097)

Helga does not want to utterly hate the place as she hates people’s hypocrisy and monolithic attitude of the place Naxos. This is the reason why she is unfit in the place though the place is beautiful.

While leaving Naxos, Helga even wants to leave her fiancé James Vayle:

Returning to James Vayle, her thoughts took on the frigidity of complete determination. Her resolution to end her stay in Naxos would of course inevitable end her engagement to James. She had been engaged to him since her first semester there, when both had been new workers, and both were lonely. Together they had discussed their work and problems in adjustment and had drifted into a closer relationship. Bitterly she reflected that James had speedily and with entire ease fitted into his niche. (1090)

While Helga finds herself as unfit for Naxos, she finds her fiancé James Vayle as quite suitable for the place. Helga and Vayle met each other as new teachers, collaborated and became engaged. Her leaving her fiancé also can be taken her determined search of racial identity.

Helga’s revolutionary stand is vivid in the following lines:

Helga on the other hand never quite achieved the unmistakable Naxos mold, would never achieve it, in spite of much trying. She could neither conform, nor be happy in her unconformity. This she saw clearly now, and with cold anger at all the past futile effort. What a waste! How pathetically she had struggled in those first months and with what small success. A lack somewhere. Always she had considered it a lack of understanding on the part of the community, but her present new revolt she realized that the fault had been partly hers. A lack of acquiescence. She hadn't really wanted to be made over. (1090-91)

Helga actually does not agree to be molded in Naxos living parameter. Her community does not understand her part of unconformities. She never wants to be constructed. She chooses her way of searching identity as she desires.

Ultimately, Helga decides to leave Naxos as bold decision of setting herself in the journey of searching racial identity as her will. "She had decided to leave Naxos. That was it" (1092). She is committed to seek her favorable place.

Helga's bold commitment to pursue her racial independent identity is clearer further:

It wasn't, she was suddenly aware, merely the school and its ways and its decorous stupid people that oppressed her. There was something else, some other more ruthless force, a quality within herself, which was frustrating her, had always frustrated her, kept her from getting the things she had wanted. Still wanted. (1092)

Helga does not want to save appropriation of whites' supremacist ideology and practice. Actually, whites along with ideologized blacks deploy her oppression. But, she is not ready to tolerate that. She takes strong decision to flee from whites' ideological trap of Naxos. Her such stand demonstrates that she is anti-supremacist against whites opening new horizon to seek racial identity further.

Her determination got reinforced: "The strident ringing of a bell somewhere in the building brought back the fierce resentment of the night. It crystalized her wavering determination" (1092). Her determination becomes stronger as Naxos's hypocrisy irritates her:

No Helga wasn't sick. Not physically. She was merely disgusted. Fed up with Naxos. If that could be called sickness. The truth was that she had made up her mind to leave. That very day. She could no longer abide being connected with a place of shame, lies, hypocrisy, cruelty, servility, and snobbishness. (1092)

Naxos's blacks have already accepted servility in front whites, their parameter of belief system and practice. People are highly arrogant in the same manner. They do not feel shameful for the cruelty of changing black children into machinery mechanism. So, Helga gets tired and decisively moves ahead for leaving Naxos.

Louis Tyson writes about whites' economic interest:

*Interest Convergence* – Derrick Bell uses this term to explain that racism is common in our country because it often converges, or overlaps, with the interest-with something needed or desired – of a white individual or group. For example, racism is in the financial interest of upper-class whites who

exploit black laborers by paying them less than their white counterparts...  
(371)

Whites have practiced racism being guided by economic interest that if they could construct racial identity assigned certain duties, they could be rich using blacks' labor as cheaply as possible. Helga's determination to leave Naxos gets reinforced and it is stumble with monetary trouble:

But, Helga, you can't go now. Not in the middle of the term." The kindly Margaret was distressed". "But I can. And I am. Today." "They'll never let you," prophesied Margaret." "They can't stop me. Trains leave here for civilization every day. All that's needed is money," Helga pointed out.  
(1095)

"Margaret Creighton, another teacher in the English department" (1095) tries Helga to bind and compel not to leave Naxos at least amid the session. But, no one can restrict Helga from leaving Naxos despite financial problem. Helga does not have enough money to go to the next place though she teaches in Naxos. This shows that whites have used her in fewer money. It is proved in the line: "she would have to ask Uncle Peter for loan" (1090). If she had earned enough money, she would not have to ask Uncle Peter for loan. She is strong in her position for her quest for acceptance as quest of homely racial identity.

