

Reconstructing African Americans' Ethnic Identity: a Study on Alice Randall's *the Wind Done Gone* and Edward P. Jones' *the Known World*

Rasiah¹, Ida Rochani Adi² & Siti Chamamah Soeratno³

Abstract

The fact that slavery-themed novel has a power in American literary representation is inevitable. Two centuries since the publication of novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), the reception of slavery-themed novels kept going on. It is not only reaccepted by the white authors, but also black authors. Even in the latest decade, early 21st century, slavery-themed novels kept exist with modern context in coloring the American literary genres. This study is intended to analyze two contemporary slavery-themed novels written by African Americans writers; Alice Randall's *The Wind Done Gone* (2001) and Edward P Jones' *The Known World* (2003). Through the post-colonial analysis, it found that the authors of those novels tried to reconstruct the African Americans' ethnic identity as African descendants. Four ethnic characteristics became the markers of African Americans' ethnic identity that expressed on those novels are; the pattern of kin and social embeddedness, the language, the local arts, and the last is the beliefs. These four markers became the central struggle of African Americans to define themselves as 'other' in United States, and also to survive from the white hegemonic culture empire.

Keywords: Ethnic, Identity, African Americans, Slavery-Themed Novels

1. Introduction

In the beginning of 21st century, the landscape of American literature colored by the emergence of the slavery-themed novel, which retell about African American enslavement in the antebellum period? Two of the novels which retell the slavery experience in the past are *The Wind Done Gone* (2001) written by Alice Randall and *The Known World* (2003) by Edward P Jones. Both novels are written by African American writers. By using the past experience, both African American writers tried to reconstruct African Americans' identity as African descendants in United States. They are not only ensuring the differences of African Americans experience in United states from another immigrants, but also to show that they are the 'other' in the terms of cultural heritage in the United States.

³*The Wind Done Gone* (2001) is a parody of the most perennial bestseller novel, *Gone with the Wind* (1936). It retold a slavery tale through the eyes mulatto woman. The mulatto leading character is represented to search and form her identity in United States, as African descendant. She is not only facing the negative stereotype attached to her racial and cultural identity, but also the need to negotiate identity in the mainstream context. Whereas, *The Known World* (2003) is a novel which told a black ex-slave, Henry Townsend, who then became a black slave owner. It is could be said that *The Known World* is an invention in slave narrative, because it is not a parody or a sequel from previous novel, and the angle of character also never found in white novels when producing slavery-themed novels either in past era or in recent time. This dramatization is to reflect the searching identity of African American as a part of being African, besides being as an American.

¹Faculty of Cultural Science Halu Oleo University, Kendari Indonesia. Phone+6281943283134 rasiahsitti@gmail.com

²Faculty of Cultural Science, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. idaadi@mail.ugm.ac.id

³Faculty of Cultural Science, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. chamamah_s@yahoo.com

The concept of identity basically used to explain about self identify due to the most fundamental question "who am I"? (Erikson, 1966, p. 145; Sokefeld, 2001, p. 527; Weigert, 1986, p. 165; Woodward, 2003, p. 6-8). The term of identity actually originated from the Latin root, *idem*, whose meaning is *the same*, and this word has been used in English since the seventeenth century (Gleason, 1983, p. 911; Sökefeld, 2001, p. 532). The meaning of identity philosophically is not far from its basic meaning. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) defined identity as:

The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality. Personal identity (in Psychology), the condition or fact of remaining the same person throughout the various phases of existence; continuity of the personality (Gleason, 1983, p.911).

The core of identity based on the definition is the sameness that a group of people have in a community. So, it is tend to focus on one way direction to see the identity of peoples. Meanwhile, in defining people, we do not see the sameness between a person and also the difference from the others. So, Weeks (1990, p.88) pointed out that identity is not only talk but the sameness but also empasize the differences. He explained that identity is about belonging, about what people have in common with some people and what differentiates them from others. At its most basic, it gives us a sense of personal location, the stable core to our individuality, social relationships, and the complex involvement with others.

