

**PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF M'SILA
FACULTY OF LETTERS AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

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OPTION: LITERATURE & CIVILIZATION

**Racial Identity in Ralph Ellison's
*Invisible Man***

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of Master in Literature**

Candidates

Miss. Bochra Ouali

Miss. Meryem Hana Karouche

Supervisor

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DEDICATION

This study is wholeheartedly dedicated my beloved parents for their endless love, support and encouragement.

To my sisters (Samíha, Ismahane, Fatime Al Zahra and Linda) thank you for being my greatest motivation. I love you All.

To my best Friend and partner Bochra, you are the ideal partner I could ever have, thank you for being Last and not least, to all my friends and family thank you for all the love and support.

-Meryem Hana

DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation work to my beloved parents who they have been my source of inspiration, they supported and believed in me even more than I did, their unconditionally love has been always my motivation.

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I also dedicate this work to my friends and my soul-mate Meryem Hana, you are the best friend I have ever had.

-Bochra

ABSTRACT

The present study highlights and explores the relationship between racism and the construction of the African American identity in Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* (1952). The selected novel examines the aspects of racism in the American society and its impact on the life of African American individuals during the late 1920's and the beginning of 1930's. Furthermore, this study provides a view on the socio-historical events such as the Harlem Renaissance and Jazz music that led to the rise of Black people's voice and their quest for equality and identity. In addition, it highlights the mindset of oppressed people and their self-discovery affected by racism, white supremacy and society's stereotypes. Moreover, it sheds light on the issue of internalized racism, that is to say, Black people also oppress and segregate fellow black people. To this end, this dissertation is divided into two chapters; the first one offers a socio-historical background to the era in which the novel was written in order to provide a better view of the issues dealt with in the second chapter. This latter, in its turn, examines and analyses both stylistically and thematically the protagonist's experience and his psychological struggle to formulate his identity using Critical Race Theory.

Key Words:

Racism, Identity, Double Consciousness, Jazz Age, Harlem Renaissance.

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INTRODUCTION

In Literature, It is common to find similarities between the events, the characters and the author, his background or even the society he lived in, in which it may indeed affect the production of a given literary work. Usually, writers produce literature and use it as a tool to face real-life problems or to fight for a cause. African American literature is not an exception of this fact; as one type that is considered with the transmission of the critical and psychological issues from which Afro-Americans suffered for ages, as an example of defending the right of minorities being ignored and segregated by majorities. In Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the black male nameless protagonist tries to discover his true identity in the American society in which he finds a rejection and neglect of his existence as a human being, consequently, the protagonist finds himself invisible.

Since the beginning of the colonial and slave era, Racism became a prevalent problem in The United States. Racism was spread widely after the wave of immigration where groups of minorities and ethnic groups traveled across the world especially toward the United State of America. However, black and African Americans are not among them since they were brought to the States as slaves leading them suffer from racism more than other groups of minorities.

Hence, the problem of Racism is a primary reason to the appearance of many black American writers, among them Ralph Ellison. Who expressed in his novel *Invisible Man* his personal perspective of black people's struggle. A brief look into the events of the novel provides the reader with a sight of the Black and African Americans' living conditions in an American society, moreover, it demonstrates the reasons that led the protagonist to feel invisible.

Furthermore, the study focuses on social and psychological problems facing African Americans in the early twentieth century. It touches racism and conflict of identity through the analysis of Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Ellison's inclusion of a racial as well as a psychological aspects of identity imparts his text with a rich and dynamic commentary on social conditions, standards, and the ways in which human interaction dictate and contribute to our overall sense of identity. He builds his themes on the assumption that in a racist country, blacks are granted no true identity. In our paper we are going to present the racism and its effect on individuals' identity.

Therefore, the main questions upon which the dissertation raises are: How racism affects the individual identity of the oppressed people, throughout the novel? To what extent are the historical events present in Ralph Ellison's novel? Other sub-questions that this dissertation entails are: How racism and identity concepts are depicted in *Invisible Man*? Are all black people in the novel invisible? How the protagonist's identity is established and maintained? What does invisibility mean in the context of this novel? Do the main character's acts signify any evolvement in his self-perception? What are the different facets of racism, and how does Ralph Ellison approach racism in *Invisible Man*?

Right after its first publication Ellison's masterpiece *invisible man* has become the focus of attention due to its influence on society. Many critics, international journals, and newspapers reviewed the novel and gave their honest opinion. Works with relevancy to the topic will be cited here, due to the communion in the findings.

Among the few authors who tackle the theme of African American identity is Alain Locke, in his essay "Enter the New Negro", Alain Locke states how the New started to fit and coexist in the modern society. Within his essay, Locke believes that the New Negro's process of becoming was not an overnight appearance. African Americans during the 1920's

offered the current society a culture of vigor and pride, embodied within music as Jazz music, that had never been seen before. During this time, African Americans proved that they have the right to be treated equally as human beings.

Langston Hughes in his poem “Harlem” (1951) addresses African American’s dream of liberty and equality for a respected life and dignified ethnic identity. Harlem was the place in which people moved from the south to the north searching for their dream making it place of the birth of the African American culture during the period of Harlem renaissance. Through the poem, Hughes examines the possible effects caused by this dream through arguing that someday this dream will explode and destroy all the limitations imposed upon them.

In a recent movie “get out” (2017) directed and written by Jorden Peele. peelee tackles the theme of racism in the lens of a young African American photographer who goes to visit the parents of his white girlfriend for the weekend. The protagonist witnesses that the servants in the house are all black. He notices strange things in the house and the family. The sense of uneasiness is in the air and it continues to grow as Chris finds out the strange truth of what is really going on in this place.

