



Afrofuturist Resistance in Colson Whitehead's The Underground Railroads

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Abstract

This research aims to investigate the Afrofuturist resistance in Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroads* (2016). The novel is an interlinking collection for the history of slavery traces the protagonist's journey to achieve freedom. The research unfolds the types of resistance that the Blacks utilized to obtain a reconstructed identity and an enhanced future as presented by Mark Dery, Ytasha Womac and Isiah Lavender. The novel reclaims the historical narratives to resist the Whites' control over the past and shift this power to the Blacks through knowledge and Deblackness. It draws over the concepts such as the relation between technology and Michel Foucault's power, racial discrimination and slaves' experiences. It revolves around a group of slaves that decide to abandon their plantation to resist the chains of the Whites power to control the slave physically and mentally. Imagination presented as a tool of resistance used by Whitehead to enforce a place for Blacks through imagining an alternative reality where people of color can decide their destiny. In addition, the research reflects the double consciousness of the Blacks and the different procedures followed by the protagonist Cora to stand against it. Resistance proves that Blacks have a distinctive identity and unforgettable legacy that bridges the gap between the Black generations and finds them a place in the future among other races.

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المقاومة الأفرو-مستقبلية في رواية كولسون وايتهايد "السكك الحديدية تحت الأرض"

حسان مؤيد حامد **

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المستخلص:

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة مقاومة الأفرو-مستقبلية في رواية كولسون وايتهايد "السكك الحديدية تحت الأرض" (2016). تُعد الرواية عملاً متصلاً بتاريخ العبودية، حيث تتبّع رحلة البطلة وصولاً إلى الحرية. يتناول البحث أشكال المقاومة التي استخدمها السود لإعادة بناء هويتهم وصياغة مستقبل أفضل، كما قدمها منظرو الأفرو-مستقبلية مثل مارك ديري، ويتاشا ووماك، وإيزابا لافندر. تعيد الرواية صياغة

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السرد التاريخي لمقاومة سيطرة البيض على الماضي وتحويل هذه السلطة إلى السود من خلال قوة المعرفة ونهج محو السواد. كما تستند إلى مفاهيم مثل العلاقة بين التكنولوجيا والقوة التي قمها ميشيل فوكو، والتمييز العنصري، والتجارب المفروضة على العبيد. تدور أحداث الرواية حول مجموعة من العبيد الذين يقررون الهروب من مزرعتهم لمقاومة قيود السلطة البيضاء التي تسيطر عليهم جسدياً وعقلياً. كما يُقدّم التخييل كأداة مقاومة يستخدمها وابتهايد لفرص وجود مكان للسود من خلال تصور واقع بديل يتمكن فيه أصحاب البشرة الملونة تحديد مصيرهم. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يعكس البحث الوعي المزدوج لدى السود والإجراءات المختلفة التي تتبعها البطلة كورا لمواجهة. ويخلص البحث إلى أن المقاومة تهيئ للسود هوية مميزة وإرثاً لا يُنسى، مما يملأ الفجوة بين الأجيال ويضمن لهم مكاناً في المستقبل بين الأعراق الأخرى

الكلمات المفتاحية : الأفروفوتوريزم، إزالة السود، الوعي المزدوج، الهوية، السلطة، المقاومة

1. Introduction

Afrofuturism is an aesthetic movement that changed the history of the Black generations and enhanced their place in the society. It is a movement that combines cultural, artistic and philosophical aspects that originated in the late twentieth century; it further combines science fiction, fantasy, history, and African diaspora (Yaszek, 2006: 43). Afrofuturism's roots are traced back to different historical, social, and cultural developments. The African diaspora is one of the early influences on the development of Afrofuturism. This diaspora is linked with the long history of colonialism that caused the displacement of the Africans by the transatlantic slave trade. These experiences serve as the main motif for the Africans to write about their future using and imagining different reality to shape the cultural expressions of the next generations. The African-descended generations utilize Afrofuturism to resist the various forms of racism and stereotypes that weakened and besmeared their image.