The principle of the sameness and differences then give the roots to define various identities people. One of them is ethnic identity. Sowell (Liliweri, 2005) stated that ethnic identity is dealt to a group of ethnic characteristics, that is, a group of people who's the same life principle and practice upon a set of values and norms, such as the same of religion, nation, tribe, culture, language, and other other traits which lied on one umbrella called ethnic. Isajiw (1999) described that ethnic identity consists of two aspects, they are, first, is internal aspect of identity which referred to images, ideas, attitudes, and feeling. The second is external aspect referred to the observable behaviors, such as, dialect of language; ethnic tradition practice, the involvement into ethnic works system; in kin and friendship ethnic works and in institutions. So, it could be concluded that ethnic identity exist as a feeling which grows based on the sameness on history, culture, values, and race, that leading to how to define themselves different from the others.

African American is as an ethnic group in the United States, who came from Africa since the seventeenth century. Their arrival in United States was different from other immigrant (Merelman, 1993, p.331; McLemore, 1983, p.262). They came in coersion of European for the cheap labour interest. The consequence of this arrival was they confronted on two realities; they left their homeland, and in the new place they certainly had to adjust to dominant behavior patterns and way of life. The consequences of these two challenges are, it's threatening the existence of their ethnic identity as a collective symbol of the Africans life. The threats of existence was apparently not only because of the demands of adaptation or assimilation, but also a colonial construction that built the opinion that the African Americans' racial identity defined as a disc tint species (Frederickson, 1987, p xvii; Mellinger, 1992, p. 413; Hariyanti, 2010, p. 187), and ethnic and cultural attributes were seen as the mirror of low culture, illiterate, and inferior class (Mellinger, 1992, p. 424; Frederickson, 1987, p. xvii; Jordan, 1972, p. 81-94). These stereotypes were formed based on the premise of environmentalist, which said that comparatively short-range result of climate and other environmental factors" (Frederickson, 1987, hal. 2; Vaugham, 1995, hal. ix) affected the manner of living. So, the the climate and environmental factors in Africa had formed and effected the manner of living of African Americans at all.

The construction of African American identity to sustain the white supremacy in the United States celebrated in the production of literary and popular culture. Nelson (1992), Bogle (1971), Lemons (1977), Deburg (1984), dan Dubin (1987) tried to trace the construction of African American identity through the representation in American literature and popular culture. This research found that there was a hidden agenda behind the literary representation of African American, particularly from the white authors. They enacted and sustained white supremacy in the United States.

However, Starke (1971, p. 249) stated that the shifts of black portraiture in the aftermath of civil right movement is inevitable. He said that "the most dramatic changes were in the attitudes of Blacks toward themselves and the autonomous emergence of black consciousness, pride, and assertion among twentieth century blacks" (p. 249). Fisher & Steptoe (1996) pointed out that, now, these fictional symbols of Black Americans served as a "literary device available to black writers to attain their individual literary voices" (p. 239).

The identity construction that put white in superiority position commenced to be dismantled by starting to celebrate their own ethnic and cultural identities. The Slogan of 'Black is beautiful' (Eyerman, 2003; Mercer, 1990); then became the consciousness movement to glorify and appreciate their racial identity as well as the whole cultural identity. This slogan is a real consciousness movement to manifesting vision and mission to get equality in American fabric society. The African American authors then animated this slogan in presenting African American characters in their fictions in order to resist the colonial stereotype attached to them. The attributes of African American are not seen as the weakness, but as a strengthens. Citing Beauvoir's argument (Tong, 1998, p. 9) that otherness, although associated with everything that sidelined, avoided, rejected, unwanted, abandoned, and marginalized, actually provide a distinct advantage. Being the other is a way to exist that enable changes and differences. Another function of being the other is that, although it attached to something regarded as foreign and marginalized, it can be transformed into a unique and prominent, as a marker of identity that is different from the dominant ones.

Based on such above explanation, this study is intended to show how the African American writers reconstruct African Americans' ethnic identity through both novels written by African Americans. What identity's traits do they present to reconstruct the African American ethnic identity? And why the identities are vital in defining the African American existence in the United States?

2. Conceptual Framework and Method

This study is laid within the framework of the New American studies. That is, if the features of the United States in traditional American studies formed by the model of Eurocentric, which was approached through Puritan Origins, intellectual history, and myth and symbol schools (Gura, 2010, hal. 31), New American Studies concerned with cross-cultural communication, race and gender, identity, global and local, as well as the complex tensions between economic and politics symbolic, which raised a new approach, that is post nationalist American Studies.