Carol E. Henderson argues in her book entitled “Scarring the Black Body: Race and Representation in African American Literature” (2002) that slavery’s attempt to control, dictate and dehumanize the African American has left indelible marks on the body and psyche of the African American.

The theorist Frantz Fanon in his essay “The Fact of Blackness” (1996) claims that “blackness” is not a self-made identity, but rather imposed on black people. Furthermore, Fanon describes “Blackness” as a “Social Uniform” that functions as a tool to categories

people apart as a result of the individuals being judged by their outer appearance. The black man is defined as what others see him instead of being given the chance to construct an identity for himself.

In “The Soul of The Black Folks” written by W. E. B. Du Bois. Du Bois in his book claims that the problem of the twentieth century is a problem of color line. In his book, Du Bois describes the experience of being alienated using a literary figure “a vast veil” rather than using the word “race”, this vast veil produces a kind of subjectivity that is called by Du Bois as “double consciousness”. This later is the result of how black people are forced to view themselves in both through their own eyes and through eyes of racists.

A thesis made by Alyssa Sellers "Destruction as a Necessity for Creation in Ellison's *Invisible Man*" (2012) asserts that invisibility is the only choice for the protagonist to take in order to liberate and construct oneself amid discrimination and segregation.

“The Meaning of Freedom in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*” (1975), is another thesis conducted by Dolores Beth Powers in which she states that *Invisible Man's* protagonist search for the utmost freedom to get away from the oppressed society he lives in. Racial segregation was another reason for him to chase his own freedom. Powers argues that existentialism and freedom are interrelated especially when the protagonist tries to make some actions as his own personal decisions.

According to Scott Irwin in his “A Bulger Of Words: Ellison's musicality and the Jazz/blues in *Invisible Man*”; Ralph Ellison was profoundly affected with Jazz music and Blues, in which Ellison relied upon his musical instinct in constructing his book *the Invisible Man*. Ellison wrote in his introduction of the book in 1981 “*I would have to improvise upon*

my materials in the manner of a jazz musician putting a musical theme through a wild star-burst of metamorphosis”¹

Invisible Man treats racism, identity and discrimination in a very clear and wide angle during the Harlem renaissance movement. We see that the most suitable theory to tackle the issues above mentioned is Critical Race Theory with Du Bois’s Double Consciousness and the Fanonian approach. In other words, we shall analyze the impact of racism on the construction of the African American identity.

Concerning the significance of this research; this study aims at finding out the impact of racism on African Americans’ identity, also the role of Harlem movement on the black’s search of equality with a look at the meaning behind the term invisibility in the novel. Finally, this dissertation aims at highlighting the impact of racism and segregation on the construction of the African American identity in the novel.

Accordingly, the study will be divided into two chapters; the first chapter named the Socio-Historical context and Theoretical background is also divided into two parts, the first part; Socio-Historical context, will deal with the impact of the historical events on the production of the novel, such as the Harlem Renaissance movement, Jazz age and Civil Right Movement Era, as well as the reasons behind the birth of these periods. In addition to the greatest African American achievements which are Jazz and Blues music, we will also take a look for the most prominent African American musicians whom Ralph Ellison was highly influenced by when writing his novel such as Louis Armstrong. The second part will be under the title “Theoretical Background” in which we will provide definition to the theories used to analyze the novel, which are Critical Race Theory, Fanonian approach and Du Bois’s

¹ Ellison Ralph. *Invisible man*. (New York: Vintage International, 1995), xxiii

Double Consciousness. The second chapter entitled “the Aesthetic and Psychology of Invisibility and Racial Identity”, the first part of this chapter will analyze Ellison’s use of symbols in order to deliver his message, while the second part will take a look inside the psychology of the protagonist using the theories mentioned above and study and the affect of racism on his individual identity in the American society. We will also examine the meaning behind invisibility and how the main character managed to use as a veil in order to represent himself in the novel.

CHAPTER ONE: SOCIO-HISTORICAL AND THEORITICAL CONTEXT

Part One: Socio-Historical context

“The most advanced, creative and original thinking is always a product of historical context and the influences of previous geniuses, mentors, and collaborators on the mind of the originators”²

Michael J. Gelb

This chapter is divided into two parts that presents an overview of the historical and theoretical background. It is widely acknowledged that every literary work is reflected by the author’s background and environment. Therefore, the first part of this chapter is concerned with the socio-historical context that shaped the act of writing and reading the novel; i.e., we give an overview of Harlem Renaissance and the Jazz age including African American music that contains the blues music and jazz music. While the second part of this chapter is devoted to the theoretical background of the study, in which we will define literary theory in general, than Critical Race theory; furthermore, we will introduce race theories’ prominent figures Frantz Fanon and W.E.B. Du Bois.

1. Harlem Renaissance

The Great Migration also known as “Black Migration” was the relocation of Millions of African-American from the rural, agrarian Southern cities towards the urban, industrialized Northern states to flee the economic exploitation that accompanied life as southern farmers, as well as violent and pervasive racism during the 1920s. This Great Migration of people

² Michael J. Gelb. “Discover Your Genuis: How to Think Like History’s Ten Most Revolutionary Mind’s”, *Harper Collins*, p. 7.

brought with it the migration of intellectual brilliance and awareness that led to the birth of the Harlem Renaissance movement. Harlem Renaissance was an artistic and intellectual movement that flourished within the African-American communities in the North and Midwest regions of the United States, but nowhere more than in Harlem in New York City. Some of the era's most important literary and artistic figures from activists, poetries, athletes, intellectuals, and writers to newspapers, publishing houses, music companies, and even nightclubs came together as one voice to reclaim their cultural identity and racial pride in defiance of widespread prejudice and discrimination.³

