

Exploring The Works of Contemporary Writers Inspired by Toni Morrison
Through the Lens of Intersectionality: Slavery, Trauma and Dehumanisation

By

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the requirements for the degree of
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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

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2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
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Abstract

African American writers have always given importance towards their historical background and how black women were dehumanised, objectified or tried to resist the violence against them. African Americans and slavery have been connected since the 17th century. The objective of this thesis is to provide the importance of contemporary African American writers and the inspiration taken from the novels of Toni Morrison to emphasise the relevance of History, Trauma and slavery through intersectionality. The perspectives of Kimberle Crenshaw, Helma Lutz, and Bell Hooks, through intersectionality, help to overcome the research gap. This elaborates on black women's experiences within the timeline from the 17th century to the 21st century, emphasising black women's neglect. The thesis explores the female characters Pecola and Beloved of Toni Morrison's work with contemporary protagonists to see black women's lives. The character Annis from *Let Us Descend* shows the journey of a black woman's survival and want for freedom. Similarly, Cora from *The Underground Railroad* fights for survival as a slave. Moreover, Modern Slavery gives importance to the existence of Black women's objectification. The research was conducted through qualitative methods, primarily using journals and articles from JSTOR and Google Scholar. Hence, African Americans still want to address slavery to show how historically and in the present time, Black women are victims of slavery through intersectionality.

Keywords: intersectionality, black women, power, resistance, binary, racism, oppression, dehumanisation, historical trauma, cultural trauma, Modern Slavery, inspired, Toni Morrison, Jesmyn Ward, Colson Whitehead.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Toni Morrison has had a huge impact on African American authors and has resonated with the presence of liberation in a community that reaches out for the healing and redemption of souls. The books that had been treasured over the years of Morrison impacted the readers, revealing how people were emotionally traumatised, suppressed, and resisted. Morrison has always tried to be the voice of the black community, who are often marginalised and therefore not considered as respectful. The books of Morrison, including *Beloved*, *The Bluest Eye*, reference the character's complexities that are engraved within their souls. This shows the characters of black women and how they had to rebel for their existence, which was their basic right as human beings. The commonality in the characters of each novel's protagonists shows the scars embedded within their existences, for instance, Pecola from *The Bluest Eyes* or Sethe from the novel *Beloved*. Not only do the novels target the theme of slavery, but also the evidence of their struggle for identity, trauma and the drastic, unexpected choices for survival. In addition, one of the books which was written with the inspiration of Morrison is Jesmyn Ward's *Let Us Descend*. *Let Us Descend* mostly focused on the plantation and slavery. Moreover, the last novel of Colson Whitehead's *Underground Railroad* shows how slavery determines the fate of the slaves and the desire for freedom. Both books particularly show the black lives of women and how they struggle for their own identity till the end. Therefore, the themes of the books can be viewed from the perspectives of slavery, black women's trauma, history and resistance. Modern slavery in contemporary works, like human trafficking, stereotypes of black women and addressing the history of plantations, address the root causes of slavery. Therefore, I wanted to address how these contemporary works are connected to the previous novels, particularly for African Americans, in terms of the evolution of their sufferings and the persistence of domination. My research follows the gap:

Why is slavery still relevant to the writers of African Americans? What is the reason for the inferiority that African American writers face? Following the 17th century, Toni Morrison addressed slavery through *Beloved* in the 19th century. By comparison, through intersectionality, did the evolution of slavery change in the 21st century, and is there a presence of modern slavery? Moreover, through Toni Morrison's novels, can a comparison be made with contemporary novels? Therefore, the consistent issues American writers address regarding their legacy of sufferings moulded from Toni Morrison to modern writers like Colson Whitehead and Jesmyn Ward are being addressed here.

1.1 Contemporary Work of Jesmyn Ward's *Let Us Descend*

Let Us Descend by Jesmyn Ward is one of the contemporary novels which has the element of the journey with a lot of struggles, slavery and the complex relationship of the African American people. *Let us Descend* was written and published in October 2023. It started with this enslavement and the harrowing life of Annis, who was captivated and raised on a plantation in North Carolina. Annis's mother was also an enslaved woman who was captured by a white man. Her mother was raped by her enslaver. The worst thing that took place with Annis was that she was sold by her father. While she was enslaved, she was forced to do a lot of things, like walking without food and crossing the Carolinas to New Orleans. Annis struggled to go to the South to escape from slavery.

The slavery that she faced also included the separation from her mother, but she found relief in her bond with Safi, another enslaved woman. Also, Annis was brought up by listening to the stories of her grandmother. So, whenever she felt difficulty, she tried to rely on the stories of her grandmother to get the willpower and strength. This assumption of being with her grandmother always makes a bond between the supernatural elements in the novel. Aza, the spirit of her ancestor, who also used to see her mother. With the help of the guidance

of Aza, she tried to go towards the South. With or without the help of the spirit of Aza, Annis tried to get out of this problem and break the traumatic life. She faces despair as she tries to go beyond her ability to free herself like, sexual slavery and gets the scenario of what plantation life looks like, for example, from Annis's auction when men tried to smell them and choose one of the women who did not have a birthmark and “she ripens for it”. The bond Annis had with her mother and grandmother gave her the strength to be resilient in the miserable state she was in. Also, it was seen that Aza was trying to help her, but somewhere Annis was annoyed with Aza due to the failed attempts. But the complexities were overshadowed by how Aza helped her out. Aza was always connected with nature, for example, water. She made Annis know Water and that everyone comes from it.

Hence, Annis tried to be with the spirit throughout her difficult times and learned to understand by listening to the spirit. Hence, the book focuses on how the protagonist faced the encounter with injustice, slavery and sexual abuse that she went through. Aza is a spirit that elaborates the involvement of the laws and orders of nature's elements that get involved in life and make us fulfilled. The novel truly shows the culture of the Black community and the injustice that happened in the name of slavery and abuse. Modern issues on Black African Americans. This book is about grief. We descend into the hell of Slavery. The capture of people in Africa and people trade from one plantation to another. People died from the horror, and they suffered from the suffocating malnourished and enslavement that the traders of the ship inflicted. Dumping in the water. Also, sexual assault and commonality are present here.

1.2 Contemporary work of Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*

The novel *Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead also points out slavery and the lives of African American people. The book shows initially how a character, Cora, tries to

dodge the slave tracker, whose name is Ridgeway. The shifts between the novels are shown many times. Cora's experiences in different cities through the train determine lookouts. Cora's grandmother was also victimised, being trapped in slavery and being sold in America. This act also happens with his mother, Mabel. Cora was left alone until she was offered an escape proposal from Caesar, a fellow slave. She mainly escapes by an actual underground railroad. The novel *Whitehead* mainly focuses on the dark side, where blacks and whites have been treated differently in contemporary society. If we see the character Ridgeway, of how brutal and evil he is, then it shows the dark side of how terrifying he is. Also, when Cora flees to another state, she encounters people there having different conditions, which is outrageous. For example, to show that public health care was helping African Americans, they were giving them birth control. In this way, while she was trying to live in the North, she experienced not literal slavery, but the blacks were led to complete eradication with this health care policy. Also, as it could be said, not only slavery here but also the need to be free and the urge to get freedom. Wherever she had an experience in the North, she was pulled back to her slavery days and how she was taken under the wing of Ridgeway for slavery, mercilessly. Like, the birds hanging from the ceiling on the wire remind her of the buzzards that ate up the bodies. The events that took place with Cora sticking to her throughout her travels in the American North. Later on, the darker the novel gets, the more the superior Whites try to dominate the lower people who are also Whites. As a result, this made the lower community marginalise the blacks even more. Hence, through the journey of Cora and her rebellion to another life in South America was pulled back due to the scars she had from her state. Hence, this also certainly shows the epitome of slavery, oppression and trauma.

1.3 The Background of *Beloved*

The novel *Beloved* was written in the 1980s, and then it was published in 1987. *Beloved* also shows the reflection of Slavery. Mainly, what is seen here is the ex-slavery period and the past experiences of slavery. Morrison has always tried to focus on the themes of neo-slavery that targeted the African American community and their marginalisation. The entire setting we see happens around Ohio during the period of American World War I. It is evident and relevant in the novels of Morrison how she focused on the Slavery of the black community. The novel starts having the element of superficiality. It shows the scenario of Sethe and Denver, the daughter of Sethe, living in a haunted house for 18 years. In the novel, as she was a victim of slavery, she did not want her children to be slaves as well. Hence, she ends up killing one of her children. The complexities of the characters and their fragmentation highlight the novel of Morrison. The novel shows the presence of ambiguities and the fragmentation of the complex characters. As, the character's flaws and complexities, similarly, the tensions of the Black community are present there. For example, the presence of slave motherhood. As one of the babies died because of Sethe, the house was assumed to be haunted. Hence, supernatural elements were also seen in the house after the death of her child. Howard and Buglar were seen leaving the house and fleeing due to the fear of ghosts. Moreover, after the death of Baby Suggs, Sethe and Denver were left alone in the house at 124 Bluestone Road, Cincinnati, Ohio. The slave motherhood and complexities are presented here in a more tense way. The constant burden of slavery had made Sethe kill her child validates that. With that, the emphasis on the supernatural elements of how the character of “Beloved” engaged with her mother plays a vital role. The mother-daughter relationship here could be an emphasis on the complexities of the black community. Also, it could be an imagination for Sethe's character to think about “Beloved” out of her guilt. At the end of the novel, it is seen that she becomes completely out of her mind, asking for her repentance from

Beloved. However, the importance here could rely more on how the black community knows what their fate would be, and hence they get trapped in their fears, where one of the fears is slavery.

1.4 The Background of *The Bluest Eye*

The Bluest Eye is seen through the perspective of Claudia, in which the setting is in Ohio. Pecola Breedlove stayed with Claudia's family when the narrator felt sympathy for her. Pecola, the victim of her fate, was ignored by her mother and physically assaulted by her father. Pecola, being black, had an acceptance of not being able to fit into the beauty standards of society. The disastrous fate is shown in the novel by the protagonist, Pecola. More than the indications towards slavery or dominating the black community, *The Bluest Eye* focuses towards self-acceptance and racism.

Moreover, Morrison here depicted how looks and beauty are necessary. Throughout the novel, the acceptance and upbringing of how an African American woman grows up have been pointed out. Therefore, the character of Pecola shows the hierarchies of the society that need to be met for acceptance. Thus, the stereotypical notions come from the racial discrimination towards the black community. Like, while Pecola stays with the McTeers then the narrator sees the urge of Pecola for white skin. The relationship between Pecola and her mother also emphasises how the stain of ugliness on themselves focuses towards the black community. Also, racism is depicted when the character Geraldine, for whom one's physical appearance is everything, shows Pecola that she is a poor and Black, unlucky girl. Moreover, the abuse Pecola faced, which was attempted by Cholly, was brutal to the vulnerable soul, pointing out the helplessness of Pecola. Lastly, when Pecola wants to get into society and become a part of the hierarchy, Soaphead Church tries to take advantage of the opportunity

by showing certain concern. His desire for hierarchy and superiority, through Pecola's urge to get the Bluest Eye, made him use the opportunity. But through selfishness, Pecola gets herself used here as well. Hence, this shows how Pecola wanted to get acceptance, for which she was ready to do anything. Throughout the novel, Pecola is used and voiceless. The whole plot of the story focuses on the theme of oppression, where Pecola gets victimised through classism, racism and sexism.

The novel's connection with Morrison's attempt towards the African American community justifies how they struggle to be a part of equality and try to avoid superiority. Therefore, the presence of such domination of White people over African American people still exists, with the novels of this period getting inspiration from Morrison. Notably, they are novels by Jesmyn Ward, such as *Sing Unburied Sing* and *Let Us Descend*. Also, a novel by Colson Whitehead, which is *Underground Railroad*, shows a significant impact on Morrison. The theme of Oppression, slavery and racial discrimination exists, and it's completely visible in these books till now. Both novels focus on the plantation movement and slavery.

1.5 Introduction to Intersectionality and Black Women

Intersectionality came up with the law to address discrimination and how people of different identities had their own experiences, especially Black women. The Article where intersectionality first came up was mainly a talk show presented through an Ed conference at the time of 1988. The interviewers of Kimberle W. Crenshaw, Barbara Giovanna Bello and Letizia Mancini referred to the success of how intersectionality helped the anti-discrimination movement and especially the Black women. According to (Bello and Machini 12), Kimberle Crenshaw talked about an article from 1989 about “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex in Anti-discrimination Law: A Black Feminist Critique”, which talked about racism and sexism within the context of employment, where the contextual arguments by Congress

did not take place for Black women. These policies were ascertained within the dynamics of antiracism and feminism. As Crenshaw says, “She tried to focus on the discrimination and inhumanity towards the Black women even before the law was enforced. Also, Black women had no existence when there was a claim to represent African Americans. It was always Black men and white women.” (Bello and Mancini 11). Therefore, Black identity was always considered to be a negligent part, be it within the community or outside the community. Where I feel intersectionality is a doorway through which Black women, especially, can point out their rights with respect. As in African American, Black women are counted within the white women and Black men. Therefore, intersectionality was a lived reality of race, gender and discrimination against Black women. So, this not only focuses towards feminist law but also includes anti-racism and social imbalance empowerment. Through the work of African works focusing on the anti-discrimination law, it needed modification towards gender as well. Therefore, the importance was towards Black feminist concepts was to point out the historical and contemporary struggles in America.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Existing research on the novel *Let Us Descend*

Yesmina Khedhir, through the novel *Let Us Descend*, pointed out the deep roots and the full of grudges against slavery history. The article states about the lives of the slaves and how harrowed the lives of the slaves were. The article also stated about the protagonist of the novel, Annis and how she was sold by the man who raped her mother and fathered her. She was sold through the slave market of New Orleans, from where the glimpse of her life full of sorrows and sufferings came up. Jesmyn Ward, through this novel, tries to put across the notion of mother and daughter relationship through the theme of motherhood. The bond of mother and daughter is engraved through the ancestral knowledge they have of

circumstances. For example, the healing of the body through herbal treatment is the process of survival in any situation. The relationship of motherhood and daughter and vividness is presented here, where one of the reasons could be the identity crisis of owning up to the child due to slavery. Ward wrote a short story called “Mother Swamp”, focusing on the maroon communities and the enslaved people of the society, more importantly, known as self-emancipation. Ward gave an impact of mythical adaptation where the “First Mother”, after escaping slavery, gave birth to the “First Daughter”. Afterwards, it is seen that the mother, after the age of seventeen, gave her daughter to the men of Borderline Island to make the generations keep going on (Khednir 42). It could be said that the protagonist, Annis, had been adapted from the short story of the abandoned child. Apart from this, the spirituality and connection with supernaturalism. In the novel *Let Us Descend*, Aza is said to be a spirit with power that influences Annis to have a zeal for freedom. There has been a connection of the African ancestral cosmological point of view through the human and spiritual worlds. One of the notions of the novel, therefore, seems to have the impact of “spiritual empowerment” with the influence of African-based spiritual beliefs and traditions. The adaptation of spiritual freedom and protection from the oppression that takes place the society racially. The spirit in the novel fails to save Annis's grandmother and mother from the eyes of slavery and racial violence, but tries to guide her urge for freedom. This is an example from Dante's *Inferno* with Vigil. (Khedhir 42). Lastly, there is a close reference to the Black w(hole), and it has been shown with the woman's perspectives that can be focused on as a transformation of wholeness. Here in the novel, Annis, for her freedom and her interstitial space in the “dark womb of the earth”, develops a womanhood journey. By the initiation of the rebirth of Annis here, Aza tries to advise her to sink in before the ultimate rise. Through this, Annis dives into and gets the full power of humanity. Therefore, there is a thin layer of oppression which has a connection and an integrity with spirituality that Aza showcases in the novel. In the novel *Let*

Us Descend by Ward, the southern part is summed up as the land of oppression and a part of African suffering. The expression of the spiritual entity and the involvement of the water element in the novel show the emergence of the physical salvation of Annis (Khedhir 43). On the way up from the hole, Annis, pregnant with the help of Aza, tries to cross the river and goes through the Great Dismal Swamp. Here, the main characters of the novel seem to be the women and the resilience that is seen within the women. With the presence of enslavement, the involvement of a woman loving another woman had been shown. Therefore, Alice Walker says that when a woman loves a woman, that surely justifies the appreciation and preference for a woman's tradition, emotion and power. This saying goes by with the evident relationship between Annis and Safi. Apart from Annis and Safi, the sisterhood of Ester and Mary emerges so strong when Ester throws her life to save Mary from drowning. Therefore, the novel shows the great impact of the enslavement of the Black woman with their sisterhood by showing strong relationships. I feel the absence of the historical trauma and the reference to slavery that has been carried out for a long period. With that, why the novel addresses such a historical issue in these modern times is not presented. Moreover, the inspirational elements of Morrison's Novel within this article are yet to be addressed.

Another article about the plantation in *Let Us Descend* by Jesmyn Ward goes through the way women were treated during the time and travels to the time when women were sold, the arrival of the ships and then the plantation time. Ward talks about the reality of the plantation and how this gives a lead towards hell. Annis was addressed as the protagonist, where she was conceived in a horrendous act of rape, which was committed by one of the slave owners. The character of Annis is so loyal towards the teachings of Aristotle that she constantly gets into the remainder of the learning. Therefore, the mother gets punished while trying to save Annis. Dante is involved in the book, for example, in the blind world now, where the slaves are chained and descended to the Carolina. The place of slaves, the freedom

of women and the infernal of the plantations. The losses and the struggles are being put into focus by its losses. Jesmyn Ward did try to put through some dilemmas and jeopardies to the protagonists of the novel. In the narration of Annis's mother, we see her training hand-in-hand for combat. It is seen that the spiritual connection is also repetitive within Annis in this novel. Throughout the article, the relationship between the mother and daughter is emphasised. Critically, the memories that Annis preserves for her, the slavery and discrimination through the perspectives of Morrison's adaptation, are yet to be addressed here.