Whites' monetary concern is apparent in Luis Tyson's next reference:

As many Americans of all colors know, however, racism has not disappeared: it's just gone "underground". That is, racial injustice in the United States is still a major and pressing problem; it's simply become

less visible than it used to be. Racial injustice is practiced on the sly, so to speak, to avoid legal prosecution, well. For example, as Richard Delgado and Jean Stetancic point out, African American and Latino/as still have fewer chances of acquiring jobs, housing and loans than whites with similar qualifications. (367)

The whites suppress and limit blacks limiting jobs' chances for them. The same trouble is put forward for Helga when Margaret tries to obstacle her from fleeing away leaving Naxos:

Yes of course. Everybody knows that. What I mean is that you'll only hurt yourself in your profession. They won't give you a reference if you jump up and leave like this now. At this time of the year. You'll be put on the black list. And you'll find it hard to get another teaching-job. Naxos has enormous influence in the South. Better wait till school closes. (1095)

Margaret threatens Helga not to leave Naxos amid the session for she would be put in black list and she would face difficult to find the next job. However Margaret threatens her with any mean, Helga remains unmoved. This shows Helga's thirst of acquiring new respectful racial identity. Margaret continues her courting skill:

Looking up from her watch, Margaret said: "Well, I've really got to run, or I'll be late myself. And since I'm staying – Better think it over, Helga. There's no place like Naxos, you know. Pretty good salaries, decent rooms, plenty of men, and all that. Ta-ta." (1095)

The salary Helga earns is much less than she needs but Margaret is convincing her that is the much pretty salary that she faces difficulty to have else. This shows that blacks like

Helga are allured for trifle things and limited their identity. Helga understands such motives and unsteadily she is bound to shift her place to find herself in better position.

Her unmoved stance is even more intense in the lines below:

Helga was unmoved. She was no longer concerned with what anyone in Naxos might think of her, for she was now in love with the piquancy of leaving. Automatically her fingers adjusted the Chinese-looking pillows on the low couch that served for her bed. Her mind was busy with plans for departure. Packing, money, trains, and – could she get a berth? (1095)

Now, Helga has no time to hear what others say. She even is not concerned with whoever thinks and says whatever thing about her. She is resolute enough to leave the place at any cost in adventurous search of her racial identity.

Helga Crane is determinedly tilted towards digging out her elegant identity: “- a great “race” woman; she, Helga Crane, a despised mulatto, but something intuitive, some unanalyzed driving spirit of loyalty to the inherent racial need for gorgeousness” (1096). She is hated everywhere in white community and even in her own black community. She is the lovely and refined mixed-race daughter of a Danish white mother and a West Indian black father. Nevertheless, she does have own sort of intuitive potentiality that needs to be recognized and triggered out. She knows her potentiality and so she arouses need for graceful racial identity.

Hall writes that any kind of identity is incoherent:

If we feel we have a unified identity, from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or “narrative of the self” about ourselves. The fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy.

Instead, as the systems of meaning and cultural representation multiply, we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities – anyone of which we could identify with – at least temporally.

*(Modernity and Its Features, 288)*

Complete, secured and ultimate identity is merely the matter of fantasy according to Hall. It is always fleeting. It is under incomplete process as in the novel *Quicksand*. In this novel, the protagonist Helga Crane ceaselessly investigates her possible identity.

When Dr. Anderson, the principal of the elite black school in Naxos where Helga first teaches, inquires about Helga's leaving Naxos, she responds back that she hate maltreatment towards the students in Naxos:

The man smiled, just a little. "The school? You don't like the school?"

The words burst from her. "No, I don't like it. I hate it!" "Why?" The

question was detached too detached" (1097).[...] "Well, for one thing, I

hate hypocrisy, I hate cruelty to students, and to teachers who can't fight

back. I hate backbiting, and sneaking, and pretty jealousy. Naxos? It's

hardly a place at all. It's more like some loathsome, venomous disease.

Ugh! Everybody spending his time in a malicious hunting for the

weaknesses of others, spying, grudging, scratching. (1097-8)

Helga extremely hates Naxos for its inhabitants are full of hypocrisy, hateful manners, malevolent spies for others faults, complaining attitudes even for positive attempts.

Everyone is full of jealousy, no one has idea for bringing change. Helga takes decision to leave such place for refined racial identity instead of being confined in such spiteful place.

Helga Crane has traumatic experience of being born in a slum: “If you’re speaking of family, Dr. Anderson, why, I haven’t any. I was born in a Chicago slum” (1099). In this Helga’s expression, she has feeling of pain to be born in a Chicago slum and not in better place. This expression indirectly declares that she should show her better racial position at any cost.

Helga’s love affair from Dr. Anderson, James Vayle, Olsen to marriage Mr. Green shows her quest of racial identity visits in many love partners:

“The second marriage, to a man of her own race, but not of her own kind—so passionately, so instinctively resented by Helga even at the trivial age of six [...] Memory, flown back to those years following the marriage, dealt her torturing stabs.” (1100)

Though she shifts her love affair from one person to another with an eye to have secured marital position having homely environment, she ever quavers with emergent difficult situation.

Once after Helga’s mother’s death set her identity under worrisome situation:

Her mother’s death, when Helga was fifteen. Her rescue by Uncle Peter, who had sent her to school, a school for Negroes, where for the first time she could breathe freely, where she discovered that because one was dark, one was not necessarily loathsome, and could, therefore, consider oneself without repulsion. (1100)

Helga’s uncle Peter rescued her perception of free breathing. He sent her to school for Negroes. She felt her racial identity not as problematic. However, she went on learning



and experiencing the surrounding world, the world was loathsome that set her into further search of identity.