Moreover, several events marked the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance Movement. The first was in music, the spread of the blues and jazz across the United States reaching New York City and particularly Harlem. The blues as a genre in music became increasingly popular in Harlem clubs during the second half of the twentieth century after emerging during the nineteenth century. Jazz music spread north from New Orleans to Harlem. In 1921, Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake created a musical with all-black cast known as *shuffle Along*. This musical was seen as a sign of the emergence of Harlem Renaissance. The Second event that marked the beginning of the movement was the 1924 Civic Club Dinner that took place in New York City. Magazine editors, publishers, artists and writers gathered in order to celebrate and acknowledge the great amount of black creative talent, also unite Harlem's black prominent writers with white publishers. The idea of the dinner was brought by Charles S. Johnson and was conceived as a "coming out party" that would honor and raise awareness to works such as Jessie Faust's novel *There Is Confusion*. Johnson wanted to include as many writers as possible as well as use literature as a mean to achieve

³ Mark A. Lewis, *Harlem Renaissance: A literary analysis of two Harlem Renaissance Heroes*, (2014). P1

equality for African-Americans⁴. The third sign of the Harlem Renaissance was the great amount of artistic accomplishments of African-Americans in all fields of arts. The success of *Shuffle Along*, as an example, inspired white writers to adopt black themes and cast black performers. Irving Berlin cast Blues singer Ethel Waters in *As Thousands Cheer* (1933). Black writers had the same success in literature. In 1922, more than fifty books were published by African American authors of the Harlem Renaissance. Julia Peterkin's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Scarlet Sister Mary* (1928) and Fannie Hurst's successful *Imitation of Life* (1933) represent the most examples of this development.⁵

During the Harlem Renaissance, Harlem city was the haven, a place of self-discovery, cultural and literary innovations. Several publications of literature and art sought to reflect Harlem as it is in reality. Artists and writers also shifted their focus to topics related to folk culture, religion, and the South in their works. In 1927, James Weldon Johnson Published *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* and sought to speak of traditional African-American religious oratory using vernacular language with a Southern religious sermon. In 1925, Alain Locke, a leading African American writer, philosopher, educator, and patron of the arts, published *The New Negro* and it quickly became a classic. It included poetry by Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, and others, in addition to essays by authors and critics such as James Weldon Johnson and W.E.B. Du Bois. For his part in developing the movement, Locke has been dubbed the "Father of the Harlem Renaissance." He included essays discussing art, music, and literature, Also photographs of African art from the Barnes Foundation Collection in Merion, Pennsylvania. Langston Hughes is another representative figure of the Harlem Renaissance, despite the fact that he was not born in

⁴ Charles S. Johnson, "The Civic Club Dinner, March 21, 1924" *the Voice Of Experience* March 20, 2012 <http://voice-of-experience.blogspot.com/2012/03/civic-club-dinner-march-21-1924.html> Accessed on 11.02.2019

⁵ Cary D Wintz and Bruce A. Glasrud, *The Harlem Renaissance in The America West*, (New York: Routledge, 2012), P3-4

Harlem, he was considered one of the most important writers and thinkers of that era⁶. Hughes moved to Harlem at the age of nineteen in which he could not hide his excitement when saw it for the first time in which he described it in his autobiography⁷

I can never put on paper the thrill of that underground ride to Harlem. I had never been in a subway before and it fascinated me – the noise, the speed, the green lights ahead. At every station I kept watching for the sign: 135TH STREET. When I saw it, I held my breath. I came out onto the platform with two heavy bags and looked around. It was still early morning and people were going to work. Hundreds of colored people! I wanted to shake hands with them, speak to them.⁸

With the coming of a new generation of new writers and artists, “*Harlem was like a great magnet for the Negro intellectual, pulling him from everywhere*”⁹ Langston Hughes wrote. They sought to give a voice to the African American experience.

African American historian and activist W. E. B. Du Bois also had a great impact during the Harlem Renaissance. As a spokesperson for African-American rights, Du Bois co-founded The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Du Bois served as an editor for the monthly magazine *the crisis* in which he was able to publish literary works produced by Harlem Renaissance writers.¹⁰

The Harlem Renaissance was not only an intellectual movement or an attempt to establish a literary school strictly unique to African-Americans. The Renaissance was more

⁶ “Langston Hughes, Renaissance Man”, Brewminate October 26, 2016 <https://brewminate.com/langston-hughes-renaissance-man/>, Accessed on 22.02.2019.

⁷ Smithsonian American Art Museum, “New York City: The Harlem Renaissance and Beyond” (Washington, DC April 27, 2012). P. 2

⁸ Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea: AN Autobiography* (New York City: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 1993), p.81.

⁹ Ibid., p.240.

¹⁰ Biography.com Editors, “W.E.B. Du Bois Biography”, April 2, 2014 <https://www.biography.com/activist/web-du-bois>, Accessed on 15.02.19.

than just that, it had also political, economic, and social dimensions; in fact, the Harlem Renaissance was mainly part of the New Negro Movement.

The New Negro Movement, as its name would imply, referred to an age of redefinition, to borrow a phrase from Stanley Crouch, of African Americans' attempt to construct a self-defined identity on their own terms. The Harlem Renaissance is also a Negritude artistic movement that is classified as one aspect of the New Negro Era due to the birth of jazz as a modernist art movement. in addition to the emergence of Pan Africanism¹¹ as well as anti-colonialism by Marcus Garvey, Du Bois's Pan African conferences, the racist politics of Hubert H. Harrison, and the socialism of A. Philip Randolph. The last aspect of the New Negro movement would be the rise of a new racial by Rube Foster.