In 1994, Mark Dery coined the term "Afrofuturism" in "Black to the Future". He was primarily concerned with the postwar aesthetic methods used by African American artists in relation to contemporary American techno-culture. The term was used to describe "other stories" from black communities that "tell about things to come, technology, and culture." (Dery, 1994: 180) The rise of global capitalism, whereby the scientific rationales of Western culture allowed African American artists to witness and analyze "images of technology and prosthetically enhanced future" (Dery, 1994: 180). This allowed them to confront the epistemic trend in which the prevailing frameworks of Eurocentric imagination have shaped and haunted the public imagination. From such a historical context, Afrofuturism developed.

Similar to Dery, Ytasha Womac in *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (2013) defines Afrofuturism as "an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation" in which "Afrofuturists redefine culture and notions of blackness for today and the future" by combining "elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magical realism with non-Western beliefs" (Womac, 2013: 9). Womac points out that Afrofuturism is a literary tool that used by the African authors to redefine the cultural state of blackness for the future. She claims that the literary elements can change the centrality of the Western control via technologies, and seek for the science fiction's liberation. This liberation is achieved through resistance. Thus, Afrofuturism is used to redefine Blacks future from African's point of view. It further changes the cultural state of blackness as equal to Westerners using science fiction to resist the Whites racial narrative.

1.1 Afrofuturism and resistance

The notion of resistance can be related to a larger framework such as social politics and power. Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* explains his understanding of resistance as functioning within a power structure of its own instead of being located within a state. According to Foucault "where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in

relation to power” (Foucault, 1978: 95). For him every part of life, whether culturally or literary, can be seen as a form of standing against the state’s power. Eating, dressing, gestures, language and literary images are all kinds of resistance.

However, Lila Abu-Lughod cautions against Foucault’s basic view of resistance. She stresses that resistance is crucial as a "diagnostic of power"(Abu-Lughod, 1990: 42). Power for her is not merely a top-down phenomenon because it operates through various social relations. She emphasizes the ability of cultural frameworks in shaping the experiences of oppression and resistance. Similarly, Sherry Ortner clarified why "resistance studies" are unsettling, and recommended that the emphasis is shifted to the larger political, cultural, and economic framework that gives rise to ‘cultures of resistance’ (Ortner, 1995: 182). Accordingly, the African culture resists the Western prevailed power in determining their future. This resistance occurred through Afrofuturism, which is essential to comprehend the power structure that prevailed by various stereotypes and racial discrimination against people of color, that Afrofuturism tends to stand against them.

Moreover, Afrofuturism seeks to explore the historical injustices faced by black communities through ages of slavery. It imagines a future or\and reimagines the history to show that black voices exist and they have their strategies to resist the Western racial encounters. Various authors such as Octavia Butler and Colson Whitehead prove that freedom can be achieved only if black people dismissed the Western control over technology. The resistance of this technology played a pivotal role in reconstructing their past and determining their future. Afrofuturism gives the Africans voice to speak freely while implanting the strategies of resistance in the literary texts to control their history and future.

Reclamation of narratives is one of the strategies that used by the Blacks to express their resistance. Western traditional history misrepresented and overlooked the horrible experiences of black communities. The Western centrality over telling history distorts the Black’s image with a stereotypical description of their lifestyle and appearance. Authors like Whitehead, Tade Thompson and Maurice Carlos Ruffin thrive to rewrite these narratives by creating black characters within black stories. Those authors represent the real experiences of the Blacks without distorting the authenticity of their history. According to Danielle Fuentes Morgan who is a professor specialized in African American literature :

resistance reveals black potentiality through the reclamation of the iconography of slavery, by remembering the past otherwise they underscore the continued relevance of slavery on the black experience and unveil the inadequacy of post-racialization in the 20th century and beyond into black futures” (Morgan, 2018: 20).

Resistance can be achieved not only by remembering the past, but by reconstruct the Western discourses in determining the future of Blacks. Reclamation of narratives serves as a useful solution that dismantles the inherited stereotypes over the blacks and shows their potential responses on how they can erase the effects of slavery.

Further, imagination is another tool used to express the black’s identity. It is undertaken as a resistant strategy to reconstruct the Black’s present by imagining an alternative future. Womac explains that “creating stories with people of color in the future defies the norm. With the power of technology and emerging freedoms, Black writers have more control over their image than ever before” (Womac, 2013: 24). By envisioning alternative worlds, Afrofuturism encourages to imagine futures that deviate from the oppressive reality of the present. A world that searches for freedom rather than subjugation, a world that challenges the dystopic view that depicts Black future as grievous.