Nevertheless, her childhood experience was full of alienation as well:

Six years. She had been happy there, as happy as a child unused to happiness dared be. There had been always a feeling of strangeness, of outsidersness, and one of holding her brat for fear that it wouldn't last. It hadn't. It had dwindled gradually into eclipse of painful isolation. (1100)

When she was of six year, she started to feel certain weirdness, isolated and loneliness. She felt therefore hurting experience during her childhood period that made her felt the necessity for her new identity's exploration.

As Helga was growing, she started to lay her career as a professional person: "She had looked forward with pleasant expectancy to working in Naxos when the chance came" (1100). As the building up of professional career, she hoped to work in Naxos school as a teacher which would explode her racial identity into admirable position.

Gradually, Helga started to find different from her expectation: "She began to feel terrified and lost. And she was a little hungry too, for her small money was dwindling and she felt the need to economize somehow. Food was the easiest" (1106). She was economically exploited. Though she works hard in the school, she is not provided with proper amount of money. She starts to feel estranged among Naxos people. Certain social problem of hypocrisy and snobbishness start to surround her that makes her feel to seek better place for her.

She goes to Chicago from Naxos where also she needs to do something to keep her ends meet: "Mrs. Hayes-Rore asked Helga what she was thinking of doing when she

got back to Chicago. Had she anything in mind" (1106)? Mrs. Hayes-Rore enquires what she has thought about doing something for living in Chicago to keep her better alive anew.

Slowly, Helga starts to find Chicago also as the place beyond her expectation:

Helga, it appeared, hadn't. The truth was she was she had been thinking of staying in New York. Maybe she could find something there. Everybody seemed to. At least she could make the attempt. Mrs. Hayes-Rore sighed, for no obvious reason. "Um, maybe I can help you. I know people in New York. Do you?" "No?" "New York's the loneliest place in the world if you don't know anybody." "It couldn't possibly be worse than Chicago," said Helga savagely, giving the table support a violent kick. (1110)

Helga shifts to New York where Mrs. Hayes-Rore says her New York to be better place than Chicago, nonetheless, if one does not know anybody in there, it would be worse than Chicago. Mrs. Hayes-Rore assures Helga to help her in many ways like finding job for she knows many people in that city.

In the case of Helga's ignorance in New York, it would be better to return back to Chicago: "This New York seemed somehow more appalling, more scornful, in some inexplicable way even more terrible and uncaring than Chicago. Threatening almost. Ugly. Yes, perhaps she'd better turn back" (1110).

Helga finds New York as better place perchance:

A year thick with various adventures had sped by since that spring day on which Helga Crane had set out away from Chicago's indifferent unkindness for New York in the company of Mrs. Hayes-Rore. New York

she had found not so unkind, not so unfriendly, not so indifferent. There she had been happy, and secured work, had made acquaintances and another friend. (1111)

Helga finds New York more kind and friendly place. She remains happier where she could find her job more secured. She felt that she has found more favorable place to some extent.

Helga feels content as New York friends also look at Naxos with contempt:

Soon she was able to reflect with a flicker of amusement on that constant feeling of humiliation and inferiority which had encompassed her in Naxos. Her New York friends looked with contempt and scorn on Naxos and all its works. This gave Helga a pleasant sense of avengement. Any shreds of self-consciousness or apprehension which at seeming at last to belong somewhere. For she considered that she had, as she put it, “found herself”. (1112)

Helga feels certain revenge at Naxos in New Yorkers’ hatred towards it. She feels joy and content. In a way she considers that she has found her ‘self’ to more extent.

On the course of searching more secured racial identity, Helga also thinks of getting married with financially strong man:

Some day she intended to marry one of those alluring brown or yellow men who danced attendance on her. Already financially successful, any one of them could give to her the things which she had now come to desire, a home like Anne’s, cars of expensive makes such as lined the avenue, clothes and furs [...]. (1113)

Helga intends to be safer and stronger extending hand for marriage with economically sound man. This act would satisfy her quarry of strong racial identity.

Bit by bit, Helga starts to feel racially prejudiced talks even in New York:

Why, Helga wondered, with unreasoning exasperation, didn't they find something else to talk of? Why must the race problem always creep in?

She refused to go on to another gathering. It would, she thought, be simply the same old thing. (1117)

Helga finds undesired racially problematic talk everywhere that makes her feel tired. She doesn't want to attend any gathering for that would inflict her with unintended unnecessary racial fuss. It plunges her to the next step of racial identity's quarry.

Black ones are looked ever as having limited access in every sphere of society like politics, education and financial activities:

It was as if she were shut up, boxed up, with hundreds of her race, closed up with that something in the racial character which had always been, to her, inexplicable, alien. Why, she demanded in fierce rebellion, should she be yoked to these despised black folk? (1119)

Blacks are just supposed to be confined in certain narrow domain not to let them free for their personality development devoid of innovative talent. Whites always want to define them as undefinable, alien etc. This condition arouses rebellion tendency in Helga. Helga as rebel against whites' folk of hatred towards blacks makes her stronger.

