**TRAVELING EVER TOWARD FREEDOM: A METAPHORICAL FEMINIST
STUDY OF COLSON WHITEHEAD'S *THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD***

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Abstract: *There is a growing interest in cognitive approaches to literature in recent years; undoubtedly conceptual metaphor has become one of the favourite topics for analysis. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in Metaphors We Live By (1980), assert that metaphor is not just a matter of words; rather it is inherently conceptual and conceptual metaphors help us comprehend abstract concepts in terms of more concrete ones. This article proposes that metaphor is used to overcome the inadequacy of language in the face of indescribable phenomena, such as slavery, racism and multiple oppressions of black women throughout history in Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* (2016). Patricia Collins tries to convey through her work, *Black Feminist Thought* (2000), which will be used here, that all these oppressions exist even today. The result of this study indicates that Whitehead has picked up and given life to the old slavery story to emotionally engage a global audience at the present time, when racial hatred seems to be a thing of the past.*

Keywords: *Colson Whitehead's The Underground Railroad, cognitive linguistics, freedom, metaphor, matrix of domination, slavery*

1. Introduction

This study analyses the ways in which Colson Whitehead uses metaphoric language to depict the events that cannot be put into words, much less in literary fiction. Metaphor is a means for structuring thought and constructing meaning and it makes it easy for us to focus on certain facts. The cognitive force of metaphor is that the schematic frame of the source domain is mapped onto the target domain. I have chosen central metaphors that are identified as being illustrative of general themes and worthy of discussion such as freedom-as-a-train-journey metaphor, and sterilization, lynching, and rape as metaphors of slavery, which are extended throughout the text to show readers the suffering and hardships of black female characters while escaping exploitations prevalent in the 19th century. When a metaphoric subject is chosen, the whole text should revolve around the central concept to guarantee its coherence, which is the fundamental feature of conceptual metaphors.

Eric Foner (2015:11) explains for the first time the term Underground Railroad, as an anti-racism organization or network of people who helped slaves escape, was invented in 1839 and it became widespread, so numerous authors “went overboard with the railroad metaphor”, which is exactly what Whitehead uses here, not only metaphorizing but literalizing the railroad's extension and intricacy. By bringing the reminiscence which transforms the literal past into an imaginative one, his work allows the audience to reread the escape from slavery to freedom in a way that the historical records cannot depict it. In fact, as a contemporary black writer, Whitehead is responding to the most important race riot since the Civil Rights era, i.e. the Black Lives Matter movement.

As Lakoff and Johnson (1980:4) claim, metaphors are useful cognitive devices: “our metaphor system is central to our understanding of experience and to the way we act on that understanding”. It creates wonder and delight, while simultaneously it instructs. Likewise, Whitehead tries to instruct people of his time about the tyranny and exploitation prevalent in their society, especially the kind of racism and sexism that black women have experienced throughout history up to the present time. Recently, the intersectional theory has developed

because Black feminists have noticed that mainstream feminism has no intention to improve African American women's lives in the society. Moreover, they have not received any support from African American men.

In *Black Feminist Thought* (2000), Patricia Hill Collins makes use of the same idea of intersectionality, which was introduced by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989, and calls it "a Matrix of Dominations." She contends that it is not just one item like race or sex or class, but many items, such as disability, age, ethnicity, nationality, religion, and social status, that work together and affect black women's lives (Collins 2000:9). Collins also concentrates on black women's experiences and perspectives besides that of intellectuals and activists, from past to present, as a significant lens for understanding systems of oppression because their different experiences can create new sights for looking at human rights and injustices. She discusses that today minorities are still facing new forms of slavery, segregation, and racism that must be eliminated. Therefore, Collins (2015:2) claims, intersectionality as an analytical tool makes people understand the complexity of the world and themselves better because their lives and the organization of power are shaped by the intersectional issues in the society.

Because of the ability of intersectionality to consider people from all walks of life and examine injustice, it has been accepted into all fields, such as "history, sociology, literature, philosophy, and anthropology also as in feminist studies, ethnic studies, queer studies, and legal studies" (Cho et al. 2013:787). The applications of intersectionality in different fields of knowledge provide more perceptions of this theory, as Anne Donadey (2017:24) states: "the interdisciplinary and comparative areas where they [fields of knowledge] meet and are brought together can be viewed as borderland zones in which new knowledge is created". Thus, in African American literature, the enslaved women's experiences, as the site of intersecting multiple oppressions, have been discussed in many well-known works such as those by Nella Larsen, Toni Morrison, Nalo Hopkinson, etc. In this novel, Whitehead gives us a horrific depiction of moments of extreme violence, "a weird blend of history and fantasy that will have critics rightfully making comparisons to Toni Morrison" (Domestico 2016). By applying the theories of Lakoff and Johnson, and of Patricia Collins, I have analyzed the writing style of Whitehead to see how successful he has been in conveying the messages of freedom from the violent exploitations depicted in the feminist context of the story.