The reconstruction of the past is Colson Whitehead's method to show that Blacks can change the controlled narratives of their history. He used the Afrofuturist reclamation of narratives and imagination to resist the Whites subjugation over science fiction. Afrofuturism's strategies of resistance are applied in his novel *The Underground Railroad* (2016) which portrays the journey of Cora, a slave seeking freedom as she travels to various states aboard subterranean railroad cars in the American South. Caesar, her compatriot in servitude, urges Cora to flee from the Georgia plantation of her birth. He instructed her to journey north, traveling in the boxcar of a secret subterranean train.

However, the slave catcher, Ridgeway, wants to catch Cora because of his failure to catch her mother Mabel when she ran away years ago. Ridgeway follows Cora and Caesar to South Carolina, where he captures Caesar and keeps hitting him several times. Cora continues her quest for freedom alone to North Carolina, where she spends months hiding in an attic of a white family before being discovered and captured. Her cyclical journey of escape and capture and escape takes her through Tennessee and Indiana and finally out West. At the end, she did not achieve her freedom using the technology of the enslaver; instead, an old man carries Cora to her freedom through his old wagon.

2. Resistance in The Underground Railroads

The Underground Railroad reflects the position of the Black people under the Whites' control. It is a comprehensive rereading of the American history. Whitehead turns the metaphoric rails to real underground machines, a subway of rails headed to the north that carries Black people to their freedom. The white's power shapes the stereotypical image of the Black's weakness that controls their mentality. Besides, the racial discrimination and inferiority implanted through generations of slavery by power holders is directed to subdue Blacks in every possible way. This power creates a savage slave trade which scattered Blacks over Europe.

White enslavers made up stereotypes to support their supremacy in the political, social, and economic spheres. Since enslaving individuals denoted upper class status, white nationalists were obligated to employ violence to eliminate slave resistance by cruel treatment. People in slavery experienced dehumanization, through having fewer roles, and limited by activities that their owners thought essential. Individual, familial relationships and behavioral training were shaped by social control constraints. Such cultural beliefs were taken from enslaved people to conform to their oppressors' expectations. State and federal courts upheld the cruel and dehumanizing policies, which were politicized and accepted as necessary to keep the whites in power (Kelly, 2018: 27).

This power can be in the hands of the blacks as Afrofuturist reclamation of history. Resistance through standing against the whites' control leads the protagonist, Cora and other slaves, to react and escape from the hell of slavery. However, Cora didn't like the Whites' technology as a tool for her escape. She looked at the machines as monstrous creatures and imagined them as a trap that will never transport her to freedom. Cora describes the railroads as:

The locomotive was black, an ungainly contraption led by the triangular snout of the cow-catcher, though there would be few animals where this engine was headed. The bulb of the smokestack was next, a soot-covered stalk. The main body consisted of a large black box topped by the engineer's cabin. Below that, pistons and large cylinders engaged in a relentless dance with the ten wheels, two sets of small ones in front and three behind. The colored engineer waved back at them from his cabin, grinning toothlessly. (Whitehead, 2016: 169)

The burden of letting away the Randall plantation keeps her thinking about her anonymous future. Her garden plot is the most precious thing that she ever had. Leaving these simple properties is a form of resistance against one's will. She did not want to spend years protecting this a simple garden plot that will neither give her safety nor freedom like the locomotives of the white's technology. This technology of the underground railroads as she describes is a "dilapidated boxcar" that metaphorically means the illusion of freedom that Blacks attempted to gain with these railroads. However, the railroads hand them back to their enslavers.

Cora's mother, Mabel, implants the seeds of resistance. She is the first slave that dares to escape the plantation. She abandons everything behind including Cora as a price for her freedom. She sacrificed her family and her life to escape through the woods since freedom is priceless and requires a sacrifice. The narrator describes how Mabel escaped the plantation:

Mabel wasn't going to die on Randall, even if she'd never been a mile away from the grounds in her life. She turned her escape over in her head all day, let no other thought intrude or dissuade. There were islands in the swamp follow them to the continent of freedom. She took the vegetables she raised, flint and tinder, a machete. Everything else she left behind, including her girl. (Whitehead, 2016: 192)

Mabel's mentality is a prove to the slaves' ability of resistance. She left the green plot for Cora as a physical inheritance, but the real inheritance was a mental one by endowing her with an idea which illustrates the possibility of escape. Cora inherited her mother's power of resistance through her decision to leave everything behind and fight for her freedom. The green plot is a symbol for the empowerment of the two generations of slaves. It is the place that inspires its owners to leave the miserable life of the plantation behind.