Helga's experience in New York increased:

Clanging trolley bells, quarreling cats, cackling phonographs, raucous laughter, complaining motor-horns, low singing, mingled in the familiar

medley that is Harlem. Black figures, white figures, little forms, big forms, small groups, large groups, sauntered, or hurried by. It was gay, grotesque, and a little weird. Helga Crane felt singularly apart from it all. Entering the waiting doorway, they descended through a furtive, narrow passage, into a vast subterranean room. Helga smiled, thinking that this was one of those places characterized by the righteous as a hell. (1120-21)

She increasingly finds New York as the place of weird life styles. She starts to feel alienated from all those concerns. She starts to think the city as a hell. This circumstance starts her to seek new better place: “Evidently they were interested, curious, and perhaps a little amused about this Negro girl on her way to Denmark alone” (1124). She furthers her journey of exploring her better place towards Denmark.

Wherever she goes, Helga does have a sweet memory of her former lover: “Nevertheless, the thought of love stayed with her, not prominent, definite; but shadowy, incoherent. And in a remote corner of her consciousness lurked the memory of Dr. Anderson’s serious smile and gravely musical voice”(1124). Though Helga Crane strives to raise hatred towards Dr. Anderson, she does have certain feeling of love for him lurked somewhere in her consciousness. This situation also shows her position of seeking identity.

Helga’s search of identity continues. She is now in Denmark. It is evident in: “her aunt had finished kissing her and exclaimed in Danish: “Little Helga! Goodness! But how you have grown! (1124)” These lines show that Helga is in the process of seeking identity and her identity is in the process of becoming. Her search of identity from one place to another is evident in the next portrayal as well: ““Welcome to Denmark, to

Copenhagen, to our home,” said the new uncle in queer, proud, oratorical English. And to Helga’s smiling, grateful “Thank you,” he returned: “Your trunks? Your checks?” also in English, and then lapsed into Danish. (1125)” Here, Helga’s portrayal in different languages and tones varying from English and Danish moves Helga’s identity under process.

Helga’s identity is constructed newly in Denmark: “And, noting Helga’s puzzled glance at her own subdued costume, she explained laughingly. “Oh, I’m an old married lady, and a Dane”(1126). Now, her identification is connected with her married marital status and Danish Nationality. Helga further was assertive in her own manner and interest. It is shown as:

Certainly she loved color with a passion that perhaps only Negroes and Gypsies know. But she had a deep faith in the perfection of her own taste, and no mind to be bedecked in flaunting flashy things. Still-she had to admit that Fru Dahl was right about the dressing-gown. It did suit her. Perhaps an evening dress. And she knew that she had lovely shoulders, and her feet were nice. (1127)

The lines show that Helga is determinedly fond of her own identity. She loves her own color, taste and dress. She loves her own labor and own style of independent living suggested by ‘lovely shoulders’ and ‘nice feet’ respectively. It seems that Helga’s identity is getting maturity in the process of its quest.

Franz Fanon relates white supremacist perspective of white, “Whiteness, Fanon asserts, has become a symbol of purity, of Justice, Truth, Virginity. It defines what it

means to be civilized, modern and human” (xiii). Whites see white color as civility, virginity, purity, modern and humanity.

Gradually, in Denmark too, Helga started to feel insecure in terms of her recognition. It is evident in:

To them this girl, this Helga Crane, this mysterious niece of the Dahls, was not to be reckoned seriously in their scheme of things. True, she was attractive, unusual, in an exotic, almost savage way, but she wasn't one of them. She didn't at all count. (1128)

Helga's identity gets often under crisis in here too. She is taken as mysterious, exotic that cannot be exactly understood. She is savage means uncivilized as well and she is not considered as valuable. It sets her under the process of searching identity.

People's misunderstanding on her continues:

A curio. A peacock. Their progress through she shops was an event; an event for Copenhagen as well as for Helga Crane. Her dark, alien appearance was to most people an astonishment. Some stared surreptitiously, some openly, and some stopped dead in front of her in order more fully to profit by their stares. “*Den Sorte*” dropped freely, audibly, from many lips. (1130)

Helga is taken as curio or peacock mean as souvenir or thing of attraction and show.

People started to feel strangely alien and dark. People took her skeptically. This means the situation reinforced her identity to be bound under utter doubt. This is the circumstance which set Helga under quest of her identity.