2. Methodology

2.1. Metaphor

Mostly, we read literary fiction to gain pleasure and learn something new, so, we treat it as a source of learning. Literary cognitivism is based on the belief that "literary works, including fictional narratives such as novels and plays, have cognitive enrichment and the extent to which they do so can bear on their value as literature" (Goodman 1976:7). Many poets, playwrights, and novelists attempt to impart instruction and enlightenment to their readers. Literature offers many kinds of experiences that people could not have in their actual lives, like the experience of distant historical eras or having perceptions, memories, beliefs, and desires different from their own. Jenifer Robinson (2005:158) talks about a literary cognitive privilege that "consists of the ability to feel appropriately and to develop a sensitive thoughtfulness in the reader"; thus we can acquire knowledge from other people's experiences by studying literary fiction and we learn how we should act accordingly. Learning what an experience feels like, such as what it is like to feel hunger, pain, or torture, requires metaphor because it involves the reader's imaginative engagement with the story in the cognitive process. Lakoff and Johnson pioneered a revolutionary theory known as cognitive linguistic view of metaphor, which has changed the way we understand metaphors today. In these authors' view, "metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words.... on the contrary,... metaphor is

pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:3). So, according to them, the way we think and act is metaphorical and “the locus of metaphor” does not lie in our language but in the way we conceptualise one mental domain in terms of another.

Therefore, it is our metaphorically constructed conceptual system that defines our everyday thoughts, experiences and realities without being noticed. We think about time in terms of space; for example, we have the future *ahead* of us and the past *behind* us, or we look *forward* to an occasion in the future. Lakoff (1993:202-205) claims that literal meanings are related to the domain of concrete and physical experiences which are very limited, hence metaphorical understanding is essential because it is related to the domain of abstractness and emotion. Language users understand something new by metaphorically projecting their old experiences to their new experiences, that is via “correspondences in our experiences” (Lakoff 1993:245), so a target domain is conceptualized by using a source domain which is familiar to us. Of specific import for this study is the conceptual metaphor “LIFE IS A JOURNEY”. This metaphor is “one of the most powerful tools we have for making sense of our lives and for making decisions about what to do and even what to believe” (Lakoff and Turner 1989:65). This metaphor is grounded in our cultural beliefs that individuals are supposed to have aims in life, and they are supposed to act in order to achieve those aims.

This conventional knowledge reflects a journey’s structure: “it has a starting point, endpoint, path, places we want to reach along the way, and, commonly, companions, difficulties, provisions, and so on” (Lakoff and Turner 1989:114). LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor allows for the fact that there can be different kinds of journeys and different kinds of destinations, so the metaphor, depending on the context, can be used flexibly. In this metaphor, the “highly abstract concept of life is understood in terms of the more concrete concept of journey” (Kövecses 2010:7). Similarly, as we will see, Whitehead describes the target domain of *freedom* in terms of easily understandable source domain of *railroad*. Freedom is conceptualized as a train journey. In the life of all humankind there is “One frequently-encountered goal,” that is “a greater degree of freedom” which they try to attain (Lakoff and Johnson 1999:190). Metaphor is significant to the core concept of freedom. In fact, “the marvel of metaphorical thought is Freedom” (Lakoff 2006:29). Modern theorists, like Lakoff and Johnson, have denied that metaphor is only based on similarity; disparity is also involved. In fact, metaphors are often more forceful when dissimilarity is the connection between the two subjects. The identification of similarities between diverse metaphoric expressions and how we understand abstract concepts like rage, illness, and freedom has made this theory very effectual in many fields. Due to the extreme and unique nature of slavery, it is difficult to write about the horrific events like lynching, rape, sterilization, etc., “the ones so imaginative in their monstrosity that the mind refused to accommodate them” (Domestico 2016). Whitehead makes use of figurative devices to represent such an incomprehensible atrocity towards women of color. Episode by episode, the story illustrates a coherent metaphorical structure and reveals those specific-level mappings elicited by this metaphor in addition to other characteristics in the work like anachronism and multitemporality.

As regards the novel’s plot, Cora, an enslaved woman, along with a male fellow slave named Caesar flee from a Georgia plantation and journey toward the free North. The stations on the way, “North Carolina- South Carolina- Indiana”, where Cora gets off the underground train and stays temporarily, along with the plantation, are full of nightmarish experiences of slavery. Metaphors tend to create a visual image in our minds, which is important for waking people of the present time to the real truth. It is used out of necessity rather than pure ornamentation. It is not merely a creative figure of literary imagination, it is a “valuable cognitive tool without which neither poets nor ordinary people could live” (Kövecses 2010: ix). Whitehead uses figurative language as strategic speech in order to lead readers to different

perceptions of reality and as a pedagogical method to bring empathy and identification with the experience of the enslaved en route to freedom in order to persuade readers to change their attitudes and actions.

As David Lodge (2002:10) contends, “The novel is arguably man’s most successful effort to describe the experience of individual human beings moving through space and time”. It is clear that Whitehead adopts multitemporality in his using the metaphor of the railroad in order to provide the reader with a better understanding of historical feminist periods which Cora witnesses as a traveller moving through space and time.