Caesar insists to convince Cora to escape the plantation, and "the first time Caesar approached Cora about running north, she said no" (Whitehead, 2016: 7). Cora wasn't convinced about the idea of fleeing the only place that reminds her of her mother. Caesar is a literate slave who was hiding books in his cabin to experience freedom when he reads them. After the death of his master, he longs to liberate his body from the whippings of Whites. He tries to convince Cora about their escape because she was listening to his stories and secrets which made a strong bond between the two. Eventually, as a result to the White subjugation practiced over Cora, she is convinced to leave with Caesar. In this sense, the narrator explains the idea of escape as it:

Overwhelms Cora. Apart from her preparations, how would they alert the railroad in time? Caesar had no pretext on which to leave the grounds until Sunday. He told her that their escape would cause such a ruckus that there would be no need to alert his man. (Whitehead, 2016: 46)

Caesar was the motivation for resistance and longing for freedom. His repeated invitations for Cora overwhelmed her mind and colored her thoughts with the color of freedom. Whitehead uses characters like Caesar to expose the contrasted history about the Blacks as they are not subdued and silenced. This shift in Africans' past gives an Afrofuturist view to the present reader; it is an attempt to reclaim history from another point of view.

In addition, those who continue to resist slavery are often considered mad. When Caesar approaches Cora and asks her to join him on his trip, she dismisses the proposal as a prank, "a trick he was playing on himself," and "idiocy" (Whitehead, 2016: 27). Despite the horrible conditions on Randall's plantation, Cora considers the notion of fleeing a complete and utter absurdity. Madness represents the white ideology as a

controlling strategy to brainwash the slaves from recognizing the need for resistance. However, Cora's experience in Hob, a shack on Randall for female slaves who are deemed mentally unstable or disturbed, ultimately leads her to take the decision and flee the plantation. This Hob becomes the place where rebellious ideas initiate in her mind.

Historically, Stanley Campbell explains in *Slave Catchers* (2012) that the fugitive slave law enacted in 1850, the year in which the novel is set, as part of the Compromise of 1850 between Northern "free" states and southern slave-owning states. This rule specified that Northern governments were required to cooperate in the apprehension and return of runaways to the South, and it was fiercely opposed by abolitionist and other civil rights activists. Through Cora's journey to the north, Whitehead reimagines the American history that treated race geographically, which is different from state to state, and pictures the experiences of Cora with the northerners. The southern states were opposing the idea of freeing slaves while the northern states were the symbol of supposed freedom. Caesar indicates that "the southern white man was spat from the loins of the devil and there was no way to forecast his next evil act" (Whitehead, 2016: 47). The characters indulged with the division of their country. This division creates an imbalance in their mentality as slaves with a realization that only few miles away, freedom can be achieved. This generates resistance against their oppressors.

The north became the symbol of freedom in the slaves' mind and the only exit from slavery, and that's what Whitehead tries to reread when the story of Caesar continues. He sarcastically mirrors the misrepresentation of history that the northern mentality is different from the south through the experience of Caesar's family trip. The novel reveals that "Caesar's family had spent too much time with the kindly white folks in the north. Kindly in that they didn't see fit to kill you fast. One thing about the south, it was not patient when it came to killing negroes" (Whitehead, 2016: 191). This shift in the American history shows the reclamation that the blacks need, and their desire to create their reading of history. The alternative past reconstructs the present and changes the perception of a whole continent. Cora and Caesar decided to head north to reshape their dismantled identity and gain their freedom.

In South Carolina, Cora and Caesar experience freedom for the first time. A white man called Sam, a railroad station agent, provides them with fake identities, food and jobs. They were given free medical treatment in a hospital from Dr. Stevens; however, this hospital was managing a sterilization experiment on the Blacks. Whitehead made a simile with the real Tuskegee experiment. Dery points to this experiment when he said "technology is often brought to bear on Black bodies like Tuskegee experiment" (Dery, 1995:180). This experiment tries to erase the blacks from the future because it was not formed individually, the government conducts them to force killing and sterilize them.