In the concept post nationalist, Harvery (Rowe, 2000, p. 1) explained that the condition of post modernity has dramatically changed the meaning of official nationality and the nation-state in defining the American character. In the United States, it is important to distinguish between nationalism that is in line with the nation-state and nationalism that are not in line with. George Lipsitz (Curiel, 2000, p. 2) warned that nationalism of the Black and Indian, for example, are not line with the US official nationalism or reduced in the United States nationalism. In other words, Americanists need to criticize the boundaries and exclusion of nationalism without forgetting the difference between nationalism or ignored them in the history.

Gura (2010, p. 31) considers that the significance of Puritanism in the present times provides a rich resources for different types of new inquiry related to the new shiboleth, race, social class, and gender. Post nationalist American Studies seeks to incorporate the dynamics absorption of methodology and conceptual, thus bringing a shift in the object and area studies that increased in new methods and paradigms of research, as well as the involvement of multiple disciplines and method based on the objects and the areas (Rowe, 2000, p. 6-7). The conceptual shift in methodology and practice brings American Studies focus to the recent three movements; cosmopolitanism; postcolonial studies; and the Gramscian (Rowe, 2000; Pease, 2010).

In the post nationalist umbrella, this study then dissects the problems based on postcolonial point of view intersected with the subalternity studies. In postcolonial view, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) on how to construct east is used to see America, especially to criticize the "internal colonialism" of slavery of African American (Rowe, 2012, p. 34-35). It is dealt to how White constructed Black based on colonial view. Conversely, this study intended to see how black reconstruct themselves, as colonized and subaltern in the United States. So, it is used postcolonial theory that dealt to (re)construction of identity as a counter discourse of slave narrative in American fiction. Gayatri Spivak (1988) through the idea of *Subaltern* challenged Edward Said theory of orientalism that awkwardly defining colonized people through the eyes of colonizer. In Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) stated that the form of hegemony enters to the consciousness of the colonized people when they see themselves different from their colonizer and in the same time they awared that they were more inferior to those colonizers. Spivak emphasized on the possibility of the existence of a counter-knowledge or counter narration as a form of resistance of colonized people towards colonial discourse. African American, who in the past time perceived colonialism and voiceless, then emancipated and voiced. They, for sure, could create their own voices toward themselves that difference from White voices.

Du Bois' concept of 'double consciousness' are prompting dual identities in describing the struggle of African American to define themselves in United States. They built double identities as being African descendant, besides being an American. Du Bois stated that:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (In Kemayo, 2003, p. 2).

In the concept of double consciousness, African American has to bring in mind that they are Negro. They have traits to distinct them from White, not only in biological attributes but also culturally, besides they have to adapt the American way of life as a part of being American. This strategy used to be accepted in American society.

However, this study limited the discussion on how African American reconstructed themselves as the part of African descendant in the United States. It is also could be seen as how African American countering the white colonial discourse in constructing their identity as inferior one; backward and primitive contrasted to White as superior. This study applied qualitative method with focused on textual analysis, which is approaching data through interpretative ways. The source of data is taken from two contemporary slavery-themed novels *The Known World* (2003) and *The Wind Done Gone* (2001) as the main sources of data, and the secondary data are taken from other supporting articles, novels, or topics related to the topic in this discussion to support the finding.

3. Finding and Discussion

There are four characteristics that pointed to African American ethnic identity that exposed on the two contemporary slavery-themed novels; *The Wind Done Gone* and *The Known World*. These fourth characteristics are the kin and social embeddedness pattern, language, local arts, and the beliefs.

a. The Kin and Social Embeddedness Pattern

In the concept of Western or White people, as explained in the Orientalism, the pattern of kin and social embeddedness, that become the basic characteristic of East or Orient or Black community relation, is the characteristic of dependent people, backward, primitive (Said, 1978), againsts the principle of individualism in Western worlds, especially in United States. Adi (2008,p.169) stated that American mythology of innocence, individualism is the basic character of free individuals dealt to independent, as contrasted to cooperation and collectiveness. That is the core of American culture (Bellah, et al, 1985, p.142). However, as an immigrant, African American was not directly adopting the individualism principle at once, but they prevented their ethnic traits of social embeddedness by keeping it long manifested. It is proved that, it has become the basic of struggle against racism and getting equality in the United States. The bases of social organization formed by African Americans proved that the social and kin embeddedness pattern is not worse as what the white and Western colonialists portrayed.