2.2. Intersectionality

Based on different historical times and places, African American women have used many different strategies to challenge the rules enforcing their subordination. Many times African American women protested individually against unfair laws by escaping their prison-like lives. This survival is “a form of resistance, and the struggle to provide for the survival of their children and to reject the controlling images of themselves as mammy or mule represent the foundations of Black women’s activism” (Collins 2000:201). Throughout history, black women’s resistance to sexual, racial, and class exploitation could not have happened without any accompanying assistance of activists like Collins herself. She claims that, if the consciousness of a Black woman about how she comprehends her everyday experiences changes, she would become empowered. This awareness might force her to start on a way for her personal freedom. When she is fortunate to encounter different people who are going on the same journey, they all together would change the world around them.

Old-fashioned or Jim Crow racism is viewed as a relic of the past, but the legacy of it as new racism exists even today. As Collins (2004:52) states, “the persistence of poor housing, poor health, illiteracy, unemployment, and social problems associated with poverty and powerlessness all constitute new variations of the negative effects of colonialism, slavery, and traditional forms of racial rule”. That is why Collins has used traditional data besides new data to document black women’s personal experiences to raise an Afrocentric consciousness.

The research in social psychology related to intersectionality turns attention to how “multiple inequalities work with and through one another to build individuals’ identities and ideologies” (Harnois 2015:365). Collins (2000) discusses that black women’s exploitation has included three interdependent dimensions. First of all, essential to U.S. capitalism is the exploitation of the labor of Black women. The destitution caused by “free” wage labor and drudgery of enslaved African American women on the Southern plantations shows the high costs they have paid for surviving. As Rose Brewer (qtd. in Collins 2000:4) explains, “now millions of impoverished African American women ghettoized in Philadelphia, Birmingham, Oakland, Detroit, and other U.S. inner cities demonstrate the continuation of the earlier forms of Black women’s economic exploitation”.

Secondly, there is the political dimension of oppression which “denies African-American women the rights and privileges routinely extended to White male citizens” (Collins 2000:4). Inhibiting equitable treatment in the judiciary system and excluding African American women from official offices, all prove African American women’s political subordination. Finally, there is the ideological dimension of colored women’s injustice, i.e. degrading images of colored women which are used to support the oppressive patriarchal system in the society, demeaning them according to class, gender, and race. As Collins (2000:69) points out, “These controlling images are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, inevitable parts of everyday life”. In order to resist and fight back the negative controlling images of colored women and the discriminatory practices against them at the hands of Whites, the self-definitions of Black womanhood should be used by African American women. Besides these points, Collins advises them to gain knowledge

about intersectional oppressions or the Matrix of Domination to be able to stand against them in society. When knowledge is considered, colored women's empowerment includes "rejecting the dimensions of knowledge that perpetuate objectification, commodification, and exploitation" (Collins 2000:289). Women of color and others like them would gain power if they comprehend and use their individual and group experiences as knowledge.

Reading the life of female characters in this novel through the lens of black feminism offers the reader an analytical framework for interpreting the social world. Disturbing images and treatment of black women can be seen as a set of social scripts that are the legacy of sexism, racism, class exploitation, which assign superiority and inferiority categories. Whitehead employs metaphors to explore the temporal dimension of intersectionality and to give voice to marginalized women.

3. Discussion

3.1. Freedom Is A Railroad

In examining Whitehead's use of metaphor, we notice that he is showing us something more about slavery and freedom. Whitehead "grabs onto the most richly metaphoric conveyance of all: the Underground Railroad" (Schuessler 2016). Emily Petersen (2017:1) affirms that "portraying the Underground Railroad as an actual train in his work was a magical metaphor". The use of the railroad, as a metaphor, is a way in which the writer can bring into symbolic language the articulation of the inexplicable experiences, constructing spaces in which the domain of freedom in terms of the domain of train journey can be understood as "LIFE IS A TRAIN JOURNEY" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:45). This trope emerges in the novel because, as Kelly (2018:21) states, "the journey to self-ownership as well as property ownership has typically been a crucial trope of the slave narrative and novel of slavery". There are metaphorical correspondences in this trope: the escapees are travelers on a journey, with a goal as destination to be reached. The railroad is a vehicle for them, and it permits them to follow their goals to redemption.

3.2. Purposes Are Destinations, Actions Are Motions, Difficulties Are Impediments to Motion

Metaphors of "PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS" and "ACTIONS ARE MOTIONS" are seen to positively contribute to the formative elements of the metaphor "Freedom Is A Railroad". Freedom is conceptualised in terms of the domain of physical motion. This metaphorical journey has stages that must be visited or traveled through. The point of embarkation for reaching freedom here is the Randall plantation. The journey is not simple. We can take into consideration the submapping DIFFICULTIES ARE IMPEDEMENTS TO MOTION. A difficulty is something that can emerge and impede motion to a goal as destination. There are metaphorical difficulties in many types like: "DIFFICULTIES ARE FEATURES OF THE TERRAIN, DIFFICULTIES ARE COUNTERFORCES, DIFFICULTIES ARE LACKS OF ENERGY" (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1999:202), DIFFICULTIES ARE DARKNESS, DIFFICULTIES ARE FREEZING WEATHER. These are all experienced in fugitive-slave stories of such heroes as Cora and Caesar in their pursuit of freedom throughout their way up North, in the tunnel and in different stages of their escape, or when followed by patroller Ridgeway who tried to hunt them down. The novel's structure demonstrates the stages of a journey and reflects the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema: a prospect of the underground tunnel and the progress through the states and stations encountered during the trip, and finally, the destination to be reached.