The experiment exposes that the black body is an object that can be used and killed by the American government. As power holders, the whites control the most essential institution, like hospitals and schools, giving themselves the authority to determine the doomed future of the black race. When Cora exposes Dr. Stevens and the false medical care, she thought that the :

whites had begun stealing futures in earnest. Cut you open and rip them out, dripping. Because that's what you do when you take away someone's babies, steal their future. Torture them as much as you can when they are on this earth, then take away the hope that one day their people will have it better. (Whitehead, 2016: 99)

Accordingly, when a citizen trapped in a government that demolishes his race, the role of resistance prevails. Cora's resistance for the medical care of eugenics indicates that no one can steal the blacks' future.

The white's supreme control can reach to an end if the black community starts to realize the reality of their corrupted institutions.

The African Americans experience a pervasive identity crisis due to being in a culture that, through forced immigration, forced their identification as a minority. They frequently refer to Africa as their motherland while still feeling confused about their identity in the United States, which causes them to lose their sense of where "home" is. This crisis is evident, since the nation from which their ancestors were compelled to depart and where they presently hold legal residency has not consistently accorded them dignity or afforded them the opportunities to which they are justly entitled. Double consciousness refers to this existential struggle with identification and the politics of being 'seen' in America. Double consciousness was coined by William Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1930) who states that:

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois, 1930: 3)

According to the above quotation, Cora wanted to be recognized as human being in South Carolina, but the racial discriminations constructed a double consciousness for her. Cora's double consciousness did not allow her to achieve freedom, any white man who encounters her makes a racial remark and fails to acknowledge her as a normal individual in the society. The myth that the north is a place where everyone lives his/her life with dignity is dismantled by creating a double consciousness for the blacks.

Cora and Caesar started to recognize that they never left the south even though they are in the northern states. The metaphorical chains of Georgia plantation still exist on their hands and ankles in South Carolina. Their journey with the 'devil' of the Whites control has not finished yet. Breaking slavery chains is related to the place of Cora and Caesar:

If they had been sensible and kept running, she and Caesar would be in the Free States. It was still the south, and the devil had long nimble fingers. And then, after all the world had taught them, not to recognize chains when they were snapped to their wrists and ankles. The South Carolina chains were of new manufacture. They had not traveled very far at all. (Whitehead, 2016: 120)

According to the above quotation, to break the chains of slavery, they decided to move forward to North Carolina. After Ridgeway catches Caesar, Cora travels alone into much worse place than the previous.

The chains of the whites still weaken her impatience for freedom. She realizes the need to mentally resist the white power. knowledge is presented as the highest form of resistance. Whitehead explores the connection between reading and freedom. Throughout the American history, enslaved people were forbidden from any kind of education which leaves them unable to communicate with each other and therefore unable to resist. Further, an illiterate slave is easier to be controlled and dealt with as an object than as human being. Cora's act of reading in the attic room is considered a mental resistance. With her reading, she breaks out of the white control as she constructs a new identity. She regularly visits the library, however, "a teamster stopped her one day as she was about to enter, Master said the only thing more dangerous than a nigger with a gun, was a nigger with a book. That must be a big pile of black powder,

then!” (Whitehead, 2016: 223). Accordingly, the white masters are afraid of the blacks as they recognize their ability in demolishing their control. Books are represented as mental weapons directed to kill the white supremacy and the black’s double consciousness.

Through Cora, Afrofuturism gives the hope for the blacks’ future to avoid the control of whites’ narratives by using the past as a warning to the future. The idea of blackness creates a meek and inferior personality for the blacks that socially alienated them from other races. Milan Hrabovský a Slovenian scholar explains that “blackness became a 'scientifically' accepted fact of a 'lower' status in the secularized natural scale. And finally, today there are still racial and even racist theories perceiving blackness in a negative way” (Hrabovský, 2013: 85). Therefore, ‘Deblackness’ is the update form of resistance within Afrofuturism. Reynaldo Anderson states that “Afrofuturism, like post blackness, destabilizes previous analysis of blackness” (Anderson, 2017: 183). In Deblackness, the person’s black state of consciousness would be released from the forced negative confining or colonial mentality of slavery. In other words, it is the moment of realization that skin color is not the determinant of the individual’s status.