In two African American slavery-themed novels represented that there is a tendency of African American to form a community group, which affirmed their difference from whites. They built a communication of social and politic network which used as a way to embedding family ties, supporting, and helping each others. In its community, they built a communication, friendship, familial hood, as kin and ethnic community whose have the similar experience in United States. In *The Wind Done Gone*, the social embeddedness of African American is reflected through African American life pattern in North, and in *The Known World* (2003) is reflected through the community formed by Hendry Townsend, who pictured as *black slave owners* in the South. He refought the African American slaves from White masters in Virginia County, and then gathered them in his plantation. The Black hero in this novel strengthens his black community with embedding togetherness and familiarity. The reflection of this social embeddedness could be seen in Alice Randall's *The Wind Done Gone* as quoted in the following excerpt.

I went to the Douglasses' for tea. Their home is more than a bit out of the way. We, Frederick Douglass and I, barely exchanged three sentences, but he looked at me as they sang, and I could see that he liked what he saw. As I was making my way through the crowd (so many sky-blue, so many cardinal colored gowns--the effect--due to the new dyes--was quite unintentionally patriotic) after the song, twice the great man nodded as he smiled in my direction. I never got too close to Douglass again, but I enjoyed a lively conversation with his son. I enjoyed this party. It was a kind of Negro open house, (Randall, 2001, p. 108-109)

Negro open house as illustrated in the above excerpt reflected the African Americans' togetherness as a symbol of ethnic people. As African descendant they have the same life pattern with the orientals in Asia. They put family and social as the important element to be prevented in their community. It is not only "coming out" to prevent their cultural roots, but also as a strategy of social networking.

Historically, the social networks of African American started from family composition, and then it formed the social members that strengthening each other. Dodson (2002, p. 114) stated as what in Africa applied that the family had been the basis of social organization, including economic and political life. Moreover, Dodson (2002, p. 114) said that even though the condition of slavery worsening the social embeddedness that built through family, but they kept hold it as the foundation of black families in plantation. It is actually become the traits of Africans which become the social foundation, and it such pattern kept alive in African American community. Glass (2006) stated that community viewed as continuum of existence and the struggle of African American. This social and kin embeddedness not only used to defend the invasion of the individualistic cultural mainstream, but also to defend racism in their being in United States. Thus, the kin and social embeddedness utilized by the African American authors to presented the characteristic of African American in the United States.

b. The Uniqueness of Language

The second aspect to reconstruct the African American's ethnic identity is the aspect of language. In both contemporary slavery-themed novels, Gullah language or dialect that the African American characters used indicated that they were an African descendant, from where the language originated and produced. In *The Wind Done Gone*, the model of language use could be seen from the way of Mammy's, the African American character, speaking, as expressed in the following excerpt.

Dear Sur,

You done already send one of mah childrens back to me broke. Lak an itty bitty thang, a red robin, you done twist her soul lak da little neck and huah can't sang no mo'. She was mah lamb, so i guess that how that goes. Her Mammy " (p. 160).

The same way also presented in *The Known World* in marked the African American characters' language use. The following excerpt reflects Black slave's, Moses, speaking model.

Moses, a few feet before passing Elias, said, "You gotta meet that mule in the mornin." "I know," Elias said. Moses had not stopped walking. "I ain't hurtin a soul here," Elias said. "Just fixin on some wood." Now Moses stopped and said, "I ain't carin if you fixin God's throne. I said you gotta meet that mule in the mornin. That mule sleepin right now, so maybe you should follow after him." Elias said nothing and he did not move. Moses said, "I ain't but two minutes off you, fella, and you seem to wanna keep forgettin that" (p.4).

The Language use that showed in the above excerpt indicated that there is a strange construct of English that produced by African American characters on those novels, that what is called Gullah English or the later known as African American English. Even though, the language pattern indicated the hybridity in African American English, but it is viewed as marker of the origin of the language construct.