The literary analysis of the story is in a historically chronological form. Whitehead has to follow this form because he explores a chronological structure of the black female lived

experiences which Cora witnesses at each stage of her journey. Utilising the mechanisms of slavery as metaphorical vehicles brings to the fore a critique by focusing the reader's attention on the violation of rights, the commodification of human beings who are raped, sterilized, turned into guinea pigs, and the exploitation of both natural and human resources that makes a comparison between slavery and contemporary realities possible and necessary.

To understand how the conceptualization of the slavery metaphor could have been, we have to reimagine what kind of life stories, bodily experiences, and cultural settings constituted the slaves' world. The intensive dehumanization which is highlighted in the early scenes of the story turns slaves into property, when Cora was on the Randall plantation. By likening the manner in which the natural surroundings have been treated to the violent act of sexual assault, Whitehead can be said to be metaphorically connecting nature and woman in the face of their oppressor.

3.3. Plants Are People

Like nature, women's bodies are abused and their children are killed or taken away from them by force, in fact they are objectified and the rape of nature depends on the same process of objectification too, as we see in the story: "White men and brown men had used the women's bodies violently, their babies came out stunted and shrunken, beatings had knocked the sense out of their heads, and they repeated the names of their dead children in the darkness: Eve, Elizabeth, N'thaniel, Tom" (Whitehead 2016:17). In another place in the novel we see, "A crowd gathered. The woman blubbered incoherently and then said suddenly, 'My babies, they're taking away my babies!' The onlookers sighed at the familiar refrain. They had heard it so many times in plantation life, the lament of the mother over her tormented offspring." (Whitehead 2016:114)

Many times, women attempted to physically abort or kill their offspring as a result; they reject women's claim to their own wombs and their nurturing natures. A greed that is never quenched filled whites, their relations with materialistic culture eliminate African American women's rights in the natural world. They are "unmindful of living harmoniously on the land" and have no "respect for the life-giving forces of nature, of the earth" and of black women (hooks 2005:104-107). Through the ecofeminist lens, Whitehead tries to reinforce the value of both women and nature in his work. Women are connected to nature by "the ancient identity of nature as a nurturing mother" (Merchant 1980:472). In a similar manner, women and nature are oppressed. From an eco-critical perspective, we can draw parallels between the killing of black bodies and the destruction of trees in the novel, slaves hanging from trees their bodies ooze and die (Whitehead 2016:152). Similarly, the trees that became scaffolds on which black people were lynched were themselves the victims of nature lynching when lands were totally cleared to facilitate the accumulation of white people's wealth. The scene of uprooting trees is used indirectly as a metaphor-related image and it creates the conceptual metaphor PLANTS ARE PEOPLE. This includes the notions of being alive and dying, while also enabling readers to see correspondences between the two domains of people and plants.

Slave owners always tried to find ways they could make more money from their crops and the labor of their slaves. For example, Cora's owner, Randall, feels financially secure because of his land and his slaves. He was a "savvy businessman" that "when black blood was money ... [he] knew to open the vein" (Whitehead 2016:23). They aimed to control and objectify both people and property. As Europe's unquenchable request for cotton goods grows, Randall makes plans to buy more forest lands and clear them to build hobs and expand his agriculture, therefore he objectifies nature through his capitalist mindset.

3.4. America Is An Engine

In the 19th century, the United States like other countries was struggling for a great progress in their technology and economy.

And America is a delusion, the grandest one of all. The white race believes that it is their right to take the land. To kill Indians. Make war. Enslave their brothers... Stolen bodies working stolen land. It was an engine that did not stop, its hungry boiler fed with blood. (Whitehead 2016:341-139)

This quote summons the new conceptual metaphor of “America Is An Engine”. An engine is a new literary imagination for this country. The fuel of this engine is blood. First, the United States was the land of Indians, but the Whites killed them and drove them out of their land. Now that White people owned the country, they continued practicing institutionalized unrelenting slavery. Therefore, slave-catchers were needed to keep the wheels of the engine turning: “The other patrollers were boys and men of bad character; the work attracted a type. In another country they would have been criminals, but this was America.” (Whitehead 2016:90) These criminals through resorting to violence gained what they wanted in the antebellum era. Our knowledge of that time is based on the tropes used by slaves, such as working like mules, being treated like animals or being sold like merchandise.