Danish environment forced her to curve accordingly but Helga rejected as the process of searching and asserting her own identity:

Helga crane's new existence was intensely pleasant to her; it gratified her augmented sense of self-importance. And it suited her. She had to admit that the Danes had the right idea. To each his own milieu. Enhance what was already in one's possession. In America Negroes sometimes talked loudly of this, but in their hearts they repudiated it. [...] What they wanted, asked for, begged for, was to be like their white overlords. They were ashamed to be Negroes, but not ashamed to beg to be something else. Something inferior. Not quite genuine. Too bad! (1130)

In Denmark, Danes tried their best to bend Helga in their own setting, but, this situation enhanced Helga's self-importance. It was the situation like in America for Negroes. They would talk loudly as if they suit themselves in whites' setting, but, in reality they would resist it to be so from their inner heart. Helga Crane in the similar fashion, is determined not to lose her self-determination regarding her recognition. She is forced to be ashamed to be mulatto as Negroes were forced to be ashamed to be Negroes. However she is asked to be like whites like the Negroes were asked to be like whites, she is committed not to erase her selfness as a strong sign of her finding identity.

Helga Crane didn't, however, think often of America, excepting in unfavorable contrast to Denmark. For she had resolved never to return to the existence of ignominy which the New World of opportunity and promise forced upon Negroes. (1131)



Helga wants to forget America for it is only so called dreamland where many opportunities invite us. It is the land of humiliation. This dreamland tries to erase Helga's identity disregarding all Negroes. This Helga's attitude shows her assertiveness in terms her seeking identity.

West opines, "Black people have always been in America's wilderness in search of promised land" (25). Whites have taught black people that America is chosen land for heavenly life. Blacks always hope of so kind of America nevertheless, their dream gets ever deferred. In the same light Helga imagines her identity devoid of children in America:

How stupid she had been ever to have thought that she could marry and perhaps have children in a land where every dark child was handicapped at the start by the shroud of color! She saw, suddenly, the giving birth to little, helpless, unprotesting Negro children as a sin, an unforgivable outrage. More black folk to suffer indignities. More dark bodies for mobs to lynch. No, Helga Crane didn't think often of America. It was too humiliating, too disturbing. (1131)

It is useless to marry and up bring children in America. America sees black children as the signs of sin. They are for lynching. America doesn't see any color child having certain potential. The country devalue and humiliate black children. Therefore, Helga doesn't think of searching identity through marriage and getting children. She even doesn't want to remember America as a symptom of seeking identity. She utterly wants to forget America: "To her, Helga Crane, it had come at last, and she meant to cling to it. So she turned her back on painful America, resolutely shutting out the griefs, the

humiliations, the frustrations, which she had endured there”(1131). Helga wants to turn her back on America for this nation is painful for black people like Helga. This Helga’s position of turning her back on America shows she is in the process of searching her secured identity.

Rigney points out that “blackness is a key to an identity that is always multiple, shared, a form of membership in community” (55). Black’s identity relies in the power of declaring blackness itself is true identity. Helga’s assertion regarding her identity is shown in these lines:

Here it was that one day an old countrywoman asked her to what manner of mankind she belonged and at Helga’s replying: “I’m a Negro,” had become indignant, retorting angrily that, just because she was old and a countrywoman she could not be so easily fooled, for she knew as well as everyone else that Negroes were black and had woolly hair. (1132)

Color people are taken as foolish with hatred for blackness and unusual hair etc. But, Helga assertively declares that she is a Negro. It shows that she loves what she really is. This shows Helga’s original identity in respected position as sought of identity.

In search of identity, marriage is taken as a process. The reference of marriage is shown in several places like in: “Any of these Helga might marry, was Aunt Katrina’s opinion. “And,” she added, “others.” Or maybe Helga herself had some ideas.” Here, Aunt Katrina thinks that after marriage Helga’s search of identity becomes completed. But, Helga adds, “Helga had. She didn’t, she responded, believe in mixed marriages, “between races, you know.” They brought only trouble-to the children-as she herself knew but too well from bitter experience” (1133). Helga’s response about marriage is that

marriage itself is not stable process that doesn't guarantee stable identity. Similarly, marriage brings many children and that is the source of troublesome experience. So, Helga's attitude of seeking complete identity is not possible through marriage.

Helga's insecure identity in Denmark is evident in the following lines:

Helga Crane said: "Ah, Fru Fischer. It's good to see you." She meant it. Her whole body was tense with suppressed indignation. Burning inside like the confined fire of a hot furnace. She was so harassed that she smiled in self-protection. And suddenly she was oddly cold. An intimation of things distant, but none the less disturbing, oppressed her with a faintly sick feeling. (1134)

Helga feels even in Denmark as suppressed with hatred. She feels odd, harassed and burning inside. She feels that she is alienated and sick due to contempt in Danish environment. This condition reinforces her identity seeking tendency into more heighten form. She is not satisfied in Denmark: "Well into Helga's second year in Denmark, came an indefinite discontent" (1135). In such situation of her discontent she happens to memorize her marital concern which definitely adds her frustration:

And then on a warm spring day came Anne's letter telling of her coming marriage to Anderson, who retained still his shadowy place in Helga Crane's memory. It added, somehow, to her discontent, and to her growing dissatisfaction with her peacock's life. This too, annoyed her. (1135)

Helga happens to memorize her marriage with Anderson through Anne's letter during her frustration caused by unfavorable Danish environment which extends her depressive

mood. Actually, marriage has treated her as a dolly and matter of plaything and matter of beauty and pleasure like peacock. It annoyed her for that demoralizes her value. Her annoyance develops her determination to upgrade her identity.