It seems that, even though, the African American character have been tried to produce English, but the dialect of Gullah could not be put away from their language use. The language pattern, even, in recent times revived and has become the style in language production either in teen's community or in music language style, and not only celebrated in America, but also in the countries, where English learned as the second or foreign language. Even, Toni Morrison, an African American famous writer, during an interview in responding to the question, "What do you think is distinctive about your fiction? What makes it good?" she answers:

The language, only the language. The language must be careful and must appear effortless. It must not sweat. It must suggest and be provocative at the same time. It is the thing that black people love so much—the saying of words, holding them on the tongue, experimenting with them, playing with them. It's a love, a passion. Its function is like a preacher's: to make you stand up out of your seat, make you lose yourself and hear yourself. The worst of all possible things that could happen would be to lose that language. There are certain things I cannot say without recourse to my language. It's terrible to think that a child with five different present tenses comes to school to be faced with those books that are less than his own language. And then to be told things about his language, which is him, that are sometimes permanently damaging" (Lanehart, 2001, p.2).

Although Morrison is answering to response to her fiction writing, she is doing so in a way that shows the significance of a language to a people who celebrate language and its possibilities. It also points to the vulnerability of the people and the language because of this type of oneness.

According to Mufwene (1989,p.53) and Alleyne (1980; hal.13) that the emergence of African-American English in the New World occurred since the 17th century as a result of cultural contact with the Europeans. This language then grew into varieties of English of African-American as pidgins and creoles in the west coast of Africa when Europeans start braided trade with the Africans, and the language was developed in creole of other colonial territories of the Atlantic as well as the colonies of America's coast, when the Europeans started trading with the workers from Africa. Therefore, the people of Africa exported to America not in a state of "tabula rasa" waiting to be filled by a new culture and language, but they had had their own language as well as culture which were then integrated to the new culture and language in a new place. Dillard (1992) states that:

That slaves coming to virtually any part of the East Coast in the eighteenth century are very likely to have known some version of Pidgin English. From the evidence we have, what was spoken in West Africa and at sea was rather similar to what was being used in the American colonies, and not just in the South. (p. 65)

Based on this opinion, it can be said that the African English had already existed in some parts of Africa. It was become the general construction of African language when it met the new language. What they brought to America was an identity that could not be eliminated and hibridity occurred in this context. Zeigler and Osinubi (2002, p. 591) established a theoretical framework for postcoloniality of African-American English and contextualized the anxiety felt by the African-American to their language. Likewise, the other marginalized groups around the world, African-American response to their status as subjects of history, keep looking for their place in the world that condemn their language. Criticism sometimes assumes proportions that varied: from smooth, harsh criticism, up to direct negation of their language.

c. The Local Art

The third aspect that reflects the reconstruction of African American ethnic identity is the attributes of local arts. It is pictured modestly come from wood for woodcraft and leathers. In the construction of colonial whites, the artistic products are viewed as the product of backwardness, primitive, and low creativity due to tehcnology limitedness. However it is the product of people who live in specific area in the world, and it is become the marker of their creativity.

In *The Known World*, shows the creations woodcraft, as expressed as the following excerpt.

A week later he was at her door again and she was in the doorway and he opened a little piece of a rag and presented a comb he had carved out of a piece of wood. The comb was rough, certainly one of the crudest and ugliest instruments in the history of the world. Not one tooth looked like another; some of the teeth were far too thick, but most of them were very thin, the result of his whittling away with the hope that he was approaching some kind of perfection. "Oh," Celeste said. "Oh, my." She took it and smiled. "My goodness gracious." (p.45).

The woodcraft in the form of wood comb actually reflects any of the handmade creations of the back warders, who lived a primitive site, but it was seen no matter, because it is the African American local art that inherited form their mother land Africa. The author put the stereotypical images "one of the crudest and ugliest instruments in the history of the world" to show the respond of White people on that creation at the past time. Although, the creation often considered as the product of back warders and could not be efficiently used in daily life practically, but in the aspect of creativity, it is valued as a unique product.

In the present century, the attribute of African Americans heritage not longer considered as negative traits from primitive people, but it is appreciated as the uniqueness that must be protected and preserved. It was already belongs to the United States cultural heritage as well. As Robertson (1994) witnessed that the opening of the new ethnographic wing of the New Orleans Museum of Art, he noticed an American bishop's robe made of kente cloth on display in a special exhibition. This superb textile reminded him of the tremendous African-American interest in African decorative arts, from elements of formal wear to other personal articles such as dishes, sheets, and even sneakers.