Collins (2008:3) discusses that “the day-to-day life and lived experience is the primary domain in which the conceptualization and understanding of intersectionality has been grounded”. Cora conceptualizes intersections of race, class, and gender through her experiences, first on the Randall plantation in Georgia and later in other states that she travels through. Traveling from one state to another, Cora witnesses so many incidences and possibilities or, as Morrison (1992:xiii) calls them, “different mechanisms of devastating racial oppression,” which have “their twentieth and twenty-first century equivalents”.

3.5. Women Are Animals, Women Are Goods

Cora has both love and hatred for her mother, Mabel, because she had abandoned her on the plantation. Cora did not know that she had regretted her flight and was on her way back to take her daughter. Contrary to the public belief, Mabel was not living in freedom up North, but died from a snakebite and her body was swallowed by a swamp. When Caesar first proposed escaping to the North, Cora rejected the idea because her grandmother Ajarry had always believed that any attempt to escape the plantation was idiocy. First on the auction, Ajarry was sold for \$226 and later she was exchanged like an object between slaveholders for rum, glass beads, gunpowder, sugar, tobacco, cowrie shells, and dollars (Whitehead 2016:3). As Collins (2004:55) clarifies, “Chattel slavery was crucial to the founding of U.S. capitalism because the African bodies and all that was contained in those bodies (labor, sexuality, and reproduction) were turned into commodities that were traded in the marketplace”. Exasperated by the harsh conditions on the ship and having been gang-raped for six weeks, Ajarry had tried to kill herself twice on her voyage to the United States. Collins (2004:64) describes the irony of situation on the issue of rape concerning blacks: “Ironically, even though Black people were murdered and raped under chattel slavery, these crimes were not labeled lynching or rape. Because lynching and rape only apply to human beings who possess legal freedom and citizenship rights”. After being violently lashed for standing up against the punishment of a young slave, Chester, at his birthday party and after having been sexually abused by a gang of men, Cora changed her mind and accepted Caesar’s plan. They decided to escape through The Underground Railroad, which literally ran from one station to another and metaphorically stood as a path for freedom from slavery and tyranny.

While staying in South Carolina, the first station they arrived at, Cora visited a doctor at the hospital for her mandatory appointments and she found out that the doctor sterilized the

black women. As Henry Gates (2010:67) states, “the black population grew to 4.4 million in the United States by 1860. Because of this massive population growth, whites were afraid of blacks being able to gain power and rebel”. As Whitehead depicts in the novel’s reimagining of South Carolina, many whites sought to exterminate black people. Readers of the novel can see how both gender and race play a part in the compulsory sterilization of some black women; something which white women are totally exempted from throughout the history of USA.

Controlling both the biological reproduction and the mothering experiences of working-class colored women has long been necessary to keep a racialized nationalism. In previous eras like before the Civil War a need for unskilled, cheap labor and the political powerlessness of Black populations worked to produce population policies which encouraged African American women to have many children. Because Black children were used as cheap source of labor and could be fired easily. Also, they “were denied education and social-welfare benefits routinely extended to other groups, they cost the state little” (Collins 2006:67). The political economy in fact changed all these circumstances. As Collins discusses, the mechanization of economic trends, such as agriculture, and industrial factories demanded less low skilled labor and more highly skilled workers, which required expensive investments in health care and schooling. In this period, “African Americans gained political rights that had been unavailable prior to the passage of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act, which allowed them to benefit from entitlement programs long enjoyed by Whites” (Collins 2006:68). For the employers, a large African American population, who were now legally entitled to the benefits of first-class citizenship, became both economically unfeasible and politically dangerous. When the author describes Caesar’s job on a “factory conveyer belt” in South Carolina, the novel echoes the time after the Civil War.

Since fewer African Americans were needed, population policies, ideological constructions for black women, and the structure of social institutions combined to discourage working-class and poor black women from having children. As Roberts (1997:22) asserts, “Poor Black mothers are blamed for perpetuating social problems by transmitting defective genes, irreparable crack damage, and a deviant lifestyle to their children”. Providing free services to reduce infertility of White middleclass women, while preventing family-planning services except sterilization for poor black women, proves how the logic of eugenics regulates population policies.

True freedom is so rare because the effects of slavery continue to influence black lives today. Blacks may have obtained some upward mobility today to make better lives for themselves but the fact of the matter remains, the United States has not yet reached racial equality. Currently, poor women and colored women are often discouraged from having children and are rewarded by government policy if they do so. In today’s media African American women are shown as “matriarchs” or “unfit” mothers, which further describes them as “sexually irresponsible, as abusive mothers, and as welfare queens”. Also, “Stereotypes of people of African descent and women as being less intellectual, more impulsive, and more emotional than Whites, provide a context for quasi-sterilization methods such as Norplant and Depo-Provera” (Collins 2006:68), indicating the resurgence of white racist and supremacist plans in the postracial age.