In another article in the novel by Jesmyn Ward, Annis is an enslaved woman who was sold to the South in New Orleans. While she met Phyllis on her journey, she got to know about the Swamp. In addition, she asks Annis not to succumb to the dangers of the Swamp. Because she refers to Annis, there are islands within the swamps which she is required to get out of. It is known that the Black community has always struggled and has been under oppression across the West. The character Annis and her escape from slavery are an example of maroonage. According to Celeste Winston, the existence of the slave era was established around spaces called swamps. In the contemporary world, the presence of the Swamp is considered to be a hindrance to the productivity of a progressive approach. Many environmental approaches and programs have changed the natural environment regarding the control of economic chaos. The initiative was beneficial towards the geographical preservation of wildlife. Unfortunately, it did not help any of the Black people; rather, it ended up killing 3000 people living in the swamps. Moreover, the swampification of many lands took place where Johannes van des Bosch tried for the Colonies of Benevolence in the period 1818. The founder Van des Bosch wanted to build an agricultural colony through the hands of orphans and oppressed people. As per the understanding of Van des Bosch, he wanted the people and the people that were present there to come under considerable control.

Like the Colonies of Benevolence, another approach was called the Peat Colonies. These kinds of colonies only tried to make money out of people. The Peat Colonies eventually turned into many canals that were formed due to transportation. For the capitalisation and its development when the swamps are extracted, many emissions and pollution are being released to pollute the environment. The presence of these swamps of Black people resembles the “anti-capitalist” movement (Zwiers 30). Like all other Swamps, come up with different slogans, the “drain of slogans” also refers to a particular meaning racially, politically and economically (Zwiers 32). Therefore, like many other paths of transformation and devastation, it is understandable that the settlers come and imbalance the ecosystem of a place. But when the protest goes too far between the workers and they face the bullet, that is the last remaining of the swamp transformation (Zwiers 32). As swamps are something derogatory to the slaves, this clearly emphasises the struggles of slave workers. The protests and discrimination show the underlying issues with Black people that the contemporary writers try to show allegorically within the novels. In contrast, the limitations here are seen where slavery, historical trauma and how the people are still getting oppressed are not addressed through the lens of intersectionality. The connection with Toni Morrison is not highlighted within the article.

2.2 Existing Research on *The Underground Railroad*

As per Grace Heneks from *The American Plot*, Whitehead mockingly addresses that the 21st century is a time when no racial differences exist. He adds that the people of the U.S. do not see coloured people but identify them only as people. This is a mere way of sarcasm, which I criticise through Whitehead's comment, as there is always unaddressed discrimination within the community. Rather than this, white people identify this as a choice of segregation (Heneks 60). Moreover, white people are said to have equal consideration for Black people with no racial disproportionality. Therefore, they refer to colour blindness as an

issue where the racial differences that are shown are justified as preferences. According to the poet Hughes, America was not the country that he wanted. Social discrimination and equality remain constant. This surely simplifies the discrimination that people face without being said verbally. Moreover, Stephanie Li discusses “post” racism with the social development of oppression and inequalities (Heneks 61). The statement of the “post” prefix of racism shows how the evidence of inequalities persists in the present world. The rapid growth of post-racial discourse points out that society has developed, and its ideologies are ahead of race and racism. However, with reference towards Squires and Whitehead, it is more complicated as it overlooks the current problems by conflating race and racism, leading to overlooking actual injustices. Also, Thomas Holt justifies that the merging of racialism and Race could eventually worsen the whole situation through ambiguities of post signals. I abide by this as it surely masks the real situations faced by coloured people. Whitehead focuses on the geographical and geopolitical context in his novels, for example, the novel slave narrative *The Underground Railroad*. Here, the novel presents an allegorical approach to post-racial practices. Most of the allegorical practices of the slaves were inspired by the history of Haiti in the 17th century, when the country of St. Dominique was under the control of French rule. It was believed that the African slaves turned into zombies and returned to Africa when they were tortured to death. Therefore, the suicidal concept was very common in the slavery issue amongst the slave population. Hence, Sara Lauro said that this suicidal approach to African slaves showed the representation of African culture and their anxiety through fragmentation. Through post-racialism, the aspect of showing that inequality is no longer present has been showcased (Heneks 68). Through Grace Heneks, the overview of conflation between race and racism is highlighted, which overlooks the underlying issues of discrimination and torture that coloured people face. Critically, how Whitehead tries to show the discrimination through allegorical narratives, slavery, and a historical approach, showcases the persistence of

divisions among people. Hence, through the article, whitewashing of discrimination has been shown by covering up the relevant differentiations that were made with the people by their race or colour through giving a term of “post” racism theory. The article was limited regarding the influence of Toni Morrison and the persisting reasons to persuade writings on African people.

Also, through the article Broyld, the superhero film *Black Panther* was a part of Afrofuturism like the novel *The Underground Railroad* from the perspectives of slavery and magical realism. Therefore, Afrofuturism here tries to explore how the Black Afrofuturists try to go through the Underground Railroad and also the connection it has with American mythology. Again, as Afrofuturism is connected with the wide aspects of tools and technology and how it connected the Black fugitives with modernity, it is considered that the term Afrofuturism was speculated in North America, and then it was widespread with the help of the American Diaspora. So, it generally intersects the diaspora with technology. Therefore, Afrofuturism is defined as the exploration of the future of the black community through their identity acknowledgements and liberation. In a more detailed manner, Afrofuturism questions the belief in racism, sexism, alienation and colonialism. Critically, this tries to challenge the vision of white people and their ideology. Afrofuturism has pointed out metaphysics, cosmology, cultural analysis, Blackness and many more. Afrofuturism gives a newer, widespread and detailed perspective to the audience (Broyld 171). Moreover, it can put forward racism as a technology. Mainly, through Afrofuturism, it has been pointed out by the Scholar Beth Coleman that race could be utilized as a tool but not as a trait. Moreover, there is something present in the detailed dissection of the team race where it has been manifested with government, rules, laws and practices. For example, the campaign of Black Lives Matter (Broyld 172). The persisting movements of African Americans surely pointed towards the injustice and discrimination done towards them in the contemporary world.

Moreover, Black people with slavery, with the explanation of Afrofuturism, place immense importance towards colonialism. Hence, the philosophy of Afrofuturism is valid for slavery, where Afrofuturism engineered the Black people to produce cash crops at the expense of the alienation of the Black people. Through the possible Underground Railroad, the Blacks could act for themselves, and the logistics legislated against them. Through Afrofuturism, Black people could showcase the hidden transcript of the ability to revolt and voice out the willpower of the Black people (Broyld 172). The Underground Railroad, the two most important notions pointed out would be reality and myth. The Underground Railroad was a synonym for freedom and an imagined rebellion. The context goes through that historically, there are a few stories of hidden quilts and passageways which eventually do not exist (Broyld 172). It is to be noted that in *The Underground Railroad*, there was the presence of secret codes and symbols. The Railroad was stronger in the Northern areas, though it was not beneficial for the Black allies. It was the escaped people who went through their escape and had to keep themselves at risk of repercussions. The Black community tried to build up their confidence for a successful journey. It was the people of the Southern part who tried to demean the people of the act communities, who never appreciated their skills. Black people wanted speedy development and modernity, which was not ensured when the whites still had the phrase “Colored people not allowed” (Broyld 176). Through the characters of the novel by Colson Whitehead, in *The Underground Railroad*, the rebel Cora and her escape towards South Carolina was a freedom that was a part of modernity. However, people like Dr. Campbell did not appreciate the growth of more black people within their community. Therefore, when Black people discovered their lives in freedom, they tried to get it without being manipulated by the Whites. The Blacks tried to navigate their lives without any hindrance and the influence of the new sky, galaxy and technology. They tried to emphasise equality and destroyed the visions of utopians. Therefore, Sun Ra says that Space is not

considered to be high; rather, it is bottomless and endless. But still, all the racial tensions continue to sabotage the peace between the communities, mostly due to the brutality done by the Southern part (Broyld 176). The long arc from slavery to rectifying the Atlantic Slave trade was a task. Blacks wanted to be recognised and hoped to get reform slave status. Their alienated status was something they no longer wanted to be tagged with. In the novel *The Underground Railroad*, Colson Whitehead tries to portray how Cora felt and how every station was something that she was not prepared for. Therefore, the novel tried to put out the stories of the fugitives and how they were part of real horrors. Another essay in this novel addresses neo-slavery and the narrative style. The article surely points towards racism and the coloured people's conflicts, but the continuation of struggles, the horrors of the coloured people, and how Toni Morrison can be included through the contexts are not presented.

The story of Cora being enslaved and then trying to escape the Georgia plantation shows the point of view of the conventional slave narrative. The narration of the novel is within the context of the history of the family, which includes oppression and violence. The evidence of a failed escape from the plantation and, therefore, the confrontation with the slave owners is being upheld. With that, the novel has a connection with women's sterilisation that connects towards American history. In the novel, Colson Whitehead has pointed out the presence of many relevant historical elements, which are satirically presented by Matthew Dischinger, who says this to be “speculative satire” (Salván 13). Apart from this remark, it is also considered to be a genre used as a drag of a topic by Maus. As per the article, Whitehead tried to relocate the slaves rather than abolish slavery. Certainly, this shows the determination to have a life of freedom rather than being enslaved. According to Kathryn Schulz, it shows the nation's past and its relationship with the truth. The novel itself tries to focus on the networks that are present in reality, like the subterranean tracks, by the real box car ride was untold. Hence, many things through the lens of Colson Whitehead are

yet to be presented. It is observed that a part of the lack of narration is found within the passage of narratives (Salván 15). This shows that some parts of the narration have been tried to keep away from the readers. It could be one of the reasons that the untold narrations are explicit to be explained. Also, as Warhol says (Salván 16), the lack of narration did not happen. As per Eric Forbes, it is like a jigsaw puzzle where the pieces are lost or maybe a detective story without any evidence. Warhorse taxonomy further adds to the addition of unspoken within the novel, which may be important for distinguishing between the narrations that are not said within the slave's narrative. Therefore, Warhol comes with an important taxonomy, and it could be relevant in differentiating the motivations for the untold narrations that are evident in the slave's history. Also, with the things that are not told or “what should not be told,” they are mainly done to avoid unavoidable circumstances. In terms of Whitehead's ideological views, *The Underground Railroad* has been written through different sections of historical and cultural aspects. Therefore, rather than understanding which side the writer was on, it is claimed that the Underground Railroad was determined as a network operating at the national level for the workers' purposes. Therefore, while it carried different other activists and cultural constructions in reality in relative isolation, it is evident that Colson Whitehead tried to involve and give references towards reality literally (Salván 20). The railroad here from the beginning could be a metaphoric element. The extension of the tunnel and how the Railroad system evinces comes as a question. This has been considered to have a double systematic nature, as it already has the presence of an underground existence. Hence, it can be evident as a private location for escape. Another important aspect is how the slave hunters are unable to track the slaves. For example, “When she told of her escape, she omitted the tunnel and kept it under the main contour” (Salván 20). The unnarrated part comes to light when Lumbly calls out to Cora to get the essence of real life when she rides the rails. Again, the element of darkness is incorporated in this novel. With that, the violence

of America as this nation should not exist; there is no presence of justice, and continuous facing of murders or thefts are present here. Whitehead ambiguously points out all the darkness in the novel without a particular narration. Also, the presence of each station is not indicated particularly in the novel, again showing a loophole within the narration. In terms of cultural evolution, Whitehead seems to be influencing the narrative of how there is a pattern of escape for the character Cora., The South represents bondage in contrast to the North, which shows the path towards freedom. The topography here defines not only the place but also an ideological meaning. Thus, the element of topography also helps to understand the narrative motive. Also, the element of straightforward linearity is present here. The way Colson Whitehead presents the story is through one path that is taken as a choice from potential trajectories (Salván 23). The novel *Underground Railroad* is driven by the decisions of the characters, and the plot of the novel follows the decisions that are eventually made. For example, when Cora remembers Lumbly's word, each destination comes across with a new Ray of possibility. Whitehead, throughout the novel, relates to the slave narrative tradition. The incidents that Cora faces throughout the novel and her survival point out a great survival for herself (Salván 27). It is seen that the character Cora was trying to get freedom from the white community, and throughout her journey of uncertainty, she got a Ray of hope. The hope of diminishing oppression and slavery. Therefore, through my criticism, Cora shows resilience through narrative style, which the article points out, but certain limitations of inspiration from the writer Toni Morrison or through the theory of intersectionality are not present.

Moreover, like the event in the novel Colson Whitehead named *The Underground Railroad*, we see the escape from Slavery within the period of the early nineteenth century. Within the narrative of Whitehead, the pathway towards the escape vision was towards the North for the people with the subterranean train line. The novel *The Underground Railroad* is

evidence of the involvement of a mythical story where the slaves try to save their lives. In Whitehead's imagination, the hero and the protagonist of the novel, Cora, escape towards the Northway, but the fear remains. The fear of her is unlocked again in the North way when she is subjected to recapturing, sterilisation, and rape. It reminds me of her mother, Mabel, who, years before, was subjected to the same problem and the same situations. Cora, within the novel, tries to resist for herself as she does not want to be the luck for others but for herself. Hence, in the novel, *The Underground Railroad* unfolds as a subject to crowds and happiness, regulated by the flows, barriers, etc. Moving to the random encounters, it seems they are possible and inevitable here in the contingent space (Gordon 64).

2.3 Existing Research through Contemporary Novels: *Let Us Descend* and *The Underground Railroad* through the Lens of Morrison

2.3.1 Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a collective approach to colour, race, violence, and injustice based on nationality, sexuality, and identity. In American society, racism and the element of racial identity are inevitably connected. Slavery was one of the reasons why discrimination happened within the society, where the targets were sexual exploitation, physical labour and free labour. One of the prominent books that explores the reasoning behind slavery is Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Through Kimberle Crenshaw, in 1989, the term intersectionality was coined. The cultural and social considerations have led to the basis of politics here, which has helped the feminists and anti-racists. Moreover, Crenshaw had divided the structure of intersectionality within the context of politics, structurally and economically. Through the presence of Intersectionality, the domination of black people and the exploitation done by the white-dominant American white dominant community has been addressed (Rahim et al. 48). The slave owners did not consider the notion of failure and benefited from the failure. Hence,

black women were subjected to many things, including segregation, oppression and discrimination. The term Slavery only defines the existence of violence in society. The sexual exploitation of black women by the white community was something that became most familiar in America. With that, it developed the construction of slavery and fugitive slaves in American society. Racial slavery was a kind of Roman that was provided through the enslavement that happened in the 17th century. It is said that around the period of 1776 to 1865, the humans of African Americans were treated as human cattle. The presence of black women was considered more dreadful, full of agony and pain. The slaves were subjected to many tortures, physically and mentally, without any compensation. They were dominated by exploitation, being black and mostly about the enslaved women. Hence, the American laws were one of the most important aspects which provided the role of exploitation in the environment. The labour tax was imposed on the American slaves, where 1/10th of the tax was paid by the slave owners, giving them more authority and power over the people. In 1662, the rules to considered the children of slaves to be slaves were imposed. Sexual assault with the female slaves and exploitation took place with female slaves. The black women were further manipulated, and they were forced through exploitation and forced to make their children slaves as well. The exploitation of the female slaves took on a different aspect when the slave owners considered them to be more of a source of slaves. By being part of the producers, the women were saved from the usual attacks that they used to be subjected to, and the enslaved men were also used to be traded to be separated. For example, a slave called Mattie Jackson was sold outright after she got married to her husband. Hence, the separation of the children from their parents happened most frequently within the slave community. As per Curtin, the slave population increased to 3.9 million, and almost 56% of the population was only 20 years old. Moreover, the elements of physical and mental trauma, the plantation of Tobacco and rice sugar with thousands of women slaves have traumas of being a slave

from the age of ten (Rahim et al. 50). Going by the context of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the presence of freedom, exploitation, and all emerge. With the elements of forced separation from the parents, motherhood also plays a great role in the themes of the novel. In the novel *Beloved*, Sethe and her daughter live with Sethe's mother-in-law. Where Sethe tries to kill her daughter to restrain her from slavery, the school teacher comes to take the daughter of Sethe. This justifies how slavery was towards them and how this was horrendous. Apart from Gender, the skin colour of African Americans was a major problem for the state. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* focuses on how, not only due to slavery but also because of skin colour, Sethe was subjected to discrimination. Distancing from the family, parents, and children is a very common thing among African Americans. Sethe tried to justify her horrified act of killing her daughter to rescue her from the grasp of enslavement. Morrison tries to showcase through the novel that being a slave and a mother is not an easy thing to do. Being a mother, Sethe tried to love her daughter, but in the world of whites, they were dehumanised, put into the animal category and treated as slaves by being sold at auctions. Therefore, it showcased the dehumanised phase of African Americans. Through this, Morrison tried to point out the presence of the Black community under white dominance. She also tried to emphasise how Black women were inevitably compared with animals and tried to put them through white hegemony. Morrison wanted to focus on the white hegemony and how the monopoly turned against the Blacks. Also, she emphasised how white racism, with its dominance, put a restriction on the miseries of black women who were a part of the South. Hence, he pointed out the motherhood of black women as they were restricted by their black motherhood for more than a decade. Hence, this shows the intersectionality with social, political and racial symbols. Through the description of the complicated character of *Beloved*, Morrison shows how barbaric white racism and slavery were and how they became intolerant. Throughout the intersectionality approach, the thematic approach of slavery and racial discrimination is

explored in Morrison's Novel. Critically, my stance here would be the lack of presence of the black women treated through the contemporary works inspired by Morrison. The hegemony, racism and categorical discrimination within the references of the contemporary contexts are not addressed.