He swathe African-inspired clothing in Michael Jackson videos and in inner-city McDonald's restaurant uniforms. In fact, many African Americans considered clothing of African design to be related to the proud display of one's African heritage-so much so that in Harlem, he also have witnessed instances of Whites being verbally abused for wearing it. So, it is actually depend on how the African American tries to reconstruct their ethnic identity. No matter what Whites' or other people thought about that, infect slowly the attribute has got a concern from worldwide society, not only in US but also in other states.

However, besides exposing the woodcraft creation, the author of *The Known World* also shows the expertise of African American in making some furniture and shoes from leather, though the both expertise's had been transformed into more modern creation, but the locality still remains. It is the way of African American to advancing their local art creation in order to have a place in American art world, or to make it efficient of usage in the more modern world of America. The same thing also appears in the novel *The Wind Done Gone* (2001) described, besides, the worship of Whites against African architecture, such as the building of the Egyptian pyramids; it is also exposing fruit of slave's architecture in the South. Through the following excerpt, it is stated that;

There was no architect here. There was me and what I remembered of all the great houses on great plantations I had seen. Bremono. Rattle-and-Snap. The Hermitage. Belgrove. Tudor Place. Sabine Hall. I built this place with my hands and I saw it in my mind before my hands built it (Randall, 2001, p. 52)

The African American experience in the institution of slavery who suffers discrimination very long times brought sensibility to fight through scantlings culture. Kemayo (2003) stated that: History is used within a broad scope in this context. It necessarily includes political, psychological, and sociological phenomena. Berry and Blassingame's Long Memory and Franklin and Moss' From Slavery to Freedom survey an African American history that encompasses their cultural and artistic con-attributions to the United States. These histories clearly show that African Americans came to the New World with a strong cultural sensibility and, although oppressed and marginalized by the U.S. mainstream, consistently have struggled to express and enhance their human potential. The struggle is ongoing but, in view of such trials and tribulations as the group has experienced, has been successful (p.17).

In affirming this statement Kemayo (2003) reviews some experts' opinion, such as Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, Gutman's *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750–1925*, Litwack's *Been in the Storm So Long*, and Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, collectively demonstrated that besides becoming slaves, African American constantly preventing an intrinsic beliefs about humanity, and support the moral and aesthetic value system sustained after emancipation.

Levine (Kemayo, 2003)observed that there is an indication of culture that expressed by the African American, particularly dealt to the unique folk culture developed as a result of a combination of African background and their experiences in the days of slavery in America. The overall depiction is referring to the African American efforts to revive the awareness about their ethnic identity in United States.

d. The Beliefs

Another aspect that emerged as the effort to reconstruct the African American ethnic identity is the belief tradition. Herskovits (1941, p. 214) explains that among the various kinds of spirituality, African as the roots of African American people were very trusting in the spirits of their ancestors and it was very powerful and influential in their daily life in the ages of slavery. It was raising the belief on natural power; for example supranatural power or the worship of paganism, or magic. Although, the beliefs system considered irrational and and backward in American mainstream, but the first generation of African American in the United States kept exist and justified. The reflection of magical, supernatural, the other of the belief system strongly embedded in their spirituality world. Even, it was fused in the practice of the Christian worships, or what it called *Voodoo*. Chireau (1997) stated that:

For generations, magic has persisted in black culture, often obscured but deemed compatible with other spiritual traditions. Its widespread appeal is attested to by numerous accounts describing conjuring relics, supernatural rituals, and occult specialists among African American churchgoers. From slavery days to the present, practitioners and clients of the magical arts have moved freely across ecclesial boundaries, drawing copiously from the symbols and language of Christianity. The picture of black religion that emerges is, thus, more complex than formulations distinguishing between magic and relational separate empirical categories would indicate" (hal. 226).

The reflection of the ancient belief system of African American and its attributes appeared on the slavery-themed novels in early periods of nineteenth century up to the periods of 1970s and 1980s. In the works of Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Michael Harper, and Sherley Williams- represented a symbolism, mythology, critique, and iconology which explaining the traditional Afro-American belief and culture; written in the form and type of language that is unique, but not wrapped to the dogmatic ethnocentric viewpoint (Martin, 1981,p. 66). That was, each of these authors reveal a vision of inner-directed, which enters the core of African American experience to project its depth, beauty, and vitality.