Neither Negroes are valuable in Denmark nor in America:

Go back to America, where they hated Negroes! To America, where Negroes were not people. To America, where Negroes were allowed to be beggars only, of life, of happiness, of security. To America, where everything had been taken from those dark ones, liberty, respect, even the labor of their hands. To America, where if one had Negro blood, one mustn't expect money, education, or, sometime, even work whereby one might earn bread. Perhaps she was wrong to bother about it now that she was so far away. Helga couldn't, however, help it. (1135)

In America, Negroes are not treated like human beings that means that they are treated like in animalistic way. Blacks are not free in America and they are not respected even their sweats are not counted in there. It is difficult for the blacks to ends meet. It is unbearable situation in America and this situation creates Helga's bold determination of seeking identity. In the process of seeking identity, Helga gets to Denmark and she suffers in there too.

Never could she recall the shames and often the absolute horrors of her black man's existence in America without the quickening of her heart's beating and a sensation of disturbing nausea. It was too awful. The sense of dread of it was almost a tangible thing in her throat. (1135)

Whites' humiliation in America against the blacks is unbearable in America which is suggested by disturbing nausea. It is much dreadful scenario for the blacks in America. Helga sets for many places to get rid of such terrible situation which is analogous to setting herself in search of identity.

In the process of search of racial identity, Helga refuses a famous white artist's marriage proposal utterly: "And suddenly, she didn't at all care. She said, lightly, but firmly: "But you see, Herr Olsen, I'm not for sale. Not to you. Not to any white man. I don't at all care to be owned. Even by you"" (1139). She rejects the proposal and states that marriage treats her as the matter of male's possession disregarding her difference and pride. But, she needs her bold and respectful presence in life and society.

She reinforces her unwillingness to marry with Olsen in her saying: "She proceeded, deliberately: "I think you don't understand me. What I'm trying to say is this, I don't want you. I wouldn't under any circumstances marry you"" (1139). Helga is not ready to marry with Axel Olsen at any cost for that marriage devours her identity and blurs her mightily respectful presence in the family. It shows that Helga is trying to find herself everywhere.

Helga mentions that she is not ready to marry with a Dane because of her racial trouble that is clear in her own saying:

But more gently, less indifferently, she said: "You see, I couldn't marry a white man. I simply couldn't. It isn't just you, not just personal, you understand. It's deeper, broader than that. It's racist. Someday maybe you'll be glad. We can't tell, you know; if we were married, you might

come to be ashamed of me, to hate me, to hate all dark people. My mother did that. (1139)

After the proposal of marriage, Helga offers her explanation of retort, stating that she could never marry outside of her race, thus causing extreme distress for her white relatives who cannot understand her will and decision. Her mother was a Danish white mother and a West Indian black father. Here, she expresses that even her mother was racial who would hate dark people. Her racial traumatic experience is backed up by her mother's mischief. This is why she doesn't want to marry with white people as the safeguard of her color identity.

Helga rejected Olsen for marriage as strong sign of her search for racial identity. She even dislikes his pictures: "I know Herr Olsen is a great artist, but no, I don't like that picture. It looks bad, wicked" (1140). This Helga's denial towards Olsen's artistic pictures shows her determination not to mention white people's anything in life. It is the voice of maintaining her distinct racial identity. She sees that marrying with any white people, her subjectivity would be demoralized that she doesn't want. It is evident in the line: "Glad though the Dahls may have been that their niece had had the chance of refusing the hand of Axel Olsen, they were anything but glad that she had taken that chance" (1140). Helga avoids Olsen's hand as life partner as utter assertion of her racial identity for Olsen is white.

Helga is determined on her seeking identity and she thinks that even money does not guarantee identity. It is above money. It is clear in the situation that she doesn't become ready to marry when Olsen does have plenty of money. "Olsen had money and enviable position" (1141). Olsen has much money and he does have prestigious position

in society but Helga takes the position of independent identity. She means that her identity or women's identity is not stepped on husband's position or male's position. She seeks identity beyond inclination towards upper-class or any kind of social, cultural dependence.

By and by, Helga started to feel estrangement of different kind even in Denmark. She started to feel her identity unsecured in there too. Her relatives and Danish people started to portray her in unnatural way that started to set her identity under fluctuation. This situation started to blow her up to identity seeking. People in Denmark started to address her stereotypically that utterly annoyed her: ““Yes, you're right. She's amazing. Marvelous, he,” he muttered” (1128). Stereotypical representation through different words and phrases on Helga goes on like: “Superb eyes ... color ... neck column ... yellow ... hair ... alive ... wonderful ... (1129)”. People in Denmark started to portray her through unusual terms showing Helga to be amazing, surprising etc. Stereotypes on her continuously emerged: “A curio. A peacock. ... Her dark, alien appearance was to most people an astonishment. Some stared surreptitiously, some openly, and some stopped dead in front of her in order more fully to profit by their stares” (1129). Danes represented her in many unusual ways. She is treated like alien, dark, and material of show, beauty and pleasure. Now, Helga is dissatisfied in Denmark: “Well into Helga's second year in Denmark, came an indefinite discontent”(1135). This made Helga unwell. This made Helga feel her identity under risk and this situation plays the background role for her flee to America back.