Moreover, in terms of intersectionality, there are three kinds of approaches to focus on, which are anticategorical, intercategorical, and intracategorical, as ascertained by McCall. Where anticategorical complexity addresses the importance of deconstruction of social categories like inequality, intercategorical complexity addresses social categories to strategically compare the social disparities, and intracategorical complexity falls within the anticategorical and intracategorical complexities, where it focuses on the social categories which is ignored.”

(McCall 1993). The focus on the complexities of the three approaches lies between the deconstruction and the use of categories in society. So, within the approach of inequality, the address towards slavery is not made. “With the references towards the feminists, this has been justified where the critique is substantive and the solution is substantive as well. The initial approach towards intersectionality was the male and female distinction by giving the male more priority” (McCall 1993). Intersectionality was initiated towards the conduct between genders, which denoted that women were only treated as objects. So, the categorisation of women and the domination of male-centred views were disrupted within the feminists. “Apart from this, there were critiques of postmodernist and poststructuralist theories, especially by Keller and Foucault. The white feminists claimed the inclusion of women within the modern thoughts of society. As the feminists were victims of male biasedness so, Keller and Foucault presented the challenge towards the fixation of the established truths.

Therefore, the evident approach towards the methodology is the hegemonic feminist approach with the anti-post-racial and anti-poststructuralist theories.” (McCall 1776). The writers of postmodernism and post-structuralist movements like Foucault and Keller wanted to redo the fixed ideas of power or knowledge, as the fixed categorisation and neglect of women by the idea of domination in society were harmful. Moreover, only the focus was on the domination and oppression of males and females, ignoring the presence of black women in between the categories. “Writings by feminists with the context of colour are put forward as an intra-categorical approach. The importance of both groups is necessary in terms of gender, identities, and locations. This master category is mainly the deconstruction of equality. This targets the violence towards race, sexuality, class, gender and normative assumptions. Where every feminist has researched to give freedom from such a hegemonic mindset.” Therefore, when it was seen that feminists pointed out the rights of women, they particularly focused on white women, marginalising the women of colour. So, hence the anticategorical differences between males and females of their rights as generalising women, intracategorical mostly emphasises women of colour, but somewhere the black women are overlooked. Then the question arises of “how intersectionality works within the complexities of the social relations in the Anticategorical framework” (McCall 1777). This means that, as anticategorical means social deconstruction of categories, how can it be defined by intersectionality? If through intersectionality the approach of slavery is addressed, then it is missing here as an anticategorical approach demolishes the social categories of inequality, prioritising the white women. Again, through intercategorical complexity focus on enslaved people and their mentality is not deeply focused. There is a void in exploring the enslaved Black women's lives and their traumatic experiences. McCall shares genealogy where the focus on gender can be expanded widely apart from male and female. “Through genealogy, there could be five genders. The social group can be widely divided into these five categories.

So, through the psychological version of the anti-categorical approach, there is complexity that is formed with the subject, so the identity of categories is rejected” (McCall 1778). So, as the identity or the categories of humans are layered and complicated, like Black people are not only men but women as well, who should be identified. So the identity categories are not fixed, which should be rejected, as there are people in between the lines who should be taken as a part. “Over the intersectionality development of racial and gender practices, there lie substantive intersections. For example, within the black community, women have more respect compared to their men than in the white community. This could be mainly due to slavery and white supremacy forcing them to work. The black women face sexual violence that makes them feel vulnerable (McCall 1780).” So, generally the black women work equally with black men, but the violence that is faced by them is heinous. They are ignored and left out in terms of recognition, as the focus of gender studies or the study of race mostly focuses on white women and Black men. It was not about the Black women. Hence, even if there is categorisation and other complexities, there are layered identities that need to be addressed. “One of the prototype approaches that took place is setting out narratives that define intersectionality. The intersection of groups or identities takes place through a single dimension. Therefore, complexity is managed and arranged through a group represented by an individual, where the narratives depend on social construction. In an intracategorical approach, more complexities can be found, particularly through narrative and theoretical interventions. This leads towards the intense study and categorisation of groups. More broadly, social inequality, gender discrimination and their impacts are discussed through the level of disaggregation. The social group shows the generalisations within the complexities in a detailed manner. Hence, the studies decline the generalisations following the homogeneous generalisations that are rooted in classification and categories. So, these two sections are deeply rooted in the theory of intersectionality. Interdisciplinary research goes into deeply

structured research where the discipline helps in women's studies, being multi-fragmented.

Lastly, contemporaries and women's studies play an important role” (McCall 1784).

Therefore, there are different sections to emphasise which remain within the layers of fragmentation of complexities. This is why intersectionality helps to identify the fragmented importance of different identities like Black women and tries to give them their importance in social inequality. In the intracategorical complexities, Irene Browne talked about whether there are differences between the complex differences and inequalities of the groups (McCall 1785). But focusing on the groups makes them strategically ignore the minor communities where there are Black women, their struggles of slavery and how they are looked down upon in society. Some of the counter questions may arise as to whether the categorical emphasis on relationships is really on theme differences of approach or not. This could be meaningfully defined by showing the relationships among the social groups, remaining definable and measurable inequalities (McCall 1785). Critically, I feel the categorical emphasis is there to recognise different groups and their struggles, for example, Black men vs Whites or Black men and White Women. But within those categories, the history and exploitation of Black women, objectification and harassment are not distinguished. “The categorical complexities depend on multiple groups, so the way is comparative. So, the complexity of the relationships would be based on social groups, for example, race and ethnicity, black and white. Inequality comes here for the analysis where heavily unionised cities with recent history pit through inequality in wages, which resulted in a gender wage difference” (McCall 1789). So, more consideration towards Black women is overlooked within these categories. Hence, this certainly puts disciplinary and interdisciplinary research and the categorical intersections under the narrow criticism of inequalities. Critically, through this, I feel that the categories fall more towards the perspectives of inequalities and group intersections. There is a limitation to how it can be evaluated from the perspective of slavery and by the historical

approach of the African American people. Moreover, the reason black women are marginalised for colour only is not the reason for their isolation. Therefore, there are certain limitations within the context of the trauma and slavery of black women. Certainly, the elaboration resides only in the discrimination between sections.

2.3.2 The perspective of Fanon about discrimination

According to Seunghyun Song, in Frantz Fanon's two prominent theses on *Black Skin White Masks*, the connection between racial oppression and traditional notions has been addressed. This article talks about the epidermal schema of inferiority through racial oppression. This article shows the evidence relating to the racially oppressive environment and how it turns into a racial minority. Through Fanon and colour racism, it is evident how, from the perspectives of phenomenological Jean-Paul and Maurice, colour racism still exists. Fanon, being a black man, had experience with the racial and colonial cultures by having individual subjectivity. The racial schema talks about the existence of racialization and inferiority. This emphasises that being inferior is a result of oppression. Hence, Fanon emphasises how Black people internalised racism when compared to white individuals. Through which the epidermal scheme is being pushed towards the boundary lines. The racism, consisting of bad words like “Dirty Nigger”, had been pointed out. With that, the confrontation with the white people has been showcased. In terms of bodily experience or more likely epidermal, it had been pointed out by Fanon that children get scared by the black-skinned people and always ask for help. For example, a child recalls the mom by seeing a Negro and says” Mama, see the Negro! I am frightened!” (Song 50). Thus, Fanon in France came with the confrontation that showcases the inferiority status which he feels with a lack of a fundamental mode of existence. Inferiority is discovered as something with epidermalization, where people who are neglected and marginalised are related to the notions of white people. Through a critique of Mayotte, he accosted the presence of decolonisation.

Here, Fanon talks about the desire Mayotte has for white skin and to have the desire for whiteness. Again, Mayotte feels the presence of black skin is concealing the “White potentials” as she feels like White, but her colour is Black. She seeks recognition from the Whites, and she is preoccupied with the attraction she has with the white people. Through the depiction of Mayotte, Fanon considers it to be the ultimate inferiority complex and accepts the white community. With that, Mayotte's expression put Fanon forward to explain the dual narcissism of Black and White authority. Fanon tries to attribute that individuals who are Black are mainly treated as inferior to the superior community, and their dominance should be challenged. Fanon talks socially about how the people of the community are marginalised and oppressed (Song 52). As the life of a coloured person goes daily, Fanon emphasises that a person of colour is considered to be a perpetual schema. (Song 53). With that in the bodily schema, Fanon emphasises that having consciousness is a consciousness of a transcendental object where the consciousness forms an ecological unity, like spontaneous consciousness. Also, the racial Epidermal schema that goes disrupting with the corporeal schema means leading towards the body possibilities which can be acted out without any imposition. Hence, while Fanon was referred to as a Negro, he connected it to the Corporeal schema that emphasises (Song 55). Therefore, the negative possibility is removed by internalising the perceptions of acceptable bodily movement. In terms of body images, it is specifically important as racism as its qualities are formed through racial body and their images. Moreover, Fanon, in this attribute of body image, tries to put up a confrontation with the White gaze (Song 56). The racial epidermal schema and the possible consequences will be presented from the perspectives of minorities. Based on the *Black Skin White Mask*, black individuals can push through the hindrance of ‘I Can’. For example, Oppression does not only take place physically; oppression can happen internally within their existence. Like, the oppression that is subjected internally will take place in a restrained form by the projection of

“I can”. And if we talk about the projection of the words by females for race or slavery discrimination, the clause followed will be “I can, insofar as I am like the White man”. Here, the internal mode is completely racial and sentimental due to racial views. The discrimination of racial identity and existence is particularly emphasised here. Fanon mainly conducts through the Epidermal schema and the skin colour. The approach of Morrison's writing and the inspirational contemporary world are deeply connected with persisting trauma, slavery and the oppression of African Americans, rather than a psychological approach.

2.3.3 Toni Morrison's contribution to the novels

In the intimate histories through women's perspectives, the importance of female writers like Toni Morrison has been mentioned. It is said that Black writers, especially Black women writers, try to focus on the theme of slavery through the place of sociopolitical freedom, love, tenderness, etc. Writers like Toni Morrison focus on the experiences of humans who suffered from slavery and the intimate life of the slaves where they lacked family, freedom and love (Jackson 133). Morrison said that in terms of historical context, America has nothing in the slave museum compared to the Brazilians (Jackson 134). This sheds light on the underlying cause of how African American writers try to restore their history through novels. Richard Jackson also clarifies his statement on Morrison about the intimate history and life stories of the Black slaves. She says that since the Blacks were sympathetically affecting the white people, it may make them offended. The most important part not given emphasis was the intimate life and the inferiority of the slaves' lifestyle. Hence, Morrison's novels always tell the story stripped down from the old people. For example, it is seen how Sethe is and how she splits the woodshed to kill her children. As they were born to be future slaves, Sethe preferred them to be dead rather than alive (Jackson 139). Morrison has tried to shed light on the personal lives of the slaves. Therefore, when the *Beloved* novel comes forward, it does not talk only about Slavery. Morrison added how she had to go

through the terror of society and survive within it. With the justification of slavery, Morrison says that one cannot live with a family in terms of slavery. Because you tend to be a part of another family and another life. Hence, building a family is quite impossible for those who go into enslavement. Morrison adds that she started out feeling wanting and distinguishing the feeling of self (Jackson 139). Morrison tries to put the focus beyond infanticide in the factual and private parts of her novel. Morrison tries to give us the perspectives of the lives of enslavement, abomination, and outrageous and immoral violence. The characters in the novels that Morrison has given an overview of talk about the black slaves and the desperation they have to return from that place. Sethe tried to kill her children and herself to stop going back there. Even freedom was cursed to be a paradise for them. Therefore, *Beloved* sheds light on the concept of daily life as a struggle for the slaves. Hence, leading a normal life for the slaves became a perpetual struggle (Jackson 140). Morrison doesn't talk about Brazilian slavery because of the concept of bondage (Jackson 140). Moreover, in the mythical and spiritual approach, there is a strong validation from Morrison. The human experience and mythical realism play an important role in the novel *Beloved*. The element of realistic brutality is emphasised by the spiritual and mythical combination. Hence, Morrison chose the “dead” child to be reincarnated and then used. Indeed, *Beloved* in the book of Morrison is a spirit for sure, but is also a representative of those who were not a part of slavery. She is ‘dismembered’ in the novel. Also, Slavery for the writers is a type of experience which leads the writer to take help from myths. Hence, this leads to slavery being remembered chronologically. In addition, Black writers seem to neglect the myths, mostly negative ones, which are “myths of the Negro Past” that glorify the whites and Western culture, where there are said that human society came from the white culture with no black ancestors. Therefore, Robert Bringham said that these myths and facts are persistent lies and still are taken as persistent truths. The real myths are humility and fewer lies. Hence, these blacks are inferior

compared to the Emperors or Jews. These reclamation and persistent lies are real. So, such mythical approaches showed the element of survival struggles and strategies, rebellious encounters and the fight for liberty (Jackson 141). Critically, the limitations here are the contemporary works that keep Morrison's essence alive, with a focus more on African American writers.

Colson Whitehead is not only a writer but also a historical fiction writer. Within the historical fiction, the writing capacities of Whitehead delivered a single notion of American history. The novel *The Underground Railroad* talks about neo-slavery and its narrative. There is a close relationship between the contemporary perspectives of *The Underground Railroad* within the limits and the neo-slave narratives as well. Focusing on 21st-century fiction, giving towards a context of meta slave narrative tremendously it has tremendously proliferated (Manshel 22). The meta-slave narrative plays an important role in pointing out the miseries of Black people. In the novel, *The Underground Railroad*, the major focus was on the lives of black women, emphasising the historicity and fabulation of developing the record of the United States. This novel certainly depends on a specific period with the critical progression through temporally unspecified settings. In the novel *The Underground Railroad*, a potential focus is on the lost colour rebellions and histories of people. In recent years, this has been one of the significant novels following meta-slavery narratives. Different writers have tried to question the recent contemporary writings on slavery. Stephen Best has also questioned the primacy of slavery through the black thoughts. Hence, it is evident how the truth came out from the slave past and gives an overview of black politics at the current time. As Aida Levy Hussen said, he wants to reconsider the history of the pain suffered, which is transformative and important for major changes. Constantly focusing on contemporaries surely tries to drift away from the past (Manshel 34). Moreover, in the novel *The Underground Railroad*, Best and Levy Hussen talk about the meta slave, its legacy and its

limits. Whitehead talks about contemporary narrative, whereas in *The Underground Railroad*, there are the slave narratives of the nineteenth century. Pointing towards the major importance towards *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. Whitehead's character Caesar in the novel was born a slave, and it is ensured that Whitehead's naming was mainly an inscribed form of the character from *Oroonoko* by Aphra Behn. Also, Whitehead's attention towards *Beloved* is something inevitable. Kevin Young said that the novel had a strong connection with the novel of Morrison's novel *Beloved* (Manshel 36). One of the most important scenes of *The Underground Railroad* is of Cora working in a South Carolina museum whose purpose was to give knowledge to the citizens who are white about the history of the young nation. The museum is like a Railroad that permits them to see more of a country. However, the narratives set by the museum only favour the White citizens and the colonial narratives of the nation. Mr. Field, the curator of the museum, further explains how the place gives a permit to see beyond the experience. To make the experience of the museum illuminated, and for the American historical encounters, mainly formed by whites. To make it more relevant, Cora acts here as part of three actors or options from the "Scenes of Darkest Africa", "Life on a Ship", and "Typical Day on Plantation". Moreover, Lee Konstantinou states how differently a narrative full of confusion and lies is portrayed in the context of slavery. (Manshel 37). Hence, the museum puts forth a different narrative of the history of slavery. Cora, through various aspects, is considered to be reminded of the reality, the encounter of her past life, the time of the plantation when the dead bodies were on display and typical women on the day of the encounter. The Plantation memory worries Cora, but this is not the problem with the presence of the work called "Spinning Wheel". Cora remembers the fact that she struggled due to the trauma she faced from slavery. And how Mr. Field tried to treat Cora by playing a role that physically and mentally impacted Cora. The scene where Cora was made to wear costumes was also considered to be heart-rending for her (Manshel 37). So, Whitehead

wanted to showcase how the enactment of slavery could be a scar for an individual. This mostly shows a layer towards psychological trauma rather than the persistent memory of her family through the intersectional approach. Therefore, Morrison's memory conceptualisation to showcase the atrocities that still go on should be brought up. Hence, the novel *The Underground Railroad* works as a fictional interrogation and, again, as a meta-slave narrative. The resistance that has been put through by the character Cora, how she escaped from the Plantation to a slave ship and then to the darkest part of Africa, plays an inevitable role in pointing a logic of historical narrative with how Cora escaped towards success (Manshel 37). One of the most important aspects is that with the struggles that Cora goes through, she does not find success, and she never reaches the North. In contrast, *The Underground Railroad* at the end section approaches the West, not the North. This emphasises that the struggle of slavery never ends in the novel, for all its movement across time and space. *The Underground Railroad* evokes contemporary African American Literature and its history. Also, it is determined to be Whitehead's *BeLoved* through the similarity within the genre. Therefore, through the contemporary work of Whitehead, Morrison's work is determined from the perspective of narratives. The intersectional approach through Slavery and historical trauma is not emphasised here.