The use of white superiority systemically embeds racism into American policy. The underlying tensions of the racial and economic class systems influenced industrialists’ ideas toward hiring practices, as Jacqueline Jones (1998:116) states: “They claimed the region’s large supply of cheap black labor inhibited technological advances. In deciding whether to hire blacks or whites, and in segregating their workers, employers manipulated racial antagonisms in order to bolster the status of poor whites at the expense of blacks”. Jones (1998:7) also notes that “The lowly immigrant canal digger determined to hold on to his sense of superiority while toiling alongside a black co-worker”. In the same vein, Whitehead writes about this issue that

“The whites came to this land for a fresh start and to escape the tyranny of their masters” (Whitehead 2016:117). Hence, they tried to wipe out blacks who were present in great numbers by sterilization and fatal experiments on them as guinea pigs. When Cora talked to the doctor at the hospital, she found out that black men were also “participants in a study of the latent and tertiary stages of syphilis” (Whitehead 2016:120). The physician says that one reason for the medical trials is the anxiety of whites about potential revolts of the slaves. Since chattel slavery was evidently unfair, the “threat of Black resistance was omnipresent, and periodic slave uprisings illustrated that this threat was not unfounded” (Collins 2004:12). Many black men lost their lives to syphilis, but it was not just men who suffered the consequence of this exploitation, their wives contracted this venereal disease as well, and subsequently many children were born with this congenital disease.

Collins (2017a:328) believes that “Western racism makes a logical circuit which assumes that Black people are like animals...It returns frequently to the metaphor of women as slaves as the core trope for women’s oppression”. Black slaves, especially women, suffered multiple oppressions in that system. Metaphorical mappings such as WOMEN ARE ANIMALS and WOMEN ARE GOODS, based on the medieval metaphorical system of “The Great Chain of Being,” put women and slaves below humans. It means many things like human behaviours, attributes, rights, and also values are taken away from women and colored people. According to Santa Ana (1999:201), “The Great Chain of Being has been used to justify denigration of certain groups of people (...) for two centuries”. These metaphors are considered dehumanizing, and thus racist in nature. To end brutification and objectification, self-empowered colored women tried to run away or kill slave catchers like Ridgeway (an obsessed slave catcher who follows Cora’s steps throughout the story) who acts as a tool in the system to return them to their owners using “his facility for ensuring that property remained property” (Whitehead 2016:80).

3.6. Freedom Is Up

There is a clear transformation of female characters in the work, from a submissive to a resistant position, which “emphasize[s] the courage, intelligence, and humanity of enslaved African women rather than their subjugation and misery” (Schulz 2016:2). Ridgeway boldly states that Cora and her mother “constitute a line that needs to be extinguished” (Whitehead 2016:222). As Collins (2017b:25) asserts, whether racism or sexism, resistance is always present; “[r]esistance is embedded within domination”. In the novel, the journey is the essence of the story and “geography is plot: the South represents iniquity and bondage, the North enlightenment and freedom” (Schulz 2012:2). The threat of these bodily violations sets the protagonist on a path of almost constant motion toward the North so that we have the orientational metaphor of FREEDOM IS UP.

3.7. Riding the Rail Is Literacy

Collins (2000:204) argues that discerning the path to individual and collective empowerment requires the power of a free mind and it will not be accomplished unless oppositional and independent identities are built for African American women. A step towards having a free mind is learning how to read and write, which is what Cora did in South Carolina. Thus, riding the rails can be seen as a metaphor for (re)reading, for freedom from illiteracy. As Laura Dubek (2018:74) points out, “Just like the activity of reading, Cora transforms by the experience, gaining knowledge and insight along the way”. Collins (2000) elucidates that education has acted as a powerful symbol for a long time to connect self, change, and empowerment in black communities. Ignorance and illiteracy doomed colored people to powerlessness. Collins clarifies that acquiring these skills was seen as an expression of political activism not just for the reason that education led slaves to become better ones but because “it

offered skills essential in challenging the very tenets of slavery itself” (Collins 2000:210). By the start of the 19th century, it was against the law in all slave states to teach blacks even the fundamentals of reading and writing. But two developments in the late nineteenth-century southern society happened: an increase in literacy rates and a general urban in-migration among southern blacks, which shows that at least some families managed to separate themselves from the past and look to the future (Jones 1998). In South Carolina, Cora’s situation reflects this period of history. Cora acquires knowledge through experience on her way up North and formal education in school, such forms of knowledge as emphasised by Collins (2015:5) move her away from what she is known for, like her former identity.

3.8. America Is A Warden

As Whitehead illustrates, America can be compared to a warden: “Whether in the fields or underground or in an attic room, America remained her warden.” (Whitehead 2016:207) In Georgia, if she did something wrong and throughout Cora’s journey in pursuit of freedom, she felt as if America was guarding her like a prison warder, prepared to punish her if they caught her. Therefore, the conceptual metaphor of “America Is A Warden” is brought up.

The presence of exploitation of all forms in the construction of the past and present in America is undeniable. The collection of metaphors discussed here is thus a reminder of the crucial importance of not only the literary study of slavery but also the incorporation of metaphor into the way the past is being recalled in its unfortunate perpetual presence. Whitehead could not stand the present ill-treatment of his people so he writes Cora’s journey to make us re-evaluate the Americans’ attitude towards various races.