The great depression of the 1930s was one the factors that led to the end of the Harlem Renaissance. The economic crisis in all fields of life pushed African American authors to change their themes and to write about social and economic issues. Mainly, they wrote about the Great Depression, the loss of the American Dream. Despite the end of this movement, it left great impact on modern writers and artists.¹²

2. The Jazz Age

Novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald referred to the period that emerged in the United States of America between the end of the Great War and the Great Depression as the Jazz Age in his book "*tales of the jazz Age*". The term "Jazz" is credited to African Americans as they used it to describe a genre of music that quickly became popular among middle-class Americans.

¹¹ An association that aims at empowering sense of solidarity between Africans.

¹² George Hutchinson, "Harlem Renaissance", 13 December 2018 <https://www.britannica.com/event/Harlem-Renaissance-American-literature-and-art>, Accessed on 13.01.2019.

Matza and Mancall defined the Jazz Age as “*Jazz Age is brought to mind so as countless images, mostly of 1920s: the music, fashion, Prohibition, movies, radio, and the rise of automobiles*”¹³. This decade was also known as the Roaring Twenties or the Boom, which was a period of outstanding prosperity in economic and technological innovations as well as cultural adaptation; Americans lived in urban cities more than in rural states, electricity and the invention of automobiles made life easier. Radio invention helped the music especially Jazz Music to invade into the American homes. Although films had been around for a considered time, with the Jazz Age many became censoring the content of movies.

For African Americans, the Jazz Age was also home for a movement known as the Harlem Renaissance. By the end of the First World War, African Americans expected a better treatment in an equal society with white people; however, they faced a different reality. The United States of America during that time was a place of racism and segregation. African Americans were excluded from participating in most of the fields. White-owned business often refused their patronage, discrimination in jobs and education denied them the potential of earning the money required to purchase consumer goods.

Concerning public amusements, white clubs owners refused to admit African Americans, while at the same time depending on them to amuse their white clients by playing jazz music for them. Movies and shows also relied on racial stereotypes when presenting black people. Black Jazz club was the first club where black and white Americans intermingled in the 1920s.¹⁴

¹³ Mitchell Newton-Matza and Peter C. Mancall, “*Jazz Age: People and Perspectives*”, (Greenwood publishing group, 2009.) p. xiii.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 84.

Overall, the Jazz Age flourished in different aspects in the American society. Jazz music became a popular culture, and despite the fact that African Americans played Jazz Music for white people in clubs they were not allowed to attend as clients nor were welcomed as patrons of business.

3. Civil Right Movement Era

Following the American Civil War, slaves were emancipated in 1865. This meant that slavery was abolished and that the law changed to give black people rights, and in order to find better living conditions they migrated towards the north mainly Chicago where factories and industries were available, leaving racism and lack of opportunities down in the south.

This migration encouraged black people to have a sense of freedom which in turns gave a push for the rise of the civil right movement. This latter also helped black writers to change their themes such as race and sex, writers such as James Baldwin and Richard Wright wrote about the struggle of being a black in the American society. Wright's *Native Son* inspired Baldwin to write a collection entitled *Notes of a Native Son* a hint to Wright's novel. Another novelist who was highly influenced by the change of the African American literature is Ralph Ellison in which he wrote *Invisible Man*; even though it was his only achievement, still its position remained ensured in the African American Literature.

Furthermore, students created committees such as Nonviolent Coordinating Committee which was founded in 1960 and later became Student National Coordinating Committee in order to promote peace and change using slogans like "Black Is Beautiful" and "Black power", African American literature became more popular and accepted in the American Society.

This movement also gave a rise to Black women's voice poets and writers such as Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), addressed segregated housing policies at that time, she was the first African American woman to go to Broadway, and the youngest American to receive the New York Critics Circle Award in 1959 and Gwendolyn Brooks who became the first African-American to win the Pulitzer Prize for her *Book of Poetry* (1949). Other female writers such as Nikki Giovanni and Sonia Sanchez that became famous during that period.¹⁵

4. The African American Music

The history of African American music goes back to days of slavery, in which slaves brought with them to America their culture, religion they practiced, language, traditions, music and dances they performed in their hometowns and through migration from the South to the North it spread across America. African Americans have always been proud of their history and tradition, therefore, they tried to transmit and keep it alive for a long time through the use of music *"Our songs are our history. If we do not have our songs, we do not know where we are or where we have been. We don't know how to remember what has happened to us"*¹⁶.

In addition, the African American music was mostly about story-telling and folklore; it was also used to pass wisdom and tradition from one generation to another. Their music had implicit meanings too they sang about freedom, slavery and even had biblical themes, though they were prohibited from practicing their religion by their owners.¹⁷

¹⁵ David R. Peck and Eric Howard, *Civil Rights Movement in Literature*, (NJ: Salem Press, 1997) p, 3.

¹⁶ Barbara R. Lundquist and Winston T. Sims. "African-American Music Education: Reflections on an Experience." *Black Music Research Journal*, vol. 16, no. 2, (1996). p.301.

¹⁷ Encyclopedia Editors, "The History of African American Music"
<https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/history-african-american-music>,
Accessed on 02.01.2019

4.1 Blues Music

By the end of the civil war, Africans were freed and brought to a new world where they were introduced to a new language and history different to their own; however, they managed to preserve some of their cultural traditions through music and dance.