Moreover, the blacks achieve the state of Deblackness by obtaining knowledge through reading and learning. In the novel, the library or the “pile of powder” (whitehead, 2016: 222) burns the residues of the White control over the blacks. It is a flame that embraces the consciousness to get rid of the stereotypes that have been stuck in the blacks’ awareness.

she saw the disparate literature of the colored tribes. Accounts of African empires and the miracles of the Egyptian slaves who had erected pyramids. The farm’s carpenters were true artisans, they had to be to keep all those books from jumping off the shelves, so many wonders did they contain (Whitehead, 2016: 223).

Therefore, the wonders that book's contain can change the personality of a human, they give Cora a new identity, stripping away the history of slavery that she inherent through generations. She pushes away the accumulation of the plantation life from herself and obtains a respectful identity. The novel presents the opportunity to learn as one of the basic rights for humans is to reconstruct and reshape future in representing Cora’s resisting and her search for liberation. Afrofuturism guarantees a place for the blacks in the future by reclaiming their historical miseries and Deblackness is the tool that accomplished the reclamation through this theory.

Imagination is another tool of resistance. It is the ability that changes the reality of the blacks in the present and the future. In other words, it is creation, and creativity gives the people of color the power to control their culture and the power to control future. Womac addresses imagination arguing that “being imaginative and creative, and even projecting black culture into the future is part of a lineage of resistance to daunting power structures” (Womac, 2013: 19). She combines creativity with resistance to show that the black community has the power in deciding future. This power is gained through ages of producing Black Science fiction, including Octavia Butler, Samuel Delaney and Colson Whitehead’s novels. Womac further suggests that “the resilience of human spirit lies in our ability to imagine” (Womac, 2013: 24). Therefore, imagination forms the power structure of Black community and gives them the chance to reconstruct their present through imagining alternative futures. It is the hope for every alienated race to prove that they have a distinctive voice within the fabric of any society.

The books of *Almanacs*¹ allow Cora to imagine a future life where she will be able to use the Almanacs practical advice. She reads them in the attic and realized that the world contains knowledge which is hidden from Blacks, “Cora adored the old almanacs for containing the entire world” (Whitehead, 2016: 151). Imagination is the Afrofuturist resistance that Cora proclaimed in her journey. By recognizing the news around the world, she became a part of it, and imagined a place where people of color are involved in every event she read about. Almanacs had different and deeper meaning that associate with freedom. Martin, who is another fugitive, used them to trace the track of the cycles of the moon for the sake of helping slaves with their escape, “once Cora had gleaned what she could from the yellowed pamphlets, she started on the old almanacs, with their projections and ruminations about the tides and stars, and bits of obscure commentary” (Whitehead, 2016: 140). Consequently, almanacs became a symbol of freedom, resistance and knowledge. They were a navigating map for the journey of freedom for a lot of slaves.

In addition to the Almanacs, the swamp that borders the plantation represents a possibility for resistance and escape. The swamp can hide the fugitives, which encourages them to stand against their slavery and find a way for freedom. After Mabel escaped, Randall has a spell put around the swamp to keep the blacks from entering it. He hires a witch to do this spell to control the boundaries of his plantation.

Randall retained the services of a witch to goofer his property so that no one with African blood could escape without being stricken with hideous palsy. The witch woman buried fetishes in secret places, took her payment, and departed in her mule cart. There was a hearty debate in the village over the spirit of the goofer. (Whitehead, 2016: 69)

This “goofer” which means ‘spell’ is used to work on wild animals only; it becomes a symbolic stereotype of Blacks. It is a representation of white strategies in restricting the blacks. The swamp turns to be a trap for freedom seekers. The spell is the outcome of Whitehead’s imagination to criticize the American imperative policy. The swamp’s inferior tendency can be perceived as an Afrofuturist protest that reflects every tool that utilized by the whites to regulate people of color.

When Cora and Caesar entered the swamp, they felt an invisible chain pulling them back to the plantation. However, Caesar’s knowledge guides them to the right track and the swamp itself shields them from the sights of the whites. A lot of “men hunted otter and beaver in the swamp and the moss sellers scavenged from the trees, tracking far but never too far, yanked back to the plantation by invisible chains” (Whitehead, 2016: 69). Cora and Caesar’s resistance from the pulling of these chains reflect the power of the Black will against the Whites’ power. Imagination shows that the blacks have the possibility to achieve freedom without stumbling on the whites’ traps. Henceforth, the swamp does not reflect freedom; it symbolizes the possible obstacle that any people of color should across in their journey towards freedom. Whitehead’s creativity mirrors the power that the black authors have to regain their lost identities. Therefore, the power of Whitehead’s imagination changes the novel into a representation of resisting the miseries of the Blacks’ history.