3.9. America Is the Declaration of Independence vs. America Is A Ghost

All these metaphors are testimony to the self-serving nature of whites because the Declaration of Independence, which affirms that “all men are created equal and independent; that from that equal creation they derive rights inherent and inalienable, among which are the preservation of life, and liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (Becker 1958:4), does not contain black people. “The Declaration of Independence as America” can be seen as a conceptual metaphor here but, as Cora observed throughout her journey, this metaphor was only applicable to white people.

Traveling further north, Cora witnessed more atrocious scenes of the institutionalized slavery in North Carolina, where colored men and women were forbidden from setting foot despite it being a free state (Whitehead 2016:179). The racial anxieties of residents are depicted in a horrible way: “The corpses hung from trees as rotting ornaments. One had been castrated, an ugly mouth gaping where his manhood had been. The other was a woman. Her belly curved. Cora had never been good at knowing if a body was with a child” (Whitehead 2016:152). Here, the situation for colored people is much worse than in South Carolina. Even white pro-abolitionists who rescued the blacks would be lynched since “Running away was a transgression so large that the punishment enveloped every generous soul on her brief tour of freedom” (Whitehead 2016:259). Despite this fact, Martin, an abolitionist, decided to take Cora home and hide her in his attic. On their way, they travelled down a road called the “Freedom Trail,” where hanging black corpses of women and men filled the trees. Such huge numbers of lynching casualties reflected the “White elites[’] obsession with fears of Black revolt and instituted practices to quell rebellions”, as Collins (2004:57) maintains. Enslaved men and women could be lashed and killed without any legal trial. This period in history known as the Jim Crow age, shows that separation of both races when slavery ended was a purposeful political act for white supremacist society which have ever since locked colored people into a permanent second-class citizenship, as many feminists like Collins (2000) affirm. By creating a witness within Cora’s character of all the diverse traumas, Whitehead makes her more than

an individual personality; makes her “a part of the collective identity and memory of all African Americans” (Eyerman 2001:83) and these varied experiences raise Cora’s consciousness, as Collins (2000:204) emphasises.

When the Irish maid found out that Cora was hiding in the attic, she told the town’s leaders. She told on the family she worked for. When Ridgeway found Cora, the townspeople killed Ethel and Martin for hiding an escapee, their bodies joined the “grisly gallery on the Freedom Trail”. Over her stay in North Carolina, Cora thought of the Bible and the Declaration of Independence, as two holy essential texts but after seeing all these scenes, Cora was not certain that the “Declaration described anything real at all. America was a ghost in the darkness, like her.” (Whitehead 2016:216)

A group of young black men rescued Cora from Ridgeway and took her to the next station in Indiana. On the Valentine farm, Cora apparently found peace, she found some friends and she made great progress regarding her education. Whitehead provides “chapter by-chapter deferrals of Cora’s bondage and the trauma it has inflicted” (Li 2019:18). Despite falling in love with Royal, a black man, Cora was unable to have any relationship with him because of her trauma of being gang raped. Feith makes it clear that the probability of overcoming trauma is a hope for freedom and a happiness which is not a state but a process, “not a given but a hard-earned boon, with the help of a community, embryonic though it be” (Feith 2018:156). There is no such a community Cora could rely on to find real liberty and overcome her trauma, which illuminates the importance of racial solidarity in the face of oppression and racism.

Ridgeway and some slave patrollers came after Cora. Slave patrollers “required no reason to stop a person apart from color” (Whitehead 2016:175). They killed many people, including Royal in Indiana. Kakutani (2016:3) asserts that “Such passages in the novel resonate today: the police killings of unarmed black men and women, the stop-and-frisk policies that often target minorities, and the anti-immigrant language used by politicians to ramp up prejudice and fear”. The anachronical aspect of most episodes permits us “to probe the continuity between past and present, concerning the American quandary of race” (Feith 2018:154). Whitehead asserts, “I merely play with time. Eugenics movements and skyscrapers eventually arrived, as did the 40-year-long Tuskegee syphilis experiment conducted by the US Department of Health in Macon County, Alabama. Even as the novel rearranges history, it hardly invents or exaggerates” (qtd. in Dischinger 2017:83). By using the multitemporal narrative style, along with depicting various experiences of black subjugation with anachronistic references, the writer asks his readers to confront racialized horrors – past and present. Cora is a witness to multigenerational dehumanization of women of color, and in this alteration of time, she has become a part of the present time as well.

3.10. Purposes Are Destinations

In order to compare the structural correlation in the PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS metaphor to the details of a common experience, in accordance with Lakoff and Johnson’s explanations, we can find: achieving the missions and goals in life, which is equal to reaching a certain destination in a journey, can bring a positive emotional feeling; this is when travellers are content and pleased with their achieved aims and generally the whole journey. On the contrary, failure in reaching the destination will bring negative states and dissatisfaction. The last chapter is titled “The North”. Cora injured Ridgeway fatally and now free, she went with a black man on his wagon to the unknown, but the story does not show that Cora reached the free North. The reader never knows whether Cora reaches freedom or not because the “wagon was headed west” (Whitehead 2016:328). The North stands as a symbol for freedom in slave narratives, but Whitehead displays it differently in his novel. He does not make a free American society at the end of the story, he just sends her into the unknown. Simpson (2017:2) states:

By exploiting generic ambiguities, Whitehead marks Cora's escape as only a beginning. Diverging from the traditional realism of the genre, Whitehead draws on a type of science-fiction in order to show that Cora's journey is not necessarily towards liberation but into an ambiguous future. While Whitehead acknowledges that the novel feeds off slave narratives, he produces a freedom narrative in which there is no freedom.