The blues music was an African American musical form and genre that started mainly in the Deep South then swept across the United States of America in the nineteenth century and continued to make its way to the future. The blues emerged from the poor communities of blacks, that is to say, it came as a reaction against the legal segregation of Jim Crow's law, their incapability to fight against injustice, enabled them to produce the blues music to express their frustration and speak about their depression as Ralph Ellison states

The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically.¹⁸

By the beginning of the twentieth century there was a massive technological and social changes led to the widespread of the blues across the world. W.C. Handy, African American musician and composer also known as the father of blues helped in the spread of blues to wider audience with hits like "Memphis Blues" and "St. Louis Blues." Blues Singers and composers were considered to be the first generation of jazz vocalists at the first days of jazz.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ralph Ellison, *Richard Wright's Blues* (New York: Modern Library, 1995), p.129

¹⁹ James Ciment, *"Encyclopedia Of The Ja Age: From The End of World War 1 to the Great Crash"*, (Sharpe Reference, 2013). P. 89

4.2 Jazz Music

Jazz music is a genre of a music originated in African American communities in New Orleans in the twenties century. It is a combination of the musical tradition of black New Orleans and the creative flexibility of the blues. Jazz music is also called “America’s classical music”. The first jazz record of jazz was released by Original Dixieland. New York is another city that witnessed the new vibe of jazz music after Chicago state due to the early records that were recorded there. By 1918, the word “Jazz” was widely known. Famous performers back then were cornetist Sydney Bechet (1897-1959), the pianists "Jelly Roll" Morton (1885-1941) and “Eubie Blake” (1883-1893), and the bandleader “James Reese Europe” (1881-1919).²⁰

Despite the fact Jazz music was inspired by the blues; jazz music was not performed by only black people like the blues. As New Orleans was a melting pot, all races of the world Italians, creoles and all immigrants from Europe also performed jazz music. The African roots of the genre did not stop them from playing it.²¹

During the 1920s and the 1930s, Swing Style took over, the big-band sound focused more on the context and their music was played in hotels and ballrooms. This kind of music had two categories; “sweet” which consisted of playing the sentimental parts of songs while the other category was known as “hot” this meant playing pure jazz. Most the musicians did not follow this categorization and sought to create a combination by mixing the two categories. By the mid of 1940s, a new modern style of jazz appeared known as Bebop, which was characterized by a fast tempo, melodies and improvisations, and the use of the contrafact (tunes based on the chord changes to other tunes). Bebop was a completely black

²⁰ Early Gerald, "The New Negro Era and the Great African American Transformation." *American Studies* 49, no. 1/2 (2008), pp. 9-19; p. 9

²¹ Piero Scaruffi, “A History of Jazz Music”. <https://www.scaruffi.com/history/jazz1.html>, Accessed on 23.02.2019

invention which was performed by smaller groups than the big band. Most famous Bebop performers during that time were tenor sax players Dexter Gordon, trumpeters Fats Navarro, Clifford Brown, and Dizzy Gillespie; pianists Bud Powell, Mary Lou Williams, and Thelonious Monk; electric guitarist Charlie Christian, and drummers Kenny Clarke, Max Roach, and Art Blakey.²²

The father of the jazz music was the trumpeter and musician “Louis Armstrong” (1900-1971); he was the most famous jazz musician of all time. The style he played was called “New Orleans-Dixieland setting”. Armstrong’s records Hot Five and Hot Seven are considered the purest jazz classics that stand for his creativity and genuineness. With songs as “What a Wonderful World” and ” West End Blues”, he was also the first African American entertainer to be liked by both white and colored people. According to the National Recording Registry “Louis Armstrong was jazz's first great soloist and is among American music's most important and influential figures. These sessions, his solos in particular, set standard musicians still strive to equal in their beauty and innovation”. Louis Armstrong influenced the coming generations of jazz musicians.²³

The jazz music also gave voice to female musicians and singers, blues and jazz singer Bessie Smith was the most famous and highly paid colored musician during that time, her style inspired many female singers such like Aretha Franklin and Janis Joplin. Another famous female jazz singer was Ella Fitzgerald was famous as “The First Lady of Song”. Fitzgerald sold over 40 million albums during her career and won 13 Grammy awards.²⁴

²² "Bebop Revolution." New York Essays, Dec 24, 2017. <https://newyorkessays.com/essay-bebop-revolution-2809>, Accessed on 24.01.2019

²³ Biography.com Editors, “Louis Armstrong Biography”, (A&E Television Networks,2014) <https://www.biography.com/musician/louis-armstrong>, Accessed on 27.02.2019

²⁴Biography.com Editors, “Bessie Smith Biography”, (A&E Television Networks,2014), <https://www.biography.com/musician/bessie-smith>, Accessed on 29.02.2019.

Music for African Americans was more than just entertainment; it was a means to preserve and transmit their heritage, and later on, they started to challenge and produce new forms and styles of music to consolidate their own place in a white-dominated society.

Part Two: Theoretical Background

1. Literary theory

Any literary analysis depends -directly or indirectly- on literary theory; study and analysis does not exist in a void. Literary theory is the methods and ideas we use in the analysis of a literary work, by applying it we refer to the theories that expose the possible meaning of literature. It is the tool to explore and draw our interpretation of a piece of literature; which can also be used as justification for different kinds of critical activity. Literary theory frames the relationship between a writer and his work; it even provides us with a better understanding of the world. In addition, the study of literary theory makes both the reader and the writer even more productive.

Critics use Literary theories as different lenses to study literature, these lenses permit them to study works of art based on certain conventions, and those conventions come from the theories and adopt what particular aspects of a work are important.²⁵

1.1 Critical Race Theory:

The Sixties civil right movement witnessed a success in America. One factor the human right movement created pretty clear was that ethnic minorities had been economically and politically burdened for a very long time. Critical race theory started with the civil rights movement; it was a fight for social justice for blacks to reach equality under

²⁵ Vince Brewton, "Literary Theory", <https://www.iep.utm.edu/literary/>, Accessed on 03.02.2019.

the United States' law. Though the origins of the movement rooted way back then, the critical race theory movement officially organized itself in July 1989.