Helga's relatives also could not stop her from her bold decision to return back to America further in search of identity: “Without demure, opposition, or recrimination Herr

and Fru Dahl accepted Helga's decision to go back to America" (1135). The narrator asks some rhetorical questions on the verge of Helga's leaving Denmark:

The last day came. The last good-byes were said. Helga began to regret that she was leaving. Why couldn't she have two lives, or why couldn't she felt heavy at heart. Already she looked back with infinite regret at the two years in the country which had given her so much, of pride, of happiness, of wealth, and of beauty. (1143)

The narrator asks some rhetorical questions to show surprise that Helga is leaving Denmark despite her many achievements. She achieved many things in Denmark like pride, wealth, beauty and happiness. But, for Helga, all these gains are merely transitory and not finally satisfactory. Her major concern is to attain secured identity. Until and unless stable identity is established, everything whether that be money or beauty or anything else becomes futile. She does have strong sense of identity. Therefore, she becomes ready to set her for discovery of her respected identity despite any regretful condition. In this same scene Helga quits Denmark: "Good-bye Denmark! Good-bye, Good-bye!" (1143).

After getting back to America, she tries to get Dr. Anderson's hand for marriage, her lover while in Naxos. But Anderson refuses her:

The wish to give herself had been so intense that Dr. Anderson's surprising, trivial apology loomed as a direct refusal of the offering. Whatever outcome she had expected, it had been something else than this, this mortification, this feeling of ridicule and self-loathing, this knowledge



that she had deluded herself. It was all, she told herself, as unpleasant as possible. (1152)

Dr. Anderson's response was unexpected for Helga for she had expected that he would marry her. But, quite surprisingly, he rejected her. It was Helga's delusion and more unpleasant matter. It set her identity under more unsecured way. She was more depressed now.

Helga's seeking of the self goes on continuously. Now, on the way, she comes to see the reverend Mr. Pleasant Green. "He had introduced himself as the Reverend Mr. Pleasant Green in proffering his escort for which Helga had been grateful because she and still felt a little dizzy and much exhausted" (1155). Mr. Pleasant Green introduces himself to Helga and it is the matter of Helga's pleasure as well. Latter, Helga married to him:

And so in the confusion of seductive repentance Helga Crane was married to the grandiloquent Reverend Mr. Pleasant Green, that rattish yellow man, who had so kindly, so unctuously, proffered his escort to her hotel on the memorable night of her conversion. With him she willingly, even eagerly, left the sins and temptations of New York behind her to, as he put it, "labor in the vineyard of the Lord" in the tiny Alabama town where he was pastor to a scattered and primitive flock. And where, as the wife of the preacher, she was a person of relative importance. Only relative. (1157)

Helga willingly married to Mr. Pleasant Green. She accepted the role of Mr. Green's wife. She along with her husband Mr. Green in Alabama City leaving New York. Now her role started to become washing, cooking etc. which is clear in these lines: "In the

morning she was serene again. Peace had returned. And she could go happily, inexpertly, about the humble tasks of her household, cooking, dish-washing, sweeping, dusting, mending, and darning” (1159). Helga went on searching her identities. She went on gaining many identities but she again remained unfulfilled.

After her marriage with Mr. Green, Helga became mother of many children sooner. “The children used her up. There were already three of them, all born within the short space of twenty months” (1160). Her children started to swallow her time. This situation also started to blur identity. “So there was no time for the pursuit of beauty, or for the uplifting of other harassed and teeming women, or for the instruction of their neglected children” (1160). Her occupancy of children banned her from cultivating her beautiful identity and women’s advancement. So, now she has felt surrounding of her children as disturbance on the way of seeking identity. Gradually, she also felt hatred against her husband as the sense of empowering her identity. Marriage has created obstacle in the wake of her identity that she never had thought of. It is shown in the following lines:

The thought of her husband roused in her a deep and contemptuous hatred. At his every approach she had forcibly to subdue a furious inclination to scream out in protest. Shame, too, swept over her at every thought of her marriage. Marriage. This sacred thing of which parsons and other Christian folk ranted so sanctimoniously, how immoral – according to their own standards – it could be! But Helga felt also a modicum of pity for him, as for one already abandoned. She meant to leave him. And it

was, she had to concede, all of her own doing, this marriage. Nevertheless, she hated him. (1167)

Marriage has disturbed in finding Helga's self. This condition has created her hatred against her husband. She has meant to leave her in one sense and she also has aroused pity for him in other sense. This situation increases her sense of searching identity again.