Whitehead affirms that all the predicaments with which the characters in the novel are struggling have echoes and parallels in the present time (Bianculi 2016). Whitehead chooses the abolitionist historiographical notion of the underground train network to draw parallels between recent tensions in the United States concerning police brutality and "the Black Lives Matter movement" and the race connections in the antebellum period. Cases of innocent blacks who were killed by the cops or who died in police custody have reached national prominence in recent years, often arousing protests nationwide. Collins elucidates the role of women in Black Lives Matter, who, by gathering in front of federal courts and on the streets, defend the rights of men and women killed by the cops. She (2019) also asserts that we have to connect struggles, political tactics, and paths in order to have a joint global solidarity movement for uprooting oppression across the world by using the struggles of racialized women as focal points for more general discussion and inquiry. Collins (2006:34) reveals the continuation of racism in the present time: "The mechanisms of internal racism certainly changed over time—from slavery, to Jim Crow, to the present new racial discrimination in housing, education, and employment—but the need for the exploitation of Black labor persisted". White people continue to use race as an indication of difference, and hence inequalities, so black people, as a capitalist source of cheap labor, are imprisoned more than white people to be exploited in the growing prison-industrial complexes. Collins (2004:75) contends that it is a "belief in upholding colorblindness which masks the continued inequalities of contemporary racism".

Comprehending women's exploitation via intersectional analysis of sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class provides a new vision on freedom. Racism, in all its various forms, whether blatant or latent, is part of every scene in *The Underground Railroad*, and with every aspect of the novel the Matrix of Domination is expressed. **Whitehead chose a woman to be his primary character** because as he says, "Slavery is terrible for both men and women. But the female slave has a different dimension of horror" (Gill 2019). By conceptualizing intersectionality in different stages of Cora's journey to the North, Whitehead produces a literary aesthetic that challenges the prevailing palpable racialized ideologies.

4. Conclusion

The present essay has discussed to what extent Whitehead's use of metaphor in *The Underground Railroad* has been effective in demonstrating racial and gender issues. It has focused on certain important recurring conceptual metaphors and analysed their contribution to the effectiveness of his writing, in particular through the way in which they support his key theme of bridging different periods of time and feminist outlooks. This analysis thus supports Lakoff and Johnson's claim that, understanding experience through metaphor is one of the major imaginative achievements of the mind, and it aims to bring to the fore the light and depth which Whitehead's metaphors add to his writings and the ways in which they also illustrate different aspects of his own authorial character.

The progressive structure of this study examines the female protagonists' persona, the trauma of their lived experiences, their resistance and survival. To achieve this purpose, Whitehead tracks the historical formation of black women's identity through the slavery system and the role slave-trading has played in degrading their identity. Metaphor creates or communicates knowledge, the mental representations and knowledge of abstract concepts that we cannot physically experience. In this way, readers can metaphorically conceptualize vague,

abstract domains of knowledge like life, suffering, or freedom. The concept of freedom has been explored by virtue of the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY. Whitehead describes the target domain of Freedom in terms of the more concrete source domain of Railroad. He takes readers on Cora's horrifying journey in search for freedom and, as the story proceeds episodically, each stage of Cora's travel presents new horrors of slavery, such as terrible working conditions without wages, the separation of mothers from their children, sterilization, syphilis experiments, racial cleansing, lynching and the like up to the present time. The end point of Cora's metaphorical journey is not a real place on a free land. She goes into the unknown and her future is not evident, resembling the present situation of African Americans in the United States. On the surface, they may have some degree of freedom but in reality people of color, particularly women, could not actually gain the kind of true freedom promised to them with the passing of the Civil Rights Acts.

This is what Collins affirms by enquiring into the nature of current prejudices, which she calls "new racism". Likewise, Whitehead has chosen the old story of racism to depict Collins' same idea that racism exists today and must be corrected. By focusing on atrocities inflicted on slaves in the past, Whitehead gives readers a way to understanding how these atrocities might continue to oppress black people. Intersectionality, as a critical method, "sheds light on the doing of social justice work and the types of actions to bring about social justice" (Collins 2015:16), like Black Lives Matter or Say Her Name movements, which certainly reflect black practices and solidarity. By being more inclusive, intersectionality can help multiple fights for equality, like the fight against police brutality, mass incarceration and other violent acts. By depicting colored women as self-reliant, self-defined figures experiencing gender, race, and class oppression, Whitehead speaks about the important role of courage, experience, knowledge, and action in empowering African American women.

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