Critical Race Theory is a mode that examines the aspects of racism across cultural modes of appearance. In adopting this approach, Critical Race Theory scholars attempt to understand how racism affects people by cultural views of race and how they are able to represent themselves to counter prejudice. It is a combination of concepts resulted from the Civil Rights and ethnic studies discourses. This Theory developed during the mid-1970s by researchers like Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado. Some lawyers, scholars, and activists saw the work of the Civil Rights as being delayed and sometimes neglected, they also saw the liberal and positivist views of laws as being colorblind and ignorant of the racism that is pervasive in the law.

Critical race theory defends the idea that the white peoples' perspectives are not the only perspectives to be expressed, minorities started to ask for integrating their perspectives and experiences in schools and universities as a crucial part in U.S's culture and history. It is the view that race, instead of being biologically grounded and accepted, is socially created and that race, as a concept socially built, used to maintain the interests of the white people that constructed it. According to Critical Race Theory, racial inequality emerges from the differences that white people create among "races" to sustain selected white interest in industry markets and politics. This latter creates the conditions that pave the way to poverty and criminality to rise among minority communities.

Critical race theory's scholars declared that the United States' laws and policies are biased against people of color, and they have focused their scholarship on the ways in which the legal institutions support that bias. Critical race theory innovated theoretical

understandings that the American policies tended to focus on the white peoples' efforts to give them a historical advantages neglecting colored people.

The separation of critical race theory from critical legal studies marked the introduction of the Critical race movement in 1989. Instead of inspiring theories of social organization and individual performance from European theorists such as Karl Marx or psychoanalytic figures like Sigmund Freud, Critical race theory was inspired by figures such as Martin Luther King and W.E.B. Du Bois, and from nationalist thinkers such as Frantz Fanon. Most scholars are interested in recognizing racism as a quotidian component of American life manifested in textual sources like literature. By doing this, they tend to challenge the beliefs and practices that enable racism to continue in order to seek liberation from universal racism.

The eventual goal of Critical Race Theory is eliminating all forms of social injustice and oppression, scholars and activists took a significant role fighting for it. The Critical Race Theory can be seen as a set of interdisciplinary scholars interested in working on changing the correlation between race, racism and power. The theory has not defended only blacks' but looking beyond the limits of allowed studies to many other fields, like women and gender's studies, education and sociology studies.

Race has been an important issue in all aspects of American society. Critical Race Theory is a basis that enables researchers, specialists, and politicians a race conscious approach to understand inequality and structural racism to reach more justice. Focusing on race as a center of analysis, Critical Race Theory scholars question policies that are taken for granted to discover the evident and hidden means that racist ideologies and institutions produce and maintain racial inequality. Critical race theory finds that these power structures are built on white supremacy, which maintains the marginalization of people of color. It also discards the traditions of liberalism. This theory also distinguishes that liberalism and

meritocracy are often stories told by those with wealth, power, and privilege; pretending that everyone who works hard can accomplish success while ignoring the universal inequalities that formal racism provides. Additionally, it suggests a way for scholars to comprehend how race interacts with other identities as gender and class, as a result of advocating attendance to the numerous components that shape individual identity. It addresses the various alarms facing individuals affected by racism.

Scholars like W.E.B. Du Bois and Franz Fanon debate white supremacy and concepts of whiteness throughout history to better understand how American culture conceptualizes race. They do not only discover an individual's identity and experience of the world in his or her racial identifications, but also their involvement in a specific class, gender, nation, and sexual orientation.

Our social world, with its rules, practices, and assignments of prestige and power, is not fixed; rather, we construct with it words, stories and silence. But we need not acquiesce in arrangements that are unfair and one-sided. By writing and speaking against them, we may hope to contribute to a better, fairer world²⁶

In this sense, Critical race theory scholars search for real-world ends through the rational work they perform. This contributes to their emphasis on social activism converting everyday notions of race, racism, and power.

Adopting a critical race theory approach to literature includes much more than simply identifying race, racism in fictional works. Rather, it stresses the importance of investigating the socio-cultural powers that shape how we and others identify, experience, and react to racism. The scholars consider literature works as evidence of American culture's combined

²⁶ Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic. *"Critical Race Theory: An Introduction. 2nd edition"*. (New York: New York University Press, 2012). P, 3.

values and beliefs. In doing so, they declare racism as a dually theoretical and historical experience that touches all members of a community neglecting their racial identifications.

Scholars studied why this determined racism problematically denies individuals' freedom they are otherwise promised in the United States' principal document, seeking to eliminate racism at its roots.

1.2 W.E.B. Du Bois

W.E.B. Du Bois, or William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, is an African-American writer, scholar, sociologist and activist whose work changed the picture of black citizens in American society. He was born in Great Barrington (Massachusetts), on February 23, 1868. He is considered avant-gardist, his works – among his revolutionary *The Souls of Black Folk* – became essential reading in African-American scholarships.

In 1883, Du Bois started to write articles for the *New York Globe* and the *Freeman*. Du Bois studied in Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, a blacks'. Du Bois became an editor for the *Herald*, the magazine of students. After graduation, he attended Harvard University, starting in 1888 and finally getting high degrees specialized in history. In 1892, Du Bois went towards a Ph.D. degree. At the University of Berlin until his subsidy ran out. He left to the United States without his Ph.D. certificate but later got one from Harvard while educating classics at Wilberforce University in Ohio. There he married Nina Gomer, one of his students, in 1896. His doctoral thesis, "The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638–1870," developed to be the first book and a standard in American education.