Also, in the American literary Canon, African American literature is being reincarnated from its past life, and the influences are from the oral stories, songs, slave narratives, and poems. So, African American literature comprises so many canonical and disparate genres with parts. The African American texts, which prefer the non-canonical Canon, show unruly texts, rules and reading lists. In African American literature, one of the important parts is to showcase the “slave list” and then put across the “fugitive's condition”. Hence, there is a dynamic between the master-slave conditions. Therefore, the article explores the intervention of the hegemonic notion and uproots African literature by not

depending on the sedimentation of canonisation. The African American literature is bothered by a perspective of Morrison's "rememory" of the scene that has been felt intensely. This part of the literature depends on the perspective of seeing, remembering and living in the underground. This is what is described as Black living practices (Bey 108). The debate that is formed over the canonical and uncanonical black life follows the path of racial, gender, political and social interventions. According to Kronick, "Canon is something that comes over through sacred forms, just like how Eusebius in *Ecclesiastical History* declared the official book of the Bible as canon. Hence, it was to be followed and maintained as is" (Bey 109). Moreover, Kronick adds that a canon conversation depends on morals, history, and tradition, but literature. Kronick emphasises the responses towards the questions of identity, which could be identified as possible literature (Bey 109). Therefore, Kronick emphasises the evidence of the distinction of the literature and emphasises literature from the phase where it started. So, a principal who does not accept the independence of literature simply denies its existence as an identity. So, the literature and its form do not bear an identity. Kronick sheds light towards Morrison's assertive claim that mentions the type of "Unspeakable things that remain Unspoken" (Bey 109). What T.S. Eliot said about literature and its notion denotes a regulation of changes within the literature. That means "a living literature" that always changes. Hence, it contrasts with the canonical approach. African American literature disrupts the constant disposal of the definition of the definitively fixed word. Therefore, African American literature remains non canonically canon where the condition of black operations could produce the absolute overturning and the absolute overturning of this world (Bey 110). Moreover, the Gates theory of Signifyin(g) is deeply connected to the Black vernacular traditions and the traditions of African Americans. The way Gates called it Signifyin(g) is defined through the method of repetitive approach through a signal difference, where it is said to be the Blackness of Blackness. The conceptualisation of the Signifyin(g) is

being discovered as indeterminacy or onto certain. Hence, it is motivated or unmotivated that the Black writers read and critically analyse the texts as a self-definition where the engendering moment shows for African American literature. The gate through the poem also defines that anti-essentialism does not come across through the black hue; rather, it is because of the cultural heritage and differences that lie between the Americans. He adds that the Blackness of the Americans could be redefined by its close reading and through “Blackness,” and by the presence of Blackness, it shows the literary language that has been repeated or shared. Toni Morrison defines them as writers who are epidermally but are involved with black literature. The concern is with the thinking, not the skin colour. (Bey 113). Blackness is a systematic and symbolic disobedience, reminding us of the rejection of the regular norms and through this context, racial derogation has been projected (Bey 113). The books that have been written in context to be remembered are, for example, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (Bey 119). In the novel *The Underground Railroad*, neo-slavery and its potential in African American literature are mentioned. With the concern of slavery, Blackness has also been pointed out here through complexity. As per Tillet, Slavery cannot be an exhaustion as a narrative. Therefore, Blackness is directed towards the irresistible and irreducible force that has the planes of distinction (Bey 130). Neo slavery and the concerns of Blackness are the expressions of fugitives and their desire to escape the underground. Throughout the novel, Cora tries to rebel, and her plantation escape from the Georgia slave camp takes place when a recently purchased slave is brought there. They tried to escape through underground tracks, stations, etc, which were excavated in the Southern land. Eventually, Cora was pursued by the slave catcher Ridgeway and tried for hellbound on their trail. The relationship between Mabel and Cora, where Mabel tries to escape, is followed by a verification that she was also a victim of being a slave. The grandmother of Cora, Ajarry, was also sold and has lots of stories to share. The mother-daughter relationship will always be remembered. The novel

puts the readers towards the Blackness and the sufferings of the people. It gives rise to the fugitives and the dismemberment. Therefore, *The Underground Railroad* gives an intended presentation towards the fugitives, a darkness where Cora becomes a part of its victims. The novel also tries to hold down the White law and accountability. This means that the U.S. tried to make blackness legible or fungible. It is said that there are laws, and then there are White Laws. Hence, the fugitives, Black laws and locomotives as a train have been put across. Only when one gets into the railroad and faces all the situations of *The Underground Railroad* then he does one get to see the true America. There is a joke that says, “Find the true face of America”. However, for the African Americans and “Blackness” concerned, there is a road to light within the darkness. Hence, *the Underground Railroad* shows the secrets that are not evident to all (Bey 134). Therefore, African Americans are more lenient towards the epidermalization and identity crises. The underlying cruelty towards African Americans has yet to be addressed openly. Through Morrison's book, the slavery narrative has been shown, but the underlying trauma, slavery in the contemporary world and historical protection of the contemporary writers is yet to be addressed.

Chapter 3: Research Question and Addressing the Gap

The writings by Toni Morrison influenced many other contemporary writers to show concern about African American literature, mostly towards Black women. She tried to address the survival of Black women against racial, political and cultural discrimination in a wide aspect. Her writing style included fragmentation, intensity and emotions that showcased the sufferings of different black women in different situations, be it Pecola or Beloved. I wanted to conduct my research based on the theory of intersectionality, which overlaps concepts of people's identities through their experiences, as referenced by Morrison. Within

the literature reviews, the novel *Let Us Descend* determines motherhood, enslavement, losses and struggles on the plantation. Additionally, the protagonist's spiritual belief in escaping through spiritual guidance is also demonstrated. Similarly, in the novel *The Underground Railroad* life of a fugitive is portrayed through Cora. She shows her resilience to escape when she is sold in America as a slave, only to be subjected towards more challenges. Both the characters in the contemporary novel strive for freedom and escape. However, through the literature reviews, there were limitations as the explorations of the articles were limited towards race, colour, sexual exploitation and struggles of the protagonists. So, throughout the Black African American literature, the presence of segregation, inequality, and complexities in the relationships within the Black communities has been addressed. Hence, limitations are seen where comparisons with Toni Morrison's Novels are not made. Also, how the contemporary African American writers are getting inspired by Morrison, the writers are still addressing these underlying issues are not focused. My research follows the gap where I want to discuss why slavery is still relevant to the writers of African Americans. What is the reason for the inferiority that African American writers face? Following the 17th century, Toni Morrison addressed slavery through *Beloved* in the 19th century. By comparison, through intersectionality, did the evolution of slavery change in the 21st century, and is there a presence of modern slavery? Moreover, through Toni Morrison's novels, can a comparison be made with contemporary novels?

Chapter 4: Theory

4.1 Intersectionality Method

Kimberle Crenshaw in an interview by Barbara Giovanna Bello and Letizia Mancini titled as “Talking about intersectionality with Kimberle Crenshaw”, talked about the journey

made for the black feminist legal theory and critical legal theory, “where in CLS it mainly ensured that the law structured conditions of social hierarchy where it put the important theorists and practitioners to claim that it serves justice. And FLT depends on the reproductive aspect of patriarchy” (Bello and Mancini 13). Hence, this shows how Critical Legal Studies are highly based on inequality in a legal way, where it pretends to be equal. Social hierarchy mostly depended on the power and the status of position within the society, and marginalised people are always neglected. In FLT, it maintains the notion of patriarchal stereotypes which detain women under control through gender differentiation. Therefore, this shows how, through social hierarchy and law, injustice and patriarchy prevailed within the society where Black women were open victims. So, to address the Black women, Critical Legal Studies was adapted as it was an inclusion of vast ideas through which she could address different opinions. For example, through Demarginalizing the intersection of Race and Sex, she debated about the legal injustices, “Crenshaw through Demarginalizing emphasises the preconceptions of race, gender and laws as they are addressed with limitations in the society” (Bello and Mancini 13). Hence, I feel that through the approach of Crenshaw, the negligence of Black women within the context of prevailing justice in social hierarchy and patriarchal power was addressed, as to how they were partial within one community.

Kimberle Crenshaw says, “through Intersectionality, there is the process of categorisation and modification of social hierarchy that enables social power (Bello and Mancini 14). Yes, this is how power is embedded within the society through the social and, mostly regarding the black females, where, with intersectionality, the focus can shift more towards this particular community as they are burdened under the categorisation through social power.

Additionally, Crenshaw provides an example of Leslie McCall, which highlights the distinction between anti-categorical and structural approaches, as outlined by McCall (Bello and Mancini 14). The anti-categorical approaches are where we only talk about the differences within the sectors of race and gender, whereas in the structural approaches, it is more inclined towards the power of the hierarchies of society. Therefore, these are moving beyond the conventional intersectionality, which only focused on women's marginalisation. With that, it seems that beyond race and gender, there is an overlap of the issues that invite more underlying concerns. So, through anti-categorical and structural approaches, there is room for patriarchy or power in society. Hence, “Crenshaw, in her interview, emphasises how there is a debate over the approaches of racial, hierarchical categories. Even within feminism, gender is concerned with the perspective of categorisation. With this, there is an approach towards female rights” (Bello and Mancini 14). So, Crenshaw wanted to put an important identical sector for the Black women amongst them tension of different approaches. I also agree, as not only in the gender and racial sectors, but also in the social position, Black women are not even counted. Therefore, “Crenshaw, these sections of intersectionality draw focus on the social power where the power is modified continuously” (Bello and Mancini 15).

“Crenshaw had tried to put focus on the Black women, in their rights, identity and also their rights in employment in “DeGraffenried v General Motor”. Also, in *From Private Violence to Mass Incarceration: Thinking About Women, Race, and Social Control*,” she talked about how Black women have been pushed out of the neighbourhood in California (Bello and Mancini 16). Therefore, Black women have always tried to be excluded from the community, where even their existence and acknowledgement were not recognised. So, through power, this categorised should be dismantled with the inclusion of Black women. Kimberle Crenshaw, in the article, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A

Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Anti Politics”, discusses how Black women tend to be marginalised, terrorised and excluded from the feminist theory. In this article, Crenshaw showed how the experiences are ignored and often overlooked within the terms called sexism and racism. Through the Antidiscrimination Framework, “ the problem of intersectionality was addressed as how the court discussed the stories of Black women plaintiffs.” (Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection” 141). This shows that there was a different narrative from the side of the court. Like, in one of the cases called “DeGraffenried v. General Motors, where the five black women brought suit against General Motors for discrimination against Black women. With that claimed that General Motors did not hire black-necked prior 1964 and Black women who were hired after 1970 were suddenly cut off from their jobs due to the subsequent recession. But the court did not give the verdict on the behalf of plaintiffs” (Crenshaw, “Demarginalising the Intersection” 141). This ensures that Black women were constantly bullied, and they were victims of constantly getting neglect. Moreover, another case related to Moore v Hughes Helicopters, Inc. shows how women were discriminated against when they were not promoted to higher posts. Mainly, they were discriminated against based on their race and gender, “the district courts refusal to certify Moore as the class representative in the sex discrimination on the behalf of women of Hughes” (Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection” 143). Therefore, the acknowledgement towards the existence of black women as a community was declined by the court, as for them it seemed to be valid for white women in terms of gender discrimination. “One inference could be drawn from the courts statement that Moores complaint did not entail a claim of discrimination “against females” ”(Crenshaw, “The University of Chicago Legal Forum” 144). Therefore, the complaint was not validated by Moore, as the black women did not represent the whole female community, which is directed towards sexism. For the courts to pass the judgment on behalf of Moore, the

acknowledgement of their existence was nowhere to be found. Moreover, in the case *Payne v Travenol*, “two black female plaintiffs had bought a suit against the class discrimination which later was rejected by the court as they did not allow the plaintiffs to represent Black males but only black women” (Crenshaw, “The University of Chicago Legal Forum” 148). This clearly shows where Kimberle Crenshaw wanted to highlight the court cases that Black women went through. Even if they have their rights of equality, being Black females, they have been constantly neglected and marginalised within the community. The validations of the complaints are dismissed based on petty reasons, which is unacceptable. Therefore, the existence of such behaviour is still seen within the black community, which makes the black women feel feeble in front of white females and black males.

In addition to the interview of Bello and Mancini, Crenshaw adds to the interview that “Intersectionality was nothing new in Europe and America, it was mainly focused on race and gender, ignoring the American feminism” (Bello and Mancini 16). Adding to this, I want to argue that intersectionality truly was not new in Europe and America, as there were underlying concerns. Black women are still being addressed only by Black writers of America, showing the persisting negligence. With that, the hierarchy is still in the major role towards the Black women's identity and their discrimination.

“Intersectionality is a method which can help in detecting the overlapping and connected co-construction of visible and, at first sight, invisible strands of inequality” (Lutz 39). This connects altogether the concepts of race, class, gender and other social recognitions in a method. Apart from the overall oppression and violence, intersectionality can help to focus primarily on the struggles of Black women. The suffering of Black women is not limited to either racism or sexism within a limitation, as it has a connection with both. So, the invisible strands of inequality are one of the reasons why Black women are marginalised and

oppressed. As per Scholar Floya Anthias, there are four types of analysis with intersectionality which are through the way of discrimination that can be justified by the experiences of people, actors level that emphasizes a perspective of a collective group of people through which they interpret, institutional level is depended over the systematic approach of laws that show the presence of inequality and representation level which is based over different stereotypes. So, through the dehumanisation of black women and how they are oppressed within the white community, both between white men, black men, and white women can be addressed through these aspects. The experiences of black women, the systematic laws that are against black women, approach them through these experiences and take action through resistance. Lastly, regarding the representation of black stereotypes, for example, Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire. With that, Kathy Davis puts importance on the highlights of race, class and gender for their moments of narration and explanation of their experiences.

Lutz, a qualitative researcher in an Article with Kathy Davis, includes a three-step process for interviews, focusing on the power and identities of people. Initially, he approaches partiality (Lutz 40). Therefore, he wanted to crucially identify himself as not superior in terms of research. Secondly, how different sectors of identities like race, gender or class are connected to the practical life of each individual and they have their narratives to highlight (Lutz 40). For example, “the life story of Mamphela Ramphele, an anti-apartheid fighter and icon of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa” (Lutz 41). The example of Ramphele will emphasise the fact that, as a Black woman, she primarily focuses on her recognition. Moreover, she fought back with resistance. Hence, she fought with her power and resistance against the oppression. Thirdly, using information based on circumstantial situations, like the Ramphele Case of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa. As it can be addressed through the relationship of power, the context of

violence and racism (Lutz 41). Critically, I believe, the life stories of individuals like Ramphele, being a black woman, empower her to sustain her identity and fight within the tension between oppression and resistance.

“Introducing the following term, ‘Doing intersectionality’, we explore how individuals creatively draw on various aspects of their multiple identities as a resource to gain control of their lives” (Lutz 41). Therefore, through intersectionality, an individual can usefully use the multiple identities like Black woman, labour, etc, and use them as a resource to change the controlling power. This shows that the multiple identities not only reflect the vulnerability of black women but to utilise that and convert it into their resistance. As per Lutz and Davis, “individuals are not always and in every situation multiply vulnerable. Instead, develop strategies of resistance by drawing on multiple identities” (Lutz 42). This helps to define intersectionality not only as a medium to show oppression, particularly of Black women, but also how they can transform their vulnerability into their way to resist the control. Like, black women are victims of discrimination, oppression, and are even considered animals while they are enslaved as slaves. Therefore, more than showing these multiple identities of weakness and being victims, they can try to resist by their way of connecting to their history, through resisting physical oppression, connecting with their mothers and trying to be strong.

Hence, Lutz, in his critical argument, points out that not all the sections of intersectionality are equally important and need to be addressed, as some important sections can be addressed within the context of power. So, he finds that the incorporation of social stratification, which justifies the hierarchy of society, can be helpful to elaborate inequality. In addition, Helma Lutz points towards the privileged positions within the social hierarchy and intersectionality, referring towards the continuation of gender, race and oppression within

the people (Lutz 43). Maintaining that, I feel social stratification exercises power over Black women, as that is how inequality prevails. Regarding privilege, it also prevails between power and social hierarchy, as we see that a black woman living in her community might be treated better than she would be while living in a white community. So, for a Black woman, there has always been suffering that lies within gender, colour, race, etc. But by social stratification, it is in different categories of power, privilege and their roles. Like, being a slave who works in a plantation does not give a black woman that much power as a Black woman who is somewhere working with a family for household work.