Isiah Lavender in *Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Prehistory of a Movement* (2019), has argued that imagination leads the readers of Afrofuturism into different and enhanced present. He states that it is “crucial to understanding this future imagining – generating alternative futures, recasting the past – is how

¹Almanacs is a book or table containing a calendar of the days, weeks, and months of the year; a record of various astronomical phenomena, often with climate information and seasonal suggestions for farmers; and miscellaneous other data. Almanacs are frequently published on an annual basis and encompass a diverse array of subjects, including agriculture, horticulture, history, and cultural events. In addition, almanacs served as crucial resources for mariners, providing forecasts regarding weather patterns and seasonal variations that could influence crop cultivation and maritime navigation

Afrofuturism challenges readers to look past slavery's many tragedies through the science fictional language employed by twentieth-century black writers. We have to look beyond the past and hope for a different future" (Lavender, 2019: 4). Hope for Lavender, structures the blacks' life from antebellum America until it finds the way to the present. Imagination is the hope for the black generations to improve their present by imagining alternative futures and pasts to solve any problem. Afrofuturism changes the interest of the black authors to science fiction writing since it offers them the power of imagination to criticize the present and reconstruct the future.

Further, another side of imagination is embodied in Ridgeway, who represents the principles of the American imperative. His job is to maintain the white supremacist order to facilitate cotton production-driven economic expansion. He chases Cora not out of hatred, but rather because he imagines her and other enslaved people as vital instruments. For Ridgeway, slaves are the black sun that grows the crop and drives the global economy to fulfill the American nation's manifest destiny. Ridgeway is a monstrous tool that the novel described him as:

Ridgeway was six and a half feet tall, with the square face and thick neck of a hammer. He maintained a serene comportment at all times but generated a threatening atmosphere, like a thunderhead that seems far away but then is suddenly overhead with loud violence. He rode up on his horses with his associates, five men of disreputable mien, led by a fearsome Indian scout who wore a necklace of shriveled ears. (Whitehead, 2016: 38)

Ridgeway's image of America dismisses the struggles endured by the blacks as unimportant and points out the absurdity of a country that claims to uphold individual rights but then uses forced labor. The strong independence and persistence of Cora contradicts Ridgeway's view. Their conflict represents the clash of powers that keeps Cora resisting. She refuses Ridgeway's view of defining her as an object rather than a person with rights and freedom.

Eventually, Cora's journey is divided into physical resistance in her attempt to escape from the plantation and mental resistance in her realization of the importance of Deblackness. She resists the white control over the blacks, who use various tools to subdue Black race. Besides, the underground railroad's technology does not lead Cora to obtain freedom. Otherwise, knowledge and the decision to reshape the future empowered her to ask and search for freedom. This is evident at the end of the novel, as Cora rides an old wagon that fills her with hope to find a road to the North. Heading to the North became the remapping process that she struggles to Deblack her slave mentality.

3. Conclusion

In *The Underground Railroads*, Afrofuturist resistance is reflected through reclamation of history and imagination that presented by Mark Dery and Ytasha Womac. The novel satirically exposes the whites' strategies to control the blacks including using technology that presented through sterilization and the supernatural tools like black magic. It pinpoints that resistance can gain blacks' power and the possibility to control their fate whether in the present or in the future. Accordingly, knowledge dissolves the mental barriers of the blacks. In this sense, Cora uses reading as a solution to Deblack her double consciousness. Whitehead's novel criticized the historical narratives of America and exposed the myth of the free north where slaves can reach and live peacefully. Cora does not reach freedom using the machines of the underground railroads; the chance for education leads her and other slaves to a mental state of freedom and Deblackness where they can peacefully construct their identities. The blacks obtain their authentic voice and express the miserable experiences which they lived in the past as a warning for the next generations to

avoid the repetition of the whites' exploitative slavery. Through Cora's journey, Whitehead reshapes the American map and uses his imagination to paint a new futuristic map where the blacks can live a free. *The Underground Railroads* reminds the blacks that resistance can reconstruct the past to implant hope for a bright and delightful future.

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