In 1899 he published “*The Philadelphia Negro*”. The work took occupied him for long time until he missed the birth of his first son. The study is seen as one of the first works of statistical work being used for sociological purposes, conducted by Du Bois. Du Bois claims that the black community’s ultimate challenges were poverty, crime, lack of education and not trusting others from other communities. Du Bois wrote “*The Strivings of the Negro People*” for the *Atlantic Monthly*, an innovative essay that clarified to whites the feeling of victims of racism.²⁷

1.2.1 Double Consciousness

The Souls of Black Folk, an assembly of sociological essays investigating the black experience in America. Somehow derived from his *Atlantic* article, it contained Du Bois’ personal experiences as argument. The book presented the idea of “double consciousness,” in which African Americans are asked to consider not only their view of themselves but also the view of the world, mainly whites. In 1899, Du Bois’ son Burghardt died after Du Bois spent the night looking for black doctor in Atlanta, since white doctors would not treat the “black” child. This happening influenced him to write his essay, “The Passing of the First Born” in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois published the first weekly magazine for African Americans “*The Moon Illustrated Weekly*”, followed with the journal *Horizon*. All his works covered race relations and blacks’ culture and women’s suffrage. His goal was to bring a feeling of unity to the African Diaspora.

it is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others.... one ever feels his twoness, an American, a negro;

²⁷ History.com Editors, “W.E.B. Du Bois”, (A&E Television Networks, October 27, 2009) <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/w-e-b-du-bois>, Accessed on 08.01.2019.

two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.²⁸

Double consciousness explains the feeling of individuals and how their identities are divided into parts that makes them unable to maintain one unified identity. Du Bois included this in the context of race relations in the U.S. he claimed that African Americans lived in a society that has cheapened and blocked them throughout history, that made it difficult for them to unify their identity combined of black and American. Double consciousness obliged African Americans to view themselves from outsider world's perspective in addition to their personal unique perspective. This was what Du Bois meant in the above quote when he expressed how blacks have the sense of seeing one's self through the eyes of others. Because of this blacks are suffering from damaged identity, African Americans' life can be easily shaped by stereotypes propagated by typical culture.²⁹

1.3 Frantz Fanon

Frantz Fanon was one of the most influential psychiatrists and anti-colonial cultural theorists. Fanon was born in 1925 in the French colony of Martinique. Fanon left Martinique in 1943 to serve in the French army in the Second World War and he studied there to study medicine and psychiatry in Lyons. In 1953 he moved to Algeria and worked as psychiatrist in Blida Joinville Hospital in Algiers, which was then French colony. Fanon resigned from his post from the French government. Fanon joined the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) when Algeria fought against the French colonization. Before his death Fanon published *Black*

²⁸ Du Bois W.E.B, *the souls of black folks*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Terri Hume Oliver (New York: Norton, 1999), P11.

²⁹ John P. Pittman, "Double Consciousness", Stanford encyclopedia, March 16, 2016 <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/double-consciousness/>, Accessed in 22.01.2019.

Skin, White Mask (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) which made him a pioneer in the field of postcolonial studies.³⁰

Fanon's most ideas were inspired from his experience of racism from his white European peers during WWII and his interaction with Algerians and French soldiers in Algeria. In his book *Black skin, White Mask*; Fanon insists on understanding race as the ultimate means to understand the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized; in which relies on the Marxian analytical framework that treats the relation between the colonized and the colonizers as a psychosocial construct along the lines of the Hegelian master-slave relation. In the eyes of white culture, He analyzes the deep impact of racism and colonial violence on the human psyche. He also states that the colonizer refuses to recognize the colonized people's humanity and subjecthood in order to justify his exploitation. In the eyes of the white culture, he argues, the black culture is inferior so the act of civilization became both a necessity and desirable.³¹

While in his second book *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon views the world from the colonized perspective, he argues that fighting colonial violence with violence to gain decolonization is legitimate form of self-defense "*violence is a cleansing force. It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them, and restores their self-confidence*"³². However, he warns of the danger inherited of the mere physical violence. Fanon locates the problem of identity in language as being the main subject related to the concept of consciousness and world. *The Wretched of the Earth* served

³⁰ Charles Peterson, "Frantz Fanon", (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc, December 02, 2018) <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Frantz-Fanon>, Accessed on 04.03.2019.

³¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. (New York: Grove, 1952)

³² Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*. (New York: Grove Press, 1963) .p. 51.

as influential piece of art for many anti-colonial theorists around the world, especially African activists and writers such as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o of Kenya.³³

Fanon's experience of racism, especially with the colonialist ideology of racial differences, provided the playground for the birth of the postcolonial theory in the 1970s and 1980s. He influenced Edward Said and Homi Bhabha and many other young thinkers whose interests was to observe the relationship of race, colonialism, violence, and anti-colonial struggle.

Fanon died at the age of 36 of leukemia in Washington, DC in the United States of America and is buried in the cemetery of Chouhadas ("war martyrs") in Algeria. Fanon's ideas may belong to a different period of time; however they are still widely used today under the name of neocolonial domination.

Therefore, Ralph Ellison in writing his masterpiece *Invisible Man* was highly influenced the city of Harlem in New York in which was the birth place of Harlem Renaissance Movement. This latter was the reason of the freedom of many slaves and the creation of special laws of segregation such as Jim Crow laws and new types of music such as Jazz and Blues music. Ellison took all these components to create his nameless protagonist to in order to demonstrate the struggle of every African American in the American Society. Hence, in the second chapter we shall highlight Ellison's purpose of using symbolism in order to illustrate the protagonist's struggle with his identity in the American society as well as enriching the novel aesthetically. We will also explore the protagonist's psychology as it was affected by racism and segregation and the reasons that led him to use invisibility and the underground as an escape.