4.2 Bell Hooks in *AIN'T I A WOMAN*

The dehumanisation of African American women started during the 18th to 19th century when white people were intrigued by the discrimination that was done towards African women by African men, which created terror and fear within the slave community. The African black women were, from the very beginning, assigned to do field work and domestic work. They were also captured and sold by the slavers if they were found guilty of violating any laws (Hooks, “*Sexism and the Black Slave Experience*” 17). This dehumanisation was continued by the white people through physical abuse. There are several traumas that the African American Black women endure within their history of slavery, and this trauma is one of them. Ruth and Jacob Weldon, being an African couple, described the traumatic experiences that the black women went through. They shared, “mothers with babes at their breasts barely branded and scarred, till it would seem as if the very heavens might smite the infernal tormentors with the doom they so richly merited” (Hooks, *Sexism and the Black Slave Experience* 18). This surely justifies how pregnant black women were tortured and had horrific experiences, even when they had to nurse their babies. The slaves had the terror of being submissive to their owners, who were white people. The black women even

had to do the same work as the black male slaves used to do, for example, in domestic life, the field, etc. So, the physical labour that was done by the black women was equal to or even more than compared to that of black men (Hooks, “*Sexism and the Black Slave Experience*” 23). The exploitation of black young girls racially and sexually was evident when they used to work within the white families at a very young age (Hooks, “*Sexism and the Black Slave Experience*” 25). The horror experiences created a fear within the Black women that they did not show resistance, as “Any show of resistance on the part of enslaved females increased the determination of white owners eager to demonstrate their power” (Hooks, *Sexism and the Black Slave Experience* 26).

The stereotypes and objectification of black women are still present within the black community and their history. White womanhood were being treated as a typical idealised women whereas, black women were treated as Mammy or jezebels as they wanted to be religiously more pious by categorising women to be black temptress or a black woman being caregiver, They were labeled jezebels and sexual temptress and accused of leading white men away from spiritual purity” (Hooks, “*Sexism and the Black Slave Experience*” 33). This certainly signifies how the hegemonic control of the white community tried to push upon the black women by making them tainted. The stereotypical characters of black women as sexual temptresses dimmed the sexual abuse that Black women faced. Moreover, in the old African communities, the black women were treated as breeding slaves or as some object which could bear children for more slaves (Hooks, “*Sexism and the Black Slave Experience*” 41). The liberty for body exploitation of black women prevailed from the early stages of slavery.

Even after slavery ended, the oppression and violence against black women did not end. The portrait of African Black women in American television “the predominant image is that of the fallen woman, the white, the southern, the prostitute” (Hooks, “Continued

Devaluation of Black Womanhood” 52). Therefore, even if the abusive life of slavery was ended, the defamation continued for Black women in the media to look down upon them through hegemonic control. The black women were being shaped with a bad image by the whites. For instance, “the year of Black Reconstruction of 1867-77, black women struggled to change negative images perpetuated by whites”. (Hooks, “Continued Devaluation of Black Womanhood” 55).

Therefore, through a negative approach of ideologies and by framing the black women to be immoral and as objects to be ridiculed. The constant sabotage of black women's character and not giving acknowledgement as a human being is still present in how the African American writers try to emphasise. The black women tried to get through this humiliation with the help of the media and journalists, but that resulted in a void. (Hooks, “Continued Devaluation of Black Womanhood” 58). Therefore, it was identified by the black playwright Lorraine Hansberry, who in her drama addresses this issue, “Hey there, hot chocolate! Say there Jezebel” (Hooks, “Continued Devaluation of Black Womanhood” 59). This simply implies how black women were categorised even after the end of slavery. The naming of black women and the continuation of preferring them as temptresses, objects and something one can own and throw off continued in society to sustain the hierarchy. Apart from the negative images that Black women used to have, they had the least control over their reproductive health. Post emancipation, which is around the 20th century, we see that the Black mothers are considered mad and unfit, “Lower class women and consequently black women have the least control over their bodies and reproductive activities” (Hooks, “Continued Devaluation of Black Womanhood” 75). Therefore, controlling the reproductive rights of African American Black women from slavery, even after emancipation, is still going on. Majorly, it is a strategy for the Whites to get a grip on the Black population control.

The evidence of black women's resistance against slavery from the 19th century till contemporary is yet to be recognised. The white female scholars did not really acknowledge the black females to be women, and through their contemporary works, in *The Remembered Gate*, written by Barbara Berg, the importance of the Black women during the 19th century was not included (Hooks, "Black Women and Feminism" 161). This critically emphasises one of the reasons why, still now, the African American writers justify their history, their struggles, so that it does not succumb. The old historiographers like Sochen in *Herstory* point out how the black women tried to put focus on an end towards racism and sexism through black women's organisations by a section called "Old Problems: Black Americans". Also, the Black writer Mary Church Terrell tried to justify the black women and their social justice. (Hooks, "Black Women and Feminism" 164). Therefore, as a resistance, this have to be specific steps by the black historians and writers to keep their voices alive for the Black women against the partiality. Moreover, Fannie Barrier Williams pointed towards the political solidarity as a resistance for women's rights done by Black women to be emphasised by the World Congress of Representative Women (Hooks, "Black Women and Feminism" 164). With that, Anna Cooper, an activist, published in 1892 a book called *A Voice from the South* to identify the atrocities done towards the equality of black women (Hooks, "Black Women and Feminism" 164 -167). Mary Church Terrell also wrote in favour of black women lynching by addressing in her article about *Lynching from a Negro Point of View* in the year 1912 (Hooks, "Black Women and Feminism 169). This shows the presence of slavery in contemporary times, even if it was in the aftermath of slavery. The articles and books written over time till now evidence the maximum resistance shown by the Black writers to draw the focus of the people from the ideology that slavery has ended. The resistance that Bell hooks comes up with is that feminism has all its own needs and requirements. Hooks talks about the racism and sexism movements to have the hidden policy

of a trap that deliberately says to liberate women but tends to lead towards the old repressive system (Hooks, “Black Women and Feminism” 191). So, through the contemporary movements of Feminism, even if it tries to eliminate the sexist oppression of women but it is loosely focused on it and focuses on establishing the male system of patriarchy and only benefits white women. Therefore, it is a masked movement with the importance of the benefits of men and white women, with black women constantly addressing the struggles. Therefore, the address of lynching of women, dehumanisation and the constant address of victimisation addressed in the books or articles show the presence of black women's violence in contemporary times.

4.3 Modern Slavery

Modern slavery is considered to be something that is related to human trafficking, human labour, dehumanisation and objectification of humans even in the contemporary period. Human trafficking is a type of forced labour, and that does lead to control over that person, and one of the main reasons why human trafficking is continued is the percentage of high profit. It is evident that during the 21st century, the crime of human trafficking, the laundering of the body parts of humans, began (Ngwe and Elechi, 102). So, Body laundering and sexual exploitation of the slaves did not end over a period. This could emphasise how the slavers exploit the slaves by controlling them physically, even with reproduction, and having more slaves. As per Bales and Cornell (2008), “The modern slavery does have some differences from that of ancient slavery, as they have differences when it comes to expenses. In modern slavery, the slaves are comparatively less expensive, they are controlled by the slave masters for a definite time, and they contribute to the economy” (Ngwe and Elechi 106). Hence, through the slave trade, the slavers in the 21st century tried to make them more powerful and dehumanised the others. Moreover, it was reported that most of the human

trafficking was done from Nigeria, where the victims were females and children. So, in Nigeria, trafficking was commonly done among females and children for sexual exploitation and economic purposes. (Ngwe and Elechi 113). “The Nigerian Newspaper in 2007 reported that the age group of two males and eight females for the slave trade was between 13 to 22 years” (Ngwe and Elechi 114). So, most of the slave trade for females was done for domestic work and prostitution by controlling their lives from the early stage, giving them a scar for a lifetime. Moreover, the early life of sexual exploitation and treating them as objects certainly gives them trauma that goes through generations.

Similarly, “sexual exploitation had occurred within the black women during the timeline of 1619 to 2020, leading towards mental pain and torture. The sexuality of the black women were mostly exploited where they were the victims of determining reproductive ability and traded for economic purposes” (Wilson 122). Hence, The reproduction of the black women was ensured so that they can be used for further reproduction of slaves and that can be helpful for the economy. Moreover, “physically about 58% of all the enslaved women were subjected to sexual assaults and used for experiments without anesthesia” (Wilson 123). Experiments which led black women to give up their health made them feel like animals. The exploitation of their bodies and health happens even without the acknowledgement of the black women. Even the media exploitation was still present, leading black women to feel like sexual objects. “One of the sexual stereotypes is Jezebel, referring to the highly signifying objectification and inferiority in the white society. In 1915, the movie *The Birth of a Nation*, *Lydia Brown*, depicted the same characteristics of a black woman who was sexually objectified in the movie (Wilson 125). This signifies how black women, even after slavery and the freedom were granted, were subjected towards immoral behaviours in the media. Leading towards a certain negative image of black women within the white society. Therefore, through certain negative images and black women, for economy led to them being

oppressed physically even after freedom was granted for the slaves. “During 1955 to 1965, there was the presence of stereotypes and negative media portrayals” (Wilson 126). The exploitation of black women's health medically and the portrayal of negative images of black women continue to carry the historical discrimination and endure mental pain.

4.4 Trauma

According to the article by Ricardo Phipps and Stephen Throne, “Transgenerational trauma was based on the survivors of the Holocaust families, which had an importance towards the second generation of the surviving families (Daniel, 1985)” (Phipps and Throne 35). So, this was transmitted as a way of trauma to the second generation, which happened due to the partition. This certainly focuses on the traumas that families had from disasters, immigration, sexual abuse, war, genocides, etc. “The term *historical colonisation* refers to the domination of the Europeans over the Native American people, which resulted in the mass genocides” (Phipps and Throne 36). So, this is a which borrowed idea that was borrowed from the effects of the families of Holocaust and then used to explain the transmission of trauma within the African Americans. With the historical trauma, the European colonisers started mass genocide, geographical land grabbing, etc. Therefore, it denotes a trauma that is passed down within the generations by historical events.

Cultural trauma is also one of the distinguished approaches towards the trauma of African descendants, which was extended from the long-term impact that the Holocaust survivors had. “The circumstances of cultural trauma are differentiated through the African descent people and by enslaving them in the United States with continuous oppression” (Phipps and Throne 36). Therefore, the ideology of trauma has been extended into a historical and cultural context, connecting them. According to Eyerman, “cultural trauma surely has a psychological impact that happened from the scars of chattel slavery” (Phipps and Throne

36). For example, people who were enslaved still have the wounds of being someone's property without any will or rights. So, cultural trauma can be used to determine the identical crisis that the people faced due to being owned by the whites as some possessions.

By this, “DeGruy has ensured a term called *post-traumatic slave syndrome* for those who have the traumatic experiences of enslavement. Moreover, due to these experiences, African American people often have the cause and effect of post-traumatic experiences through continuous oppression and discrimination, called cultural *dysthymia*” (Phipps and Throne 36). This represents how the African American people often faced racial discrimination. Through the historical and cultural trauma, evidence of marginalised minorities being attacked is completely clear. With the historical background, there is also a constant identity crisis that is followed by African Americans. Also, the indigenous groups are getting sidelined by the colonisers, for example, the Japanese American survivors and Mexican American immigrants (Phipps and Throne 36). The post-traumatic experiences led the victims to go through the same behaviour internally and externally, which is known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Moreover, some of the traumatic experiences lasted more than a month or years over the past century. Historical acknowledgement of the enslavement of African people goes through a long journey of centuries through continuous oppression, violence and inequalities. Therefore, the trauma of historical enslavement of the Whites and identity crises are still prevailing within the African Americans.

As per DeGruy (2005) and Reid, Mims, and Higginbottom (2004), “Cultural trauma leads to emotional injury through the existence of traumatic experiences in one's psyche” (Phipps and Throne 36). For example, these traumatic experiences can take place from oppression, institutional or social inequality, racism and slavery. African Americans tend to be the victims by having these symptoms, resulting in a high risk of health conditions, which

are the impact of trauma that they endure transgenerationally. According to an overview of a few authors, “Wilkins, Whiting, Watson, Ruston, and Moncrief (2013) and DeGruy (2005), restriction of slavery encouraged the enslaved African American parents to force their children not to question the Whites after the end of slavery” (Phipps and Throne 36). This explains that even after there was a restriction on slavery, the African Americans were trying to control their children to ensure their safety, leading children to strain their minds with systematic ways of oppression and emotionally draining them from coping and handling the impact. “Even after the enactment of the Civil Rights Act and the emancipation of the enslaved people to discard discrimination by race and inequality, African Americans still had their struggles of experiences politically, economically, and socially” (Phipps and Throne 36). This also affects their self-esteem, occupation and their mindset. The family support is where a person should rely, whereas the continuous pressure not to question the Whites had a wide social impact on assimilation. Moreover, “due to factors of socioeconomic status, family and skin colour, a huge response towards residual social surroundings is left due to slavery” (Phipps and Throne 37). Therefore, even if slavery has ended, there is a form of discrimination. The stereotypical norms of racism, institutional discrimination, discrimination against people and media control contribute a lot to passing down the transgenerational trauma. Pouissant and Atkinson (1972) said, “the feeling of rage and passivity was adopted by the African Americans because of the memory of inhumanity happened by the slaves through the slave owners (Phipps and Throne 37). Hence, this “historical oppression of slaves has gained some new names of social justices like protest, assimilation etc.” (Phipps and Throne 37). This justifies how the African American people historically have learned to suppress themselves, which turned into anger and rage. Therefore, this self-acceptance of domination to avoid oppression was present among them, leading to justice and protests.

So, internalised racism brings up the emotion of anger within the African American people, highlighting the historical and cultural trauma. Internalised racism defines the acceptance of rules and normalising the stereotypes that are imposed on African Americans. For example, “the presence of 'doll studies' which was initiated by Clark and Clark in 1939” (Phipps and Throne 37). It was when the African American children showed their interest in the White doll rather than the black ones which replicated the ideas of racism and self-identification. Where the cultural trauma goes with self-characteristics and culture. Moreover, according to Cholewa and West Olatunji (2008), “there is also influence in the academic sector where African Americans are separated due to cultural hindrances” (Phipps and Throne 37). This explains that even in the educational sector, African Americans were given the least privilege in comparison to the Whites. So, the adoption of stereotypes and getting neglected was present among the African Americans, which they were forced to accept as internalised racism. Therefore, the presence of cultural trauma is inevitable among African Americans.

Chapter 5: Analysis

5.1 Analysis Part A: *Let us Descend*, Jesmyn Ward

5.1.1 The protagonist of the novel, Annis

Let Us Descend is a novel written by Jesmyn Ward, who is an author inspired by the writings of Toni Morrison. In the novel, the in-depth life of an American slave is highlighted. The protagonist of the novel is Annis, and how she survived within the enslaved community. The narration of the novel is done by the protagonist, Annis. The introduction of the character happened when her mother led her to the Carolina woods and learned to hold weapons. As

the novel evolves, it shows how Annis's mother tries to make herself defensive as the slave owners of both of them are the same. The slave owner has been referred to as a 'sire', and due to his misdeeds, Sasha, Annis's mother, tries to educate her on how to use weapons. Therefore, the sire himself was the father of Annis. She has the fear of facing him whenever she is summoned by him: "I keep my eyes on my hands, and it's only when I descend the stairs I realise they are shaking" (Ward, "Mama's Bladed Hands" 9)

This delivers the fear accustomed to Annis. Her Sire had two daughters who used to have lessons, and curious Annis always listened to the words where the tutor said to give lessons on ancient Greek philosophers, an Italian man's story where the man tries to walk through hell just like the hell he travels has levels like her father's house "*Let Us Descend, the poet now began, 'and this blind world'*" (Ward, "Walking Ropeward" 27). Annis was always inclined towards knowledge and keen to know more. Hence, she applied the sayings also to the consequences of her life. Annis was fond of her mother and grandmother, whereas, after her mother but the time her mother was sold by the patrollers, she became the victim of loneliness. The characters like Safi, Ether, Mary and Bastian were a part of her life. But the void of her mother and memories of her mother always drive her to rebel. Her grandmother, Mama Aza, also inspired her in different events. In between all the circumstances of loneliness, working as a slave in Carolina, and being a slave under the Sire of her father, another character played an important role, called Aza. Aza wanted to show motherly love to Annis and protect her through spiritual connections with her. Annis's affection towards Aza was not mutual, and she took help from the spirits to overcome the hurdles that came in front of her. The presence of Aza symbolises the connotation of the African American ancestors who were once victims of enslavement. Therefore, Annis' character shows raw emotions for her family and overcoming the struggles that she had through enslavement.

5.1.2 *Let us Descend* and Bell Hooks

In the novel *Let Us Descend*, the discrimination through the violence and oppression inflicted on Annis, her family and the other slave workers is highlighted here. The historical presence of the enslavement of the African people of Carolina has been shown here.

Women's dehumanisation has been evident in this novel through the lens of Annis.