In the collection of Alice Walker's short story *In Love and Trouble* (1973), which tells about the life of a black man from a perspective of black women, contains two selection mythologies that underlines the system of beliefs, values and practices operative in traditional African-American culture. According to Martin (1981, p. 67), the use of such element in the work is not to display, entertain, or a form of worship, but it aims to explore ramification and the implications of the values system that are historically used as a mechanism of protection in a hostile environment. In sub title of "*The Revenge of Hannah Kemhuff*", the central problem presented is *Voodoo* used to resolve the issue of revenge protagonist character to her enemies. Likewise, *Voodoo* who entered the Christian spiritualiality, illustrating the force of *Voodoo*, a particular mythology, within a given set of circumstances (p. 67). In rearranging the source of the African American oral tradition reveal the contradictory implications of *Voodoo* and religion as well as the medical side, the authors provide a different perspective. They did not so much leave the past, because values embeded continue to govern one's actions. It can be inferred from this fact that the authors indicate that there are some aspects of Black mythology cannot be sustained in a society that is still oppressive, though another aspects can achieve their effectiveness.

In line with the above view that Black mythology cannot be sustained for some circumstances and some are already reaching its effectiveness, in fact, also reflected in the slavery-themed novels at the beginning of the twentieth first century. Although, the aspects of the supernatural as a mirror of paganism no longer appears in the novels, but implied *Voodoo* wrapped in mystical practice for revenge still there. Although not explicitly stated, the practice of revenge mystically appears in the novel *The Wind Done Gone* through character Prissy and Mammy, ast expressed in the following excerpt.

They continued to believe Miss Priss understood that a trusted family servant (even your brother) whispering a family secret (even in assion) was peculiar treachery. Garlic, who mourned his son, knew what his daughter meant. And knowing that Miss Priss possessed a keen and labyrinthine intelligence, Garlic seemed willing to let her balance the scales. (hal. 46).

It can be inferred that the beliefs of African American that reflected on this excerpt is still internalized by the contemporary African American authors. However, the model of the belief is not viewed significantly presented as what in the previous novels did. It seems that the supernatural or something like magic are used in these novels just to strengthen the atmosphere of past ages scene on those novels, because it is not revealing to the worship and spirituality symbols at all.

The same way, the supernatural aspect in novel *The Known World* is presented on the African American's expertise in forecasting, especially in predicting someone destiny, or reading someone's behavior. These are of course going farther from the previous representation, which strongly expressing the spirituality of African American. However, the mystical signs in the present novels negotiated with rationality. The author presented Alice, A mad woman in the plantation, with the magic power able to read map of life. She was not only could predict someone's' behavior, but also could break the codes of evils or crime. She pictured often aids the Patrollers to break the codes of evil in the world of intelligence. It is not explicitly explained she has a magical power, but she knows more about life because she often wandered, especially in the night, in the regions, she met many people with many characteristic when she became a slave. So, that 'why she know more about people and life. Based on the analysis, it can be inferred that the appearance on the symbols of ancient African American belief on those contemporary slavery-themed novels could be viewed not only as the effort to reconstruct African American ethnic identity as a part of African descendant, but also the American. The authors combine the African traits with the modern context as a reflection that the attribute of African could be used in the American mainstream. It is proved that they, in much aspect, had adapted the mainstream culture of America, which put rationality as the way of thinking.

4. Conclusion

This study concluded that in the modern context, the ethnic identity that embedded on African American identity are still celebrated in the popular consciousness, though the negotiation could not be avoided. The emergence of contemporary slavery-themed novels written by the African-American, no longer fully express the oppression of the whites, but rather to celebrate their past experiences. Celebration of past experience seems quite significant in constructing ethnic and cultural identity, as African descendant in one side, also American in the other side. This study proves that, colonial construction against black ethnic identity is not always accepted by the colonized or marginalized people, it reversely creates a counter narrative of the colonial discourse as a form of resistance. Thus, reconstruction African American ethnic identity is a way to resist the hegemony of colonial white discourse on Black identity. Celebrating ethnic identity can foster of individual awareness to be proud on its cultural identity, and begin to see their own uniqueness as exceptional. The uniqueness of its ethnic identity defined to be the power of the African American to exist in United States.

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