In short, Helga has set into her ceaseless quest of identity. She goes everywhere from Naxos to Chicago, New York, Denmark and again back to America. But, she doesn't find herself fit in all those places. She finds her disregarded and devalued in some sense. She finds her identity suspended in some way. She reject's Olsen's marriage proposal disbelieving him for being white but Dr. Anderson rejects her for marriage for whom she believes for making her marital identity as stable. Later she marries to Mr. Green and begets many children. Where ever she goes and whatever she does to maintain her being strong, but nothing maintains her acceptance. Therefore, till last of the novel, Helga is not satisfied with her full being of acquaintance. It shows that novel is an incomplete story of the protagonist Helga's quest of her identity.

### Chapter III: The Novel *Quicksand* as the Story of Incomplete Search of Racial Identity

Identity is the matter of continuous shifting whether that be cultural identity or racial identity. In the novel *Quicksand*, the protagonist Helga jumps courageously from one adventurous place to another with an eye to satisfying herself finding finally comfortable racial identity however, that process remains incomplete.

Helga Crane, the protagonist of the novel *Quicksand* has proved to be a non-conventional representation of the figure of “Tragic Mulatta”, a biracial character. Helga’s family’s interracial background and her experience as an abandoned kid clearly have an influence on her outcome as a tragic character resembling the writer Nella Larsen’s own real life experience. Since, she fears becoming like her parents and being treated in the way they both treated each other, she tries to avoid the same plight in her life and seeks safety fleeing from one place to another.

She is finally unable to find the community she longs for due to her incapability to integrate her dual racial and cultural duality as a single one. Yet her effort to reject the contradictions and pretensions visible in the black communities of Naxos and Harlem, and her departure from Denmark after becoming aware of the different kind of complex racism present in Europe, her American attitudes etc. are indeed part of her identity. Her undervalued situation confirms her determination to develop herself into an independent woman who does not necessarily act or agree with what others expect from her. This determination shows her background for seeking racial identity.

Helga Crane in the novel *Quicksand* is displayed as a strong and ambitious female character that could have been able to avoid her classification as a “Tragic Mulatta” as a promotion of her in the process of seeking racial identity. She certainly deals with the

objectification of black people including black women, but her final tragedy is found in the fact that she has to give up her intellect and quest for identity in order to face her new married rural life in the South. By abandoning the struggle related to reinforce her mixed heritage as a bold identity, she actually moves into a worse entrapment that is an oppressive and hopeless life as a housewife married to Mr. Green

The protagonist in Nella Larsen's novel *Quicksand* Helga Crane gets dissatisfied in Naxos for the place is full of hypocrisy and trickery. She also equally gets discontented with the school system's machinery treatment towards the black students. Due to such reasons, Helga Crane boldly takes decision to flee away from Naxos to find more comfortable and favorable place. She flees to Chicago, Harlem, Denmark and again returns back to America. But she gets fulfilled nowhere. Everywhere, she finds problematic and critical situation of different sort. She even changes her suits from James Vayle, Dr. Anderson, Olsen to Mr. Green. She did have better chance to have socially respectful position if she had accepted Axel Olsen's marriage proposal, nonetheless, she rejects him thinking that her position would not be secured further for he a white man. Everywhere Helga's identity slides due to some odd kind of reason.

After marrying the preacher who converted her, she moves with him to the rural Deep South. There she is disillusioned by the people's adherence to religion. In each of her moves, Crane fails to find fulfillment. Helga is trying to find herself

Helga meets the Reverend Mr. Pleasant Green. Suspecting that God had directed her to the church Helga thinks that she found her "something," her happiness. She quickly marries to Reverend Green, a preacher who prays for her a lot. Helga lives and endures the duties of a wife of a Reverend Green and begets three children in the space of 20

months, and one soon after. As the novel concludes, Helga is bewildered that God has indeed made her endure hardship, childbirth, poverty and much more. She feels disgusted when she notices that she is again pregnant with her fifth child.

The novel ends with the once exotic, beautiful, intelligent Helga lapsing into depression, conquered by the “quicksand” of racial identity, social class and sexism that she has spent a lifetime trying to overcome.

The novel reflects the author’s own quest for acceptance for everywhere she is not fit for her racial mulatto. Helga represents the writer as a refined mixed-race daughter of a Danish white mother and a West Indian black father. Her father died soon after she was born. Unable to feel comfortable with her European-American relatives, Crane lives in various places in the United States and visits Denmark, searching for people among whom she feels at home.

Thus, the novel remains the doctrine of Helga Crane’s struggle of finding completely satisfying racial recognition. Neither she is satisfied with her black fellow people nor does she find comfort in white relatives. Her search of racial identity remains suspended under illusion of transitory fulfilment. Actually her quarry of racial recognition is still unfulfilled. In this sense, we can take the novel as chronicle of Helga Crane’s incomplete struggling and adventurous journey of exploring her racial acknowledgement. The novel depicts vividly the troubled plight of black people in general and specifically black women in the contemporary American society.

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