Dehumanisation was seen when “Annis's grandmother was married to a king, but she loved a soldier. Both the soldier and her grandmother were sold to the coast where the Whites sold her” (Ward, “Mama's Bladed Hands” 13). Therefore, the dehumanisation started from the time the grandmother was sold to the plantation by the white people. Where her grandmother was sold by the Whites, her mother was abused by her Sire. In the book, *AIN'T I A WOMAN* by Bell Hooks, during slavery the black women were exploited sexually and inhumanely, mainly due to the need to increase their number of slaves. “African women become frequent targets for the white male slaves. Slavers also used to capture daughters of Kings to lure African men to slavery. African women were also sold due to breaking laws”(Hooks, “Sexism and Black Female Slave Experience” 17). Therefore, what happened to Mama Aza when she broke the law of fleeing with an outsider, being a King's wife, was a curse for her. One of the main reasons why she was dehumanised by the slave catchers was that she was at fault for doing an act of resistance, being a black woman. Moreover, Annis had been close to her mother, and she shared a close bond with her. Annis and her mother, in Chapter One, highlighted how the mother of Annis is trying to teach the use of weapons in the Carolina Woods. Beyond this was a painful story of Annis's mother, where she was raped by her sire, “my mother told me a story of how her sire violated her.” (Ward, “Mama's Bladed Hands” 11). Therefore, Annis was born through sexual exploitation that was done by the Sire. Moreover, pathetically, he violated Annis as well: “You are taller than your mother. Come. Remove my boots” (Ward, “Mama's Bladed Hands” 11). Therefore, Annis, from her very

childhood, has been brought up with the stories of how her grandmother and mother were the victims of slavery. As Bell Hooks said, “the offspring of any black women would be legally slaves” (Hooks, “Sexism and Black Female Slave Experience” 16). So, it was evident when the slavery was passed down to Annis's mother and then Annis. Whereas, the way the sire behaved with Annis was mainly because ultimately the fate of an offspring of slaves will also be a slave, and they will be dehumanised and needed for more slave production. The behaviour of Sire with Annis was an ultimate example of the dehumanisation of the black identity of people. Also, when the Georgia men were trying to take the slaves to the South, the chained black women were crying for life, “The women who can't swim I'd before me, head bobbing with their kicking, but the wet crown appears and sinks” (Ward, “River Wend South” 52). Therefore, the women were considered a group of cattle who were taken to the South for slavery. They were chained and were even sinking due to the force of water. Through the lens of Annis, it has been tried to show how she was determined and helped each and every chained woman, even if she was in the same situation. As it was discussed by Bell Hooks that “the slaver regarded the black women as a marketable cook, housekeeper, nurse. Therefore, it was important that they be so terrorised that they would be submissive.” (Hooks, “Sexism and the Black Female Slave Experience” 20). Therefore, this struggle of travelling was to make the slaves feel helpless and ask for survival, as all this was planned mainly to make them feel weak. Therefore, to easily make them available as slave in the slave markets, they used to have these terrorised experiences while travelling with slave ships.

Objectification of black women has been done in this novel, *Let Us Descend*. It has been seen that black women were considered to be used as a baby-making machine for the production of slaves. One of the events where objectification was reflected in the novel was when Annis was taken to the New Orleans slave market and then treated inhumanely in the sugar plantation. For instance, when the slaves were chained by the Georgia Men and taken

to another place, they were treated like animals, emphasising the experience of Annis, “This violence was not only through torture by tying them in shackles, but also by using them as objects. My bones pestle grinding the bowls of my joints. I know that we will not stop to relieve ourselves, that in this, we are livestock too” (Ward, “Walking Ropeward” 33). This violence was not only through torture by tying them in shackles, but also by using them as objects. Therefore, the black women who were treated as slaves were tied like they were animals, and they were not required to rest or be chained. In the book, Bell Hooks said, “Black female was exploited as a laborer in the fields, a worker in the domestic household, a breeder and as an object of white male assault” (Hooks, “Sexism and the Black Female Slave Experience” 22). Therefore, the Black women were never considered that of a women. They have always been exploited for their rights at the beginning of slavery and were treated like animals. Through Annis's struggle while travelling towards the group plantation, the objectification of black women can easily be seen. Again, women were considered as a way of breeding in the slave community as a product in the slave market through the way they were treated. Women are treated like commodities when they are being sold. One of the events in New Orleans where Annis was taken as a slave, when a man asked the seller about her, “The seller said Annis to be a fancy one and a fresh stock. Moreover, the seller said about Annis that she has no bearing of children but she is ripe for it” (Ward, “Surrender” 82). Moreover, before the buyers were bought to sell the slaves, the slavers were taken to the doctors where he said to Annis, “Delicate features from some admixture. She bears no marks from childbearing. Slender waist, the doctor murmurs. And wide hips. Would probably sell best as a fancy girl” (Ward, “City of Woe” 72). Therefore, they were not more than a commodity or product that could be used for breeding, and as she did not have the marks of childbearing, she would probably be sold at a higher price. The black women slaves were more or less considered as house help, domestic workers and as an economic asset as well for

reproduction. Their potential to have children and then increase the number of slaves defines them as a “property” that has a value. Through Bell hooks, “The White men in colonial America defined the primary function of all women to be breeders. Advertisements announce black female slaves to be breeding slaves, childbearing slaves, too old to breed to describe an individual. (Hooks, “Sexism and the Black Female Slave Experience” 39). Therefore, the African black women were always considered to be a way of slave production and workers side by side. And the way they were sold through checking their worth by their capability of childbearing, defined as how economically their wombs were used by the slave owners for their worth.

The character Annis was entitled to show resistance in some events to attain freedom from the enslavers. One of the events where resistance came from was from her mother, Annis. Even Annis was provided with a spear by her mother and asked to show how to throw it. This was a self-defence tool that was taught to Annis as her sire and her mother's sire were the same, where once he violated her and raped her (Ward, “Mama's Bladed Hands” 12). Even when Annis's mother is concerned for her and asks her to tell her, she says, “*Tell me, if anybody ever touches you*” (Ward, “Mama's Bladed Hands” 12). Therefore, there was a constant fear within the mother of Annis of her daughter being abused on the plantation. The constant urge of Annis's mother to resist violation, let her know if anyone harms her and teach her self-defence defines how Annis's mother plays an important role in making Annis strong to attain freedom. Moreover, Annis has always tried to create self-resistance, whether it be trying to get help from Aza or using her knowledge of medicine. In addition, when Annis was tried to be sold in New Orleans, she was tactically handled by saying that she would only be doing the domestic works, “I wash, I iron, I sew, I start and bank fires”. I swallowed in panic” (Ward, “Surrender” 83). Hence, Annis was panicked because it was a way of tactic she wanted to handle herself in the plantation by claiming herself as a maid so

that she would not need to bear the trauma of labouring in fields. As per Bell Hooks, “Females were beaten harshly, and it was common on a plantation to see a black female stripped naked, tied to a stake and whipped with a hard saw” (Hooks, *Sexism and the Black Female Slave Experience*, 23). Therefore, Annis did not want to be treated as a savage while working under the white owners. So, she tactically tried to put herself into the domestic work to refrain from the physical abuse. Concurrently, when the plantation owner became sick, she had the thought of using the herb to kill the owner. This moment appears to be the inner resistance that Annis had within herself, “there is another orange mushroom and this one does not make the ill healthy: this one makes the healthy ill” (Ward, *Burning Men* 138). Through this, it is emphasised how she was even considering an option which would lead to the death of the slave owner and evoke the inner turmoil to kill her slave owner. Moreover, she was in hesitation that what she would do as she was not living but surviving as a slave, “How am I with none of the people I belong to? How I am here, life on one hip, death on another? “which”, I ask the air” (Ward, “Burning Men” 139). As per Bell Hooks, “the black women used to labour like men. They were not considered as women by the dominant culture as those were given to the white women.” (Hooks, “Sexism and the Black Female Slave Experience” 49). Comparing the two quotes shows that black women were devalued, and they did not have the right to call themselves women. Hence, they lack themselves with their own identities, which were lost between Black men, white women and the dominant community. So, Annis felt the same working in the fields as she lacked where she belonged and how she attained freedom. Such thoughts evoked the feelings of poisoning the slave owner and attaining freedom, as “modesty, sexual purity and innocence were the qualities of womanhood that the enslaved women endeavoured”. (Hooks, “Sexism and the Black Female Slave Experience” 49).

5.1.3 Intersectionality and *Let Us Descend* Historical Background

Annis, from the very beginning, had a strong connection with her mother, as the novel starts with her journey with her mother, Sasha. Sasha had held her hand till she was sold by the enslavers of the plantation. In the first chapter, *Mama's Bladed Hands*, “The first weapon I held was my mother's hand (Ward, “Mama's Bladed Hands” 5). This shows that she was closely bonded with her mother. Moreover, it was her mother who led her to be safe from her own Sire so that she was off from any evil eyes cast upon her. For her self defence, Annis's mother had already given her a weapon so that what inhumane dehumanisation and exploitation Sasha faced, should not be faced by her, ““This one,” she grunted, her voice low under her weapon’s whistling, “was my mama’s.” Her spear was a black whip in the night” (Ward, “Mama’s Bladed Hands” 5). This ensures the passing down of being ability to resist the enslavers who try to force them. Annis, living under the shield of her mother, was taught self-defence from an early stage. Annis's mother tried to make her more independent. This was to ensure that she overcame her fear and dependency on her mother. Annis's mother shared stories of her mother to ensure that Annis held on to the lineage of of warrior's grandchild, “You the granddaughter of a woman warrior. She was married to the Fon king, given by her daddy because he had so many daughters, and he was rich. The king had hundreds of warrior wives. They guarded him, hunted for him, fought for him.” (Ward, “Mama's Bladed Hands ” 6). This shows how the historical background of her grandmother comes from a warrior family, and yet, being a black woman, she ended up in a slave plantation. Moreover, Annis's grandmother had the warrior characteristics that were more suited to be the guard for the king. So, she was less of a wife but more of a soldier for the king. This ensured the safety of the king but not of her grandmother.

Annis mostly shared stories through her mother to learn about her grandmother and how they ended up being in the plantation. Annis was further revealed that, “ The king sent

her and the man who loved her to the coast. They walked to the white men, to the water that don't have no edge. The whites made her walk through a door to a beach, and then put her down in a ship." (Ward, "Mama's Bladed Hands" 13). This shows the harsh reality of being a warrior's wives that even after having the qualities of a warrior, she was sold to the slave plantation as a punishment because she loved a man who was someone else. As Annis's grandmother was expected to be a loyal warrior but still her soul and body were still under the control of the king. Therefore, Annis's mother always tried to make Annis aware of how her grandmother ended up on the slave plantation, even after becoming a powerful warrior. This could surely emphasise the historical background of the black women of how they were treated like some property.

Annis had been closely bonded with her mother, Sasha. Even after her mother was sold off by the white people, she constantly tried to encourage her by reminding her how her mother had helped her and tried to make her fiercely independent. Moreover, before her mother was sold off by the enslavers, she was taught about the herbs and how to make weapons by her mother. This was to pass down the generational traits to Annis so that she could fight against the white men in the absence of her mother. "There are herbs," Mama says. "I'll look for them tomorrow. We should have them." (Ward, "Mama's Bladed Hands" 18). "It was Mama Aza's. A piece of an elephant tusk. She got it on one of her hunts." Mama puts it in my hand, and it is smooth and warm as her skin. (Ward, "Mama's Bladed Hands" 18). Therefore, the strong memories of her mother made Annis more resilient about how they needed to know self-defence, being a part of the history of black women. The treatment that the Sire's daughters got was different from what she endured being a part of a slave plantation. Transgenerational trauma becomes a part of Annis when her mother leaves her side after being taken to New Orleans. She had the desire to be loved and nurtured by her

mother. She also remembers the stories of her warrior grandmother to make herself powerful among the enslavers. Thus, this is defined as the chattel slavery that has been linked towards cultural trauma of the African Americans, “Cultural trauma is linked to the psychosocial outcomes that have resulted from the cultural wounds left by the experience of chattel slavery, which refers to the usually permanent holding of another human being as personal property with no rights (Eyerman, 2004; Stamm, Stamm, Hudnall, & Higson-Smith, 2004).” (Phipps and Throne 36). Therefore, this defines to be a part of the African Americans, which they carry with them for a long time as they are traumatised by how they are sold like property in the form of slavery. It happened mostly with the Black women, evidently showing the ignorance that African Americans faced being black people. When Annis was sold to a sugar plantation, the white woman owner also tried to access medicine and herbs from Annis when her husband got ill; she was assigned to work for them, for example, bringing mushrooms to treat her husband's illness from fever. But at the same time, the enslavers were not given proper food to keep them well. This shows the harsh reality of how the black slaves were treated by the enslavers. They were not only deprived physically, but they were also made to suffer, keeping them starving. In chapter *Thin and Struggled*, “Whose game you hold in your hand, girl?” She brings her other hand up, folds the two in prayer. “Whose leaves?” She brings her praying hands to her mouth and speaks around them. “Whose wood, girl?” The lady picks up a poker that Cora uses to rouse the fire. “The two that fell in it?” (Ward, “*Thin and Struggle*” 178). This paragraph shows how Annis was treated just to eat and save food for her survival. She was taken into the hole to sustain the punishment in order of stealing the food. Therefore, Annis could not have a good life on the plantation where she was sold. Black women have always been victims of dehumanisation and treated as animals.

5.1.4 Intersectionality emphasises over inferiority

Kimberle Crenshaw, through different establishments of laws and orders against black women, showed her article, “*Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Anti-Politics*”. In the article, Crenshaw talked about the court cases and laws where Black women are dehumanised, oppressed and not considered as a part of the community. Through this, of we see the novel by Jesmyn Ward “*Let us Descend*”, then we can see that she was also a black woman facing dehumanization, oppression and violence against the whites Throughout her novel we see that Annis, has been victimised towards sexual, racial, physical labor oppressions but still it was not at all acknowledged. She was a Sire's daughter who raped her mother, Sasha. Moreover, the same person sent her to a slave market in New Orleans. So, Annis has been a victim throughout the novel where she was detained of being a woman, she was inhumanely migrated with a group of slaves in New Orleans slaves market, “In the shallow ones, our feet sink down in the bottom, and the walking that was hard on dry ground becomes a searing struggle. In the deeper ones, we fight drowning.” (Ward, “Rivers Wend South” 53). This certainly shows that Black women were dependent on the survival crisis, where they had to fight each moment for their survival and lives. This fight for survival and the desire to live echoes with what Crenshaw says over her case study of *DeGraffenid v Motors*, which was the suit by Black women. The court did not hear the suit as it did not seem to affect women. Therefore, this shows how intersectionality approaches the identity crisis and how Ward put through her views for Black women. Women and Black women were considered a negligible part in the white community that has been put in focus by Kimberle Crenshaw, and similarly, Jesmyn Ward has shown through her novel *Let Us Descend*.

Through the novel *Let Us Descend* by Jesmyn Ward, one of the fundamental themes that is evident is motherhood and how Annis was connected with her mother. Annis and her mother's relationship reflected how she was traumatised when she was separated from her mother, and it stayed with her till the end of the novel. In this novel, Black motherhood is shown and how their children are born with different narratives, experiences and struggles. The circumstances and situations that they go through turn into certain narratives of the history of the Black community. Hence, the feeling of emotions when the family is being put through a complex situation of identity, survival and freedom leads towards giving a lifelong memory or scar to bear. These events and experiences are passed down by the generations, just like the character of Annis. Intersectionality through trauma was identified after the Holocaust. Again, there are traumas of oppression and sexual abuse that are present within the history of the transgenerational trauma of Annis. The history of trauma comes from the life of Mama Aza herself. Aza was married to a king, and she was promised to be kept well as a King's wife. Annis's mother told her about how the Kings used to treat their wives as servants. The events in which Mama Aza fell in love with a servant led her and her lover to reach the coast. Therefore, Mama Aza was stolen and brought into the plantation (Ward, "Mama's Bladed Hands" 13). This defines how Mama Aza was trapped within slavery, which led to her being confined in oppression (Ward, "Mama's Bladed Hands" 10). Moreover, the older warrior wives had asked her to run. They run until they breathe only for survival and to get rid of the oppression (Ward, "Mama's Bladed Hands" 40). Mama Aza, for the freedom of her survival, had to fight till the end of her breath when she died of illness. It is quite relevant that from the death of Aza, Annis's mother had a work impact on the mind. The water becomes an important part of the rebellion of Mama Aza, as she cannot control it, leading towards illness. Again, the trauma of Annis's mother, who raped her, was traumatic to her. This tragic trauma of violation was done multiple times with Sasha until she was pregnant

with Annis (Ward, "Mama's Bladed Hands" 11). Here, the presence of internalised slavery is seen when the patrollers used the slaves for production and increased the number of slaves, with the help of which they earned money by selling the slaves. Internalised slavery has been done through racism, where the cultural trauma indicates racism and identification of slavery to resist the violence. Moreover, in the novel, Sasha is scared for her daughter, and hence, she tries to educate her with weapons in the woods of California. Also, Annis's mother was sold when they tried to run away from the enslavement of the sire. But the way Annis's mother was grabbed and pulled by the Georgia Men while the Sire tried to shoot a gunshot in the open air created terror and fear. Annis was so wounded mentally that she could not sleep after her mother was sold (Ward, "Mama's Bladed Hands" 21). Similarly, another slave, Safi, whose mother was also taken away from her, is left in loneliness and fear of being alone. She does not feel the smell of her mother anymore, as "He says he wants my mama there" (Ward, "Walking Ropeward" 26). Here, he is somewhere representing the enslavers or the white controlling community that took away her mother from her. Also, she used to miss her mother as well and talked about the times when they had holidays, completed harvest, and all together they danced. When Annis asked about her mother, she said, "When my mama's mama was stolen, she stopped talking" (Ward, "Surrender" 86). Hence, it shows how ruthless and heinous the slavery towards African Americans gave the Post Traumatic Stress that lasted with people for a long time and was even passed down to the next generation. Therefore, Annis and Safi were both emotionally and mentally drained by the loss of their mothers, and both were left as orphans. This has to be connected with the cultural trauma aspect of the intergenerational trauma of history for African Americans. According to Eyerman, this trauma keenly makes an impact on the psychology in a proper way.

The character of Aza in the novel, more than magical realism or spiritual connectivity, gave a reference to how the African Americans tried to contact their ancestors in their minds.

Aza has been the apparent spirit that encouraged Annis to move on in her life towards the pursuit of freedom. When Aza appeared in front of Annis, the first question she asked her was whether she was sent by her mother or not. Amongst the men and women struggling to get beaten up and rope-tied, when she meets Aza, the only thing she does is share her mother's and grandmother's stories. Having Aza at the time when Annis needs her and the way she pushes her for freedom enables that maybe Annis has a scar of losing her family to slavery. This could be defined by Post-traumatic stress disorder, where they remember the torture and other discrimination done to them. Through this, it can be defined how Annis was mentally disturbed and wanted support to have with her. It was also emphasised that she thinks about a support system from the ancient ancestors of Africa that does not make her feel alone. The character Aza is only visible to Annis when she wants to find her and take her to the path of freedom. Therefore, it's Annis who is taking the use of Aza in her life to move forward towards freedom. Indefinitely, Aza also had a motherly feeling for Annis, which let her express, "Aza wants more than worship" (Ward, "Ferrywomen" 189) and "Aza wanted to be a mother to the women of my line" (Ward, "Ferrywomen" 190). This shows that she is a part of the ancient ancestors of her own African American community. The part of cultural trauma experiences that affects the psyche from oppression and prevents questioning by the Whites. This tends to fight back with characters such as Aza, which comes to an end after the revolution. Hence, the importance of the imaginary characters within the African American people due to discrimination is labelled as cultural trauma that stays with the people for self-identity.

5.2 Analysis Part B: *The Underground Railroad*, Colson Whitehead

5.2.1 The protagonist of the novel, Cora

One of the most rebellious characters in *The Underground Railroad* is Cora, and her resilience in the pursuit of freedom. Throughout the novel, Cora faces dehumanisation and ostracism that make her more inclined towards freedom. Cora is a character marked by scars within her soul, which are reflected in the story. Working in the Georgia plantation and living like a slave forever, her life was not something she wanted. The domination of the slave rulers and resistance to it is the novel's highlight. The protagonist of the novel, Cora, exhibits various dimensions in her relationships, resilience, and fight against power.

The relationship that Cora shares with her mother, Mabel and Ajarry stood strong, as the relationship has led her to be stuck in trauma. Also, the way her mother abandoned her gave her self-esteem in her lifestyle within the slave community, which led her to escape slavery and live a life of freedom. Cora, with Caesar, reaches South Carolina to ensure a new lifestyle but discovers a facade of a new reality where the black African American people are treated as guinea pigs for experiments, for example, forced sterilisation. Thus, the comfortable lifestyle of Cora Shatters makes them continue their rail journey. On the other hand, the slave catcher comes behind Cora, and the grudge of not getting a hold of her mother makes him more rigid with Cora under his tame. Throughout the novel, Cora shows resilience and the confidence to conquer, whereas Ridgeway focuses on the systematic social ways and wants to control the enslaved people. Moreover, after South Carolina, when Cora reaches North Carolina, she faces another challenge from black people. This they refer to as racial cleansing, for instance, cleansing of the African American people with those who help them. The violence is shown here with the hypocrisy towards race that leads Cora to be scarred. Because the family that tried to help her safely loses it all to them, with her journey in

Indiana, Cora arrives at the refuge of a black community initiated by John Valentine, where the Valentine farm symbolises intellectual support and community help for the Black community. Moreover, even if Cora feels the urge to belong to her, the forced domination of the Whites makes her flee. So, Cora is a pathway of the black woman who has been suffering different discriminations, sufferings and violence depicting physical, mental and emotional suffering. Freedom is represented through the railroad and the underground railway.

Throughout the novel, the symbolic approach of the railroad gives a way for the people to resist the dominance and establish their existence. When Ridgeway captures her, it shows the decline of slavery in the way Cora fights back. With slavery, there is the presence of an ideology of hierarchy underlying Cora's past. Therefore, with her willpower and want for freedom, Cora approaches the future by rebelling against Ridgeway. Lastly, the novel ends with Cora striving for freedom when a person gives her a free ride, symbolising her step towards freedom. So, through Cora's power of resilience, it is captured how the blacks fight for their rights, and the longer the journey is, the nearer the freedom will be.

With that, her resilience to fight back comes within the brutal reality that she faced, which took place within her loved ones, their survival and resilience. So, in the novel, Cora fights for freedom, recognition and humanity. Cora, as the main character, evolves from a passive victim to a survivor and a resistor through the symbolisation of the struggle and rebellion of enslaved people. Cora made her life journey, both metaphorically of self-discovery and a fight against the power which tried to repress her.

5.2.2 *The Underground Railroad* through Bell Hooks

In the novel *The Underground Railroad*, the oppression and the violence inflicted on the people of the black community are described, which depicts their history. From the very beginning of the novel, the protagonist has been recalling her mother and her grandmother.

At the beginning of the novel, in the chapter Ajarry, Ajarry, the grandmother of Cora was sold in Ouidah. Due to the pain of being sold and submissive, she tried to kill herself. Multiple times, Cora's grandmother was sold, but then there was a procedure of selling the slaves just like selling goods, “the slaves stood naked on the platform. There was a bidding war over a group of Ashanti studs, those Africans of renowned industry and musculature, and the foreman of a limestone quarry bought a bunch of pickaninnies” (Whitehead, “Ajarry” 12). Moreover, how Ajarry was sold for “two hundred and twenty six dollars” (Whitehead, “Ajarry” 12) and how she was tested to be a qualified slave was emphasised. “when he pinched her breast to see if she was in flower, the metal was cool on her skin” (Whitehead, “Ajarry” 12). This showed how, from generation to generation, black women are treated as a commodity and objects, where they are properly checked to be sold like goods. Ajarry was sold multiple times, and Cora talks about how her grandmother was sold multiple times as a commodity. At last, she was sold in Georgia at the Randall plantation. Therefore, in the Randall plantation, the events of the oppression are shown from the time of Ajarry or Cora's grandmother. In the book by Bell Hooks *“AIN'T I A WOMAN”*, it was said that during the time of 19th to 18th century, the enslavers, who were White men did easily catch the African women and they were the easily available targets for the slave trades (Hooks, “Sexism and Black Female Slave Experience” 17). It was said that “female slaves were stripped and beaten on all the body parts” (Hooks, “Sexism and Black Female Slave Experience” 18). Therefore, the inequality and looking down upon black women and treating them as commodities were traditional things for White people. Cora, recalling what took place with Ajarry, who was her grandmother and describing how many times she was sold and checked by stripping, validates that being a slave is like giving up your life, as it is according to how your master says. Cora did not have her mother in her childhood, as she wanted to escape slavery and the system of the plantation. “ Mabel vanished and Cora became a stray when she

was Eleven years old” (Whitehead, “Georgia” 23). Therefore, it was always Cora who struggled alone, and the stories of her grandmother stayed with her. The oppression and inhumanity that her grandmother faced were not something Cora wanted to be a part of, but she kept them within her to keep her grandmother's stories alive. Getting oppressed was a part of Cora's life after Mabel left and Ajarry's death. Cora was put into a Hob and asked to stay there, where generally people who are mentally disturbed are kept, and violence with both men and women took place. “White men and brown men had used the women's bodies violently, their babies came out stunted and shrunken” (Whitehead, “Georgia” 24). Therefore, after the shield of grandmother went away from Cora, she was just treated like a stray animal or an object required to be sold. The black women who were part of the Randall plantation did not have their opportunity to lead their lives as they wanted to. They were treated as a commodity. As it is being discussed by Bell Hooks in *AIN'T I A WOMAN*, the dehumanisation of white people leads to many scars and traumas to Black women. This shows that Black women from history till today were dehumanised and the violence is still going on to make them feel less of a human.

Cora faced sexual abuse and human body objectification throughout her journey to freedom. In the chapter Georgia, it is being clearly emphasised how Blake, a slave on the Randall plantation and his friends tried to force themselves on Cora and Blake's friends rape her, “Edward, Pot, and two hands from the southern half dragged her behind the smokehouse” (Whitehead, “Georgia” 28). Through Bell hooks “*AIN'T I A WOMAN*”, she said that “Rape was the common method of torture for the slavers to subdue recalcitrant black women” (Hooks, “Sexism and acknowledgement Female Slave Experience” 18). So, from the period of the 18th century till now, through contemporary works, it has been shown that rape was one of the weapons for men, be it black men or white men, to show their power against women. Mostly, the black women had beard the trauma and pain of such sufferings that

remain intact till now within the contemporary works. Through such sexual abuse, the community tried to belittle the black women, which can be reflected by Cora. Moreover, when she tried to escape to South Carolina and during a medical checkup with a doctor called Dr. Stevens endured a terrible experience. The doctor tried to convince her to undergo sterilisation and mainly restricted her from giving birth. As per Dr. Stevens, “colored women who have already birthed more than two children, in the name of population control, Imbeciles and mentally unfit” (Whitehead, “South Carolina” 108). Already, women having more than two children were considered lunatics and were forced to be sterilised. Black women do not even know how they are being manipulated by some doctors like Stevens. As per Dr. Stevens, it is a blessing from him to the colored population. Hence, the control over the Black community and making them feel inferior so that they are not required in society made Cora feel vulnerable. The tradition of slavery and having female slaves for more slave production was common in the plantation. But it was seen in the 20th century how the white community controlled the births of Black women. They wanted the Blacks to be marginalised and eradicated from society. From the theory, it has been discussed how black women were controlled reproductively and considered unfit. Hence, the experiences of Cora through objectification were deep. In addition, Cora wanted to work in a Museum where Mr Fields showed her how she would be portraying the character of a slave, “She had numerous suspicions about the accuracy of the African and ship scenes but was an authority in this room” (Whitehead, “South Carolina” 105). Cora was surprised to see how the people who portrayed the characters of whites were played by the dummies, and the blacks were there playing the characters physically. Even the clothes and history of Black people were not represented in the museum properly. It had its stereotypical approach in how white people see them. Even Mr. Fields also claims to Cora that the people want to see other parts of the world, “Like a Railroad, the museum permits them to see the rest of the country. And to see

its people. People like you” (Whitehead, “South Carolina” 105). Mostly, the portrayal of the Africans was through the lens of the Whites, where they were savages. Through Bell hooks’ *“AIN’T I A WOMAN”*, there used to be plays where women were seen as devalued objects: “Hey there! hot chocolate! Say there, Jezebel!”. Therefore, the whites have different stereotypical ways of seeing black women, even after emancipation, which continues to be a part of history. The evolution of stereotypically calling black women by names, showing negative media, using them to control their reproductive health and devaluing their culture is still present in today's world.

Resistance is one of the highlights that has been shown in the character of Cora. Cora has not been submissive to the white people and their dominance. Initially, with the help of Caesar, she tried to escape to South Carolina to have a new life from slavery. Cora went to South Carolina by fighting with the slave hunters with Caesar, “She battled. Strength poured into her limbs, she bit and slapped and bashed,” (Whitehead, “Georgia” 60). Here, Cora did not fall weak within the hands of the slave hunters and was submissive to them. Moreover, one of the important characters, Ridgeway, who has tried to condemn Cora and catch her for his own interests, was not successful in his deeds. Ridgeway was a slave catcher assigned to catch Cora. Even before Cora, he failed to captivate her mother, Mabel. Therefore, he had the inner lament to catch Cora. Even the inhumanity done to Caesar and Lovey was known by Ridgeway, which he shared with Cora to make her feel weak. “She's up in Canada, laughing at the Randalls and me” (Whitehead, “Tennessee” 202). Cora even tries to escape Ridgeway when a young negro man comes between a tense situation of Ridgeway, Boseman and Cora. “Cora jumped on Ridgeway's back and strangled him with her chains, twisting them tight against their flesh” (Whitehead, “Tennessee” 206). Through the inner strength and resilience of Cora, it is noticeable how she tried to be free from the control of the slave catchers. In the book *“AIN’T I A WOMAN”*, different African scholars tried to speak for the rights of black

women. Nineteenth-century women were more aware of the black rights and how they were oppressed. “Eleanor Flexer’s *Century of Struggle*, in 1959, talked about the history of the Black women's rights movement” (Hooks, “Black Women and Feminism” 161). Therefore, the women have been actively trying to participate in the black women's rights movement during the 19th century, and now, as well, we see characters like Cora trying to show resistance on their own. Therefore, the reign of protests in the form of movements, novels and their characters has been actively part of the black women.

5.2.3 Intersectionality and *The Underground Railroad* Historical Background

Cora was influenced by her family background and how she was brought up. The trauma that Mabel left her for escape remains with her till the end of the novel. The voidness of motherly love is evident in Cora's relentless pursuit of it. The novel *The Underground Railroad* begins with this background: Ajarry, Cora's grandmother, was sold multiple times until she came to the Georgia plantation. Cora's grandmother, due to her young age and the shock, tried to kill herself twice by starving. “She twice tried to kill herself on the voyage to America, once by denying herself food and then again drowning” (Whitehead, “Ajarry” 11). In that chapter, the life history of Cora's grandmother, her struggles have been addressed. Here, the constant violence and dehumanisation of Ajarry is something that remained with Cora. It might have also made her aware that she does not want this to happen to her. One of the reasons the transgenerational trauma stayed with Cora was. Cora's grandmother, Ajarry, got married three times, and she had five children. The only living child that Ajarry had was Cora's mother, Mabel. The death of Ajarry was also brutal when she died at the brute ocean. It is to be said, “Liberty was reserved for other people, for the citizens of the city of Pennsylvania bustling a thousand miles to the north” (Whitehead, “Ajarry”15). This itself says how traumatic the death of Ajarry was. As per the quote, it was the inner pain of Ajarry as she could not lead a life of a free human being.

With that, Mabel's leaving Cora made her feel abandoned without any family. In the chapter Georgia, it was mentioned that when Cora was asked to run away initially, she declined, but later she gives in, “this was her grandmother talking that Sunday evening when Caesar approached Cora about the underground railroad, and she said no. This time her mother was talking” (Whitehead, “Georgia” 15). Therefore, the stories of both her grandmother and mother were with her. She did not want to lead a life like her grandmother with suicidal thoughts, so she gave in to the escape plan. Cora's mother, Mabel's absence has made her wounded and traumatised her. But still she remembered, “how her mother bled for days and Connelly didn't even bother to call a doctor until she looked like a ghost. Cora made up a story by tricking herself, where she turned the stories into memories, inserting the face of the ghosts, all the slaves dead, who looked down at her with love and indulgence” (Whitehead, “Georgia” 21). Therefore, the feeling of being loved and accepted by the family was something that Cora was not getting, and therefore, she tried to form it as a memory which she carries with her. According to Richard Phipps and Stephen Throne, this was called to be as transgenerational trauma, which was faced by Cora Where Transgenerational trauma was derived from the facts of losing families during the Holocaust; this can be associated with Cora losing her mother, Mabel, due to enslavement and discrimination against African Americans. “The second generational trauma was lead towards families who faced partitions due to war or genocides” (Phipps and Throne 35). Here, with Cora, we see that the way she was left alone and abandoned by her mother made her carry the transgenerational trauma of slavery.

Moreover, culturally, the African Americans faced the trauma of being black, and they were oppressed through enslavement. For example, when Cora was in South Carolina, “They are taking away my babies.” The woman wasn't lamenting an old plantation but a crime perpetrated here in South Carolina” (Whitehead, Chapter South Carolina 116). This event

certainly triggered Cora through the cultural trauma that she had endured for a long time. Cultural trauma has been relatable towards facing negligence because of being a black woman and being oppressed. Here, the incident that Cora saw with a black woman in South Carolina was nothing new to her. People who are Black have always been marginalised in the plantation. But the place where she expected freedom was no different, where black people do not have the right to live peacefully with their children. For instance, when she was sent to Hob on the Randall plantation. It is said that the unstable men or women are to keep inside the Hob, mainly for women. Where white men and brown men for violations had used the bodies of women and beaten them till their babies were dead. But then Cora did not hold any power to be out of the room, and the darkness engulfed her. With that, in the Hob, how the women were treated and how babies were killed haunted her, giving her a traumatic experience. Initially in the Randall plantation, “White men and brown men had used the women's bodies violently, their babies came out...” (Whitehead Chapter Ajarry 7). So, the memory of the plantation and what she was facing in South Carolina was no different. This can be compared to the cultural *dysthymia* that the enslaved African American people face while they have the post-traumatic experience (Phipps and Throne 36). Hence, Cora was traumatised by how the African American people used to be discriminated against racially and how the minorities were attacked. The geographical land grabbing that was seen with Cora in the novel by Randall Plantation is European domination. Cultural trauma leads towards those who were the victims of enslavement, like Cora. The post-traumatic experiences of Cora were mostly due to the oppression that she faced and the lack of love she got from her family. Through this, it can be justified that intersectionality was present within the traumatic way that Cora had faced. Therefore, even if Cora was away from the Randall plantation, she had faced the same situations with a façade.

5.2.4 Intersectionality emphasises over inferiority

While being in South Carolina, Cora has been subjected to violations and negligence under the law. For instance, Cora came to South Carolina for a better living, thinking that she would get a life of freedom that would help her to lead a life without the bondage of slavery. Throughout her journey in South Carolina witnessed nothing but a facade of equality. For example, in South Carolina, the babies were taken away from the girl. Even after asking Ms. Lucy about why they did this, Cora was told that this was for that woman's health and her good. "Miss Lucy explained that there was a nurse checking on her. "That's why we reserved that dormitory for residents with nervous disorders. It doesn't make sense to mix with the larger population" (Whitehead, "South Carolina" 103). Therefore, it was constantly a system of discrimination and treating black women as nothing but objects, which were unwanted in the civilisation. Cora was informed by Miss Lucy that the incident was for the unstable lady, but how they were controlling her just to stop the growth of the black population in the society was hidden. That is a constant veil the whites had against the blacks to hide their wrongdoings. Moreover, this incident can be considered with how Crenshaw highlighted the way black women are being ignored within the community as they were not recognised as females but only black females, which referred different from male and female. In the court, a case of *Moore v Hughes Helicopters*, women were not given the higher posts as they did not have the right to represent themselves on behalf of females and black women were considered to be different from black men and females. This was justified by the court, which declined the complaint lodged against the company. (Crenshaw, "The University of Chicago Legal Forum" 144). Certainly, both of the situations happened in different circumstances, but clearly define that Black women were never accepted and considered as women by the Whites. Hence, even if it was seen that there was no inequality in the communities, there were underlying causes that made the Black women suffer.

Trauma has to be one of the important situations through intersectionality that was faced by Cora in the novel *The Underground Railroad*. Cora was influenced by her family background and how she was brought up. Cora was alone when her grandmother died, and her mother left to escape slavery. The trauma that Mabel left her for escape remains with her till the end of the novel, as throughout the journey in the plantation, Cora had to endure on her own. The voidness of motherly love is seen by Cora in how she strives for it. From the beginning of the novel *The Underground Railroad*, the background of slavery starts with Ajarry, the grandmother of Cora. Initially, Ajarry was kidnapped and was sold multiple times till she came to the Georgia plantation. Cora's grandmother, due to her young age and the shock, tried to kill herself twice by starving (Whitehead, "Ajarry" 11). Moreover, Ajarry got married three times, and she had five children. The only living child that Ajarry had was Cora's mother, Mabel. Cora stayed within the surroundings of her grandmother until her mother ditched her to escape for freedom, making her stray. The trauma that Cora endures has a connection to her grandmother and mother, as she felt abandoned. The death of Cora's grandmother was brutal, where she said, " in the cotton, the balls around her like whitecaps on the brute ocean. The last of her village, keeled over in the rows from a knot in her brain, blood pouring from her nose" (Whitehead, "Ajarry" 15). The traumatic experiences of Ajarry have been emphasised here, where she was brought to the plantation through the ocean as a slave, as she was destined to die here. The mention of "cotton" put importance on how, till her last breath, slavery and violence had engulfed her. Being alone in the plantation, she was always filled with different memories which she kept with her as stories. Moreover, the pain that her ancestors went through was passed down through generational trauma to Cora. It was being said by Phipps and Throne, "the study of transgenerational trauma comes from the impact of disasters like immigration. Moreover, the adaptation of historical trauma comes through how the African Americans were the victims of European colonisers" (Phipps and

Thorne 36). Therefore, the presence of traumatic experiences was passed down within the generations, just like how it took place with Cora. After The Death of her grandmother and the escape of her mother, the incidents that took place surrounding her kept haunting her. Her mother, Mabel, had complained about a hard delivery. How her mother bled for days, and Connelly didn't bother to call a doctor. So, Cora trucked her mind and she made up a story of a ghost haunting her" (Whitehead, "Ajarry" 21). Hence, this shows how inhumanely her mother was treated as a mere property for producing children and ignored her sufferings. Therefore, Cora had those historical traumas within herself passed down transgenerationally to her that she kept with herself as ghost stories. With that, Cora had a rebellious nature, which she foresaw afterwards she was alone. But eventually, due to the situations she had, she shared worse experiences, for instance, when she was sent to Hob. It is said that the unstable men or women are to keep inside the Hob, mainly for women. Where white men and brown men for violations had used the bodies of women and beaten them till their babies were dead. But then Cora did not hold any power to be out of the room, and the darkness engulfed her. With that, in the Hob, how the women were treated and how babies were killed haunted her, giving her a traumatic experience. This can be compared to the cultural *dysthymia* that the enslaved African American people face while they have the post-traumatic experience. "The psychological effect of enslavement and subsequent depression and discrimination of African Americans results in *cultural dysthymia*" (Phipps and Throne 36). Therefore, this enacted the way discrimination and treating people of colour as slaves scarred them psychologically, so that they carried it for generations until it became a haunt for them. Cora, after the abandoned by her mother, was sent to Hob where she endured fear. The place where women were tortured and claimed to be mentally ill, "White men and brown men used women's bodies violently, their babies came out, and they repeated the names of their dead babies. Cora curled on the floor of the main room, too afraid to sleep up with them, those

abject creatures” (Whitehead, “Ajarry” 24). This explains how black women used to face cultural trauma that was forced upon them through discrimination. Survival for Cora became like living in isolation by being distressed and emotionally drained that she considered all the victims to be ghosts and living there.

Chapter 6

Discussion with Toni Morrison with Colson Whitehead, and Jesmyn Ward through Intersectionality

Toni Morrison, through her writings in the novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*, demonstrated how Black women have been marginalised, objectified, and considered commodities. The character of Pecola had always struggled to be accepted by her people, her parents and her community. In the novel *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola has been subjected to violence, neglected by her parents and dehumanised by her community. She wanted to be loved and accepted by her people, which included even her parents. For example, the relationship between Pauline Breedlove and Pecola is not something to be glorified. Even though it is seen in the novel that Pecola had always addressed her mother as Mrs Breedlove, not by mother. Moreover, the incident took place at Mrs Breedlove's workplace when Pecola splashed pie juice, making it more evident that Pecola was traumatised by her mother's behaviour, “Mrs.Breedlove yanked her up by the arm, slapped her again, and in a voice thin with anger, abused Pecola directly and Frieda and me by implication. “Crazy fool...my floor, mess...look what you...work...get on out...now that...crazy...my floor, my floor...my floor.” (Morrison Spring 88). This emphasises how Pecola's mother was not empathetic towards her child and ignored her, and did not show any concern towards her. This created self-hatred for Pecola as she thought she was not acceptable in the community. Also,

Symbolism and the way of in-depth writing of Morrison are highlighted in the novel *The Bluest Eye*. Like, the soft corner for white dolls that Pauline Breedlove had which made Pecola feel less of herself, “She was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen”. (Morrison “Winter” 97). This explains that Mrs Breedlove was in love with the concept of white beauty and their stereotypes. She was so invested in these norms that she refused to accept her daughter with flaws, leading towards Pecola's existential crisis. Also, initially, the story of Dick and Jane is glorified as a happy house and the repetitive way of claiming the house to be a happy and normal family. “Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy. See Jane” (Morrison 10).

In contrast to this, Pecola and the abuse she faced, being innocent and vulnerable, are shown. This juxtaposition justifies a symbol of how a white family is likely to be a happy family, but the black families are more or less dysfunctional. In addition, the incident of Geraldine and Junior also showed that her community disowned and cursed her simply due to her helplessness and being a poor Black child. Pecola, being vulnerable, did not get to defend herself when Junior blamed her for killing Geraldine's Beloved cat, which resulted in her getting insulted by Geraldine, “Get out,” she said, her voice quiet. “You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house.” (Morrison, “Winter” 76). This shows the way Pecola was abused, which led towards her wanting to be accepted badly in her community by her people. Inhumane incidents with Pecola made her weak against Soaphead Church, who was a light-skinned West Indian man who despised the black community. Pecola, being violated, abused and dehumanised, was in trauma when she met Soaphead Church for *Bluest Eye*. It was Soaphead who had the idea that Evil existed, as there is a God who wanted it to exist.

Therefore, he wanted to cast his evil power on Pecola through his long-term desire to kill the dog called Bob, which he does through Pecola by manipulating her. Therefore, in this paragraph, “We must make, ah, some offering, that is, some contact with nature. Perhaps some simple creature might be the vehicle through which He will speak. Let us see.” (Morrison, “Winter” 135). Therefore, Pecola, being ill-treated to an extent, wanted to do anything, as this violation also seemed to her as an escape from her sufferings. Thus, the manipulation of the white influenced person, Soaphead Church, made Pecola vulnerable and believe in her imagination of getting acceptance in the community through the Bluest Eye. Hence, the character Pecola was a victim of trauma, objectification and dehumanisation.

Similarly, in the novel *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, we see the victims like Sethe and the character Beloved due to slavery and women objectification. Morrison has shown through spiritual connections the guilt that Sethe faces throughout the novel for killing Beloved. After the death of Mr Garner, the dehumanisation and violence against the slaves led them to run away from the Sweet Home. Sethe ended up in Cincinnati at 124 Bluestone Road, which was famous for being haunted. The inhumanity by the school teacher shown was, “He complained they ate too much, rested too much, which was certainly true as the school teacher ate little” (Morrison 228). Therefore, the school teacher wanted to ensure slavery by imposing restrictions on their hunger, a livelihood that was dehumanising. Even Sethe was a victim of exploitation of her own body as they used her like animals, “The one I managed to have milk for and to get it to her even after they stole it; after they handled me like I was the cow,” (Morrison 206). Therefore, the grief and body exploitation, as objects or animals, remain with Sethe. The relationship between Sethe and Beloved shows the evident guilt Sethe has for killing her baby, but she just wanted her daughter to be away from slavery. As per Sethe, Slavery was so cursed that it kept humans within shackles, but unfortunately, she ended up in shackles. The constant guilty of killing her daughter made her feel near her in the form of

ghosts. The presence of Beloved as a ghost is still debatable, as it can be considered a trauma for Sethe to justify her fault to her imagination or a supernatural entity that is witnessed by all due to memory and guilt. Moreover, the supernatural entity of Beloved, by showing torture and even love towards Sethe, makes it feel the grief that the character has, even if it is death. Slavery as the core of the black community leads to many families being traumatised like this. Like Beloved, many children are victimised by inhumane death as their parents do not want them to go through inhumanity. For instance, “BELOVED, she is my daughter. She mine. See. She comes back to me of her own free will, and I don't have to explain a thing. I didn't have time to explain before because it had to be done quick. Quick. She had to be safe and I put her where she would be.” (Morrison 206). Therefore, Sethe continuously tried to justify herself and Paul D about why she killed her baby and why she ensured their death to be safer than becoming a slave. On the other hand, from the perspective of Beloved, the negligence of her mother's love and wanting to be close to her made her come back into spiritual being to her mother, “I saw your face. You made her choke." "I didn't do it." "You told me you loved her." "I fixed it, didn't I? Didn't I fix her neck?" (Morrison 109). Therefore, being close to her mother surely made her greedy for nurture, but the grief of death tried to overpower her needs. Moreover, as this conversation took place between Denver and Beloved, this spiritual entity seemed to be a part of their memory of guilt and trauma from slavery.

Morrison has been ambitious with her characters when it comes to imagination and trauma. The characters of Pecola, Sethe and Beloved seem to be victimised by colonial stereotypes, trauma and slavery. Morrison pointed out these aspects to keep the black community and their history alive in the literature. Moreover, in Colson Whitehead and Jesmyn Ward, the protagonists Cora and Annis also seemed to be a part of the legacy. Since Morrison focused more on the supernatural entity of Pecola having Blue Eyes or the return of

Beloved as a spirit, Cora's having the illusion of a happy life in South Carolina is also not real. Also, the character Annis, who recalls Aza to help her for support is a part of their imagination to gain freedom. The evolution of imagination from imagining spirits as memory to help to go through their freedom is what Colson Whitehead and Ward took away from Morrison.

The trauma Pecola had when she was ignored by her parents and was violated by her father made her question her existence. She was objectified in her community, and for acceptance, she showcased her vulnerability to accept the stereotypes. Somewhere, the stereotypes were passed down from her mother, who wanted to adopt which culture. Similarly, the trauma that Sethe endured for killing her child as she did not want her daughter to be a victim of slavery and lead life under the control of an enslaver led her to kill Beloved was passed down to her daughter. Pecola and Beloved were the victims of the trauma that their family initiated them a part of. Morrison tried to acknowledge how the black families are unusual as they constantly try to get accepted and get rid of the control of the White people. Similarly, Whitehead and Ward tried to show that history is still present within the black people, as even if they want to get out of trauma, the rebellion for freedom and the separation from the family remain with the characters.

Surely, the white influence in the novels of Morrison is seen with Soap Head Church in *The Bluest Eye* and the School teacher in *Beloved*. The overinfluence of objectification of black women to look in a certain way led Pecola to live under the control of the dehumanisation of black women's existence. With that, the exploitation of Sethe to produce children and nurture the slave owner's children made her feel like an animal. In comparison, Colson Whitehead's Cora has also been victimised when Dr. Stevens tried to exploit her body by sterilisation. Moreover, Ridgeway has tried to capture her to take back to the Randall plantation with violence showing that white control is still there. With Annis, also, when she

was sold as a housemaid, she was objectified. Also, before taking the group of slaves to New Orleans, the doctors checked their bodies and productivity. Therefore, objectification and slavery are still present in the novels to show the inhumanity.

With that, Kimberle Crenshaw showed how hierarchy and power are enforced within a society where Black women are victimised and ignored. Like, through social positions, it is seen that the court did not take the suit of the plaintiffs in the DeGraffenreid and Motors case. They pointed out black women to be a separate community (Crenshaw 141). Moreover, the theorist Helma Lutz also showed how black women are victims of racism and sexism through the Ramphel Case, where the woman was a victim of the recognition of her identity (Lutz 41). This shows that the presence of racism and sexism within the Black community is still overlapping within the hierarchies of power, like the White communities. From the perspective of Morrison, she certainly showed the death of black families and how the trauma is passed down to the next generations. The freedom from the White communities was found in the characters of Sethe and Pecola. But through the novels of Colson Whitehead and Jesmyn Ward, the characters Cora and Annis tried to resist till their willpower. Be it escaping the plantation, enduring trauma and living up to the tortures of whites, the characters tried to break through the slavery.

Lastly, Modern Slavery can be seen to be a part of intersectionality, as human trafficking is the modern way of slavery. Slavery is conducted more in Nigeria due to economic and sexual exploitation (Ngwe and Elechi 114). Similar contexts are found in the novels of Colson Whitehead and Jesmyn Ward when they were sold into slavery. Sexual exploitation is still one of the main reasons for slavery. This leads to the sterilisation and female productivity check by the White people. It is certainly evident that human trafficking is a continuous process in the present world. Also, sexually presenting black women in the films and creating stereotypes are mainly normalising within the White community to look

down upon black people. As per (Wilson 125), “ a movie made in 1925 called '*The Birth of a Nation*, by Lydia Brown, shows the objectification of black women. Mainly, it was made to normalise the exploitation and objectification of black community women. And therefore, the ignorance of the Black community regarding racism and sexism is addressed. Through intersectionality, therefore, the objectification and exploitation of Black women have been made within the perspectives of slavery, trauma and dehumanisation.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

To summarise, African American literature and contemporary writers are surely inspired by the author Toni Morrison by the ways of slavery, trauma and dehumanisation of Black women. Contemporary writers like Colson Whitehead and Jesmyn Ward have tried to show the characters as full of complexities as well as rebellious. Though the characters of Toni Morrison tried to convey messages through powerful events and dilemmas of the characters, the characters have a depth of vulnerability in contrast to spirituality, with which they go through their trauma and sustain their identities. On the other hand, contemporary writers have shown the characters pave through the restrictions and have resilience within themselves. The characters of Cora and Annis have been complex throughout the novel, with the struggles that they had gone through, so the struggles and the oppressions of the ancient ancestors also validate the historical context of African American discrimination. With that, the discrimination was done more specifically towards women than the men. The constant torture and beating of the slaves shaped the way the past life of Africans was in America. Also, the cultural and intergenerational trauma that has been carried by the slaves is mostly terrifying for them and gives them the trauma of darkness, loneliness and being left out of the

family. Be it Cora or Annis, both had the voidness of a mother's love and the desire to get the way of freedom. The characters in the contemporary period showed the presence of modern slavery that included Black women within the Black community and how they are exploited. Hence, due to the recurring events, resilience has not stopped the people from addressing the discrimination and inhumanity. Slavery not only affects people physically, but also mentally and emotionally as well.

Through the theory of intersectionality by Kimberle Crenshaw, adaptation from Bell Hooks *AIN'T I A WOMAN* and modern slavery, the intersectionality for Black Women has been addressed here. Through intersectionality, the cause of the inclusion of women has been approached. Intersectionality is being explored over discrimination, representative, institutional and actor theory as per Scholar Floya Anthias. Also, it explores through *AIN'T I A WOMAN* the oppression of womanhood, experiences and stereotypes. The Whites have always tried to suppress the flourishing of the African American literature, referring to one of the reasons contemporary writers are trying to address their history, culture and their struggles to be recognised as a major part of the community. Therefore, history has always been a powerful background for the Black community and their recognition.

With that, cultural trauma and historical transgenerational approach are pointed out through Post Traumatic Stress that impacts one's psyche. Internalised slavery also creates the impact of trauma through intersectionality. Whereas the generational passing down of trauma is mostly seen in novels. Therefore, slavery is still relevant to African Americans as they are resilient in preserving their history and culture. Through Morrison, the explicit experiences are expressed with a certain depth that inspired the contemporary writers. Through intersectionality, the rebel, dehumanisation and survival of the Black women and their identity recognition are addressed, which ensures a powerful connection with the novels. Hence, the constant marginalisation of Black women through intersectionality within the

comparison of Toni Morrison through the contemporary works addresses the evolution of slavery, ideology and the Black women's identity.

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