³³ Jennifer Poulus, Fanon, Frantz Critics & Theorists 1996
<https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/postcolonialstudies/2014/06/19/fanon-frantz/>, Accessed on 14.01.2019.

CHAPTE TWO: THE AESTHETICS AND PSYCHOLOGY OF INVISIBILITY AND RACIAL IDENTITY

Ellison entered modern art through his combination between his problems with those of the black protagonist; the search for one's identity under the condition of racism is the main problem of *Invisible Man* and eventually ones' role and purpose are recognized and accepted. Hence, the novel highlights the narrator's physical and psychological journey as expressed by Ralph Ellison; from purpose to passion to perception.

This chapter is divided into two parts; the first part entitled "the aesthetics of invisibility and racial identity", in which we explain the purpose of using colors, brief case and the liberty paints plant symbolism, also the integration of language of blackness in the novel to demonstrate the narrator's journey of racism in the American society. The second part analyzes "the psychology of invisibility and racial identity" which tackles "the meaning of invisibility" as a starting point to analyze the novel. The second issue studied is "racism as an obstacle for black identity" where we see how racism affected the protagonist's shape of identity. In addition, the protagonist's feeling of belonging is divided; he is neither black enough nor white enough to be a part from black or white community, this underlined in the section of "being a part and apart". At last we go through "the search for voice and identity".

Part One: The Aesthetics of Invisibility and Racial Identity

1. Colors Symbolism

Ralph Ellison uses many symbols and archetypes in his novel *Invisible Man* expressing his unique narrative view also conveying both identity and invisibility themes. Among these symbols we mention color symbolism, Ellison artistically combines both African and Western color symbolism in order to explain the protagonist's journey because color can mean different things according to culture and region.

The first color Ellison uses in his novel is gold in which it symbolizes power, wealth, and even the impression of prosperity, gold generally represents money. Ellison refers to this color by *the Golden Day*, the writer is mocking on the veterans who are supposed to enjoy their golden days of retirement however, instead they escape from the mental hospital once a week on a golden day; and he describes the naked blonde's hair as "*yellow like a Kewpie doll's*"³⁴ Gold can also be referred as Yellow which indicates light and enlightenment.

Black and White colors are the most used in color symbolism due to the immersive hidden meaning they hold especially to portray the theme of white dominance and control over the black people In the American society. In the first chapter, Invisible Man is forced to participate in a blindfolded boxing match called the Battle Royal. The young black boys are blindfolded with a white cloth "*....to be blindfolded with broad bands of white cloth.*"³⁵ This action symbolizes that the black people are covered up by white dominance. Another example is when the Invisible Man had to add ten drops of a black chemical to make the paint more white which means that despite the hatred and segregation; white people are still in

³⁴ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, (New York: Vintage International, 1995), p. 19.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 21.

need for black people. Another example of the use of white and black colors appears in chapter eleven where Ellison uses the white color to depict the feeling of confusion and losing oneself “...*In the vast whiteness I which I myself was lost*”³⁶ this metaphor is used for the white empowerment and how Invisible Man is getting lost behind the white control. In chapter sixteen, Invisible Man sees three white police officers riding black horses, which signifies that white people have always the blacks as labor in order to build themselves up. The black people are the ones who hold up or support the whites. The Black Sambo Doll that Clifton sells serves the purpose of showing how the white community had been controlling and manipulating the blacks. In order to show the goal of the brotherhood Ellison uses the image of black in chapter twenty one “*two black pigeons rising above a skull barn to tumble and rise through still, blue air*”³⁷.

Traditionally the white color symbolizes good, pure and positive while black represents evil or the unknown and negative. Ellison integrates the African culture believes of black and white in his novel, African cultures links the white color with the spirit world, while the black color is associated with wisdom and age. The author contradicts the philosophy of “white is right” by reversing symbols of black and white through portraying black as good and positive such as “*Ras the Destroyer upon a great black horse*”³⁸ here the writer is representing the black horse as magnificent and the black powerhouse. While he portrays white as negative and unpleasant things such as death, coldness and obscurity images taking an example from chapter eleven where he writes “*cold, white rigid chair*”³⁹ at the factory hospital and brother jack’s “*buttermilk white eye*”⁴⁰

³⁶ *Invisible Man*, p. 238.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 542.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 556.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 474

However, Ellison rejects the polar oppositions; from time to time he reverses this symbolism; as the fragrant white magnolia tree and the narrator's favorite dessert, vanilla ice cream with sloe gin. Ellison uses black and white also to symbolize the pen and paper; he intended to tell the story of invisibility. By comparing the protagonist's situations to music, Ellison is ensuring that the story is heard and at the same time read.⁴¹

Another color Ellison uses in order to depict the Invisible Man's struggle in the American society is blue. Blue refers to the blues music as the most prominent sentence of blues in the novel is "*What Did I Do to Be So Black and Blue?*"⁴² song by Louis Armstrong, Ellison also refers to other blues singer such as Bessie Smith and even characters who sang blues too such as Jim Trueblood and Mary Rambo highlighting the harsh life conditions blacks overcome through their faith and religious believes in a brighter future. The blue is emphasized within the novel through referring to blues language and black folks songs like "Poor Robin", In addition to Mr. Norton's discarded blueprints, Mr. Norton's blue eyes, and he describes the naked blonde's eyes as blue as a baboon's butt.⁴³

Grey is also like white defined by negative images. The most significant example one can notice is the grey ting in the white paint that symbolizes the result of mixing black and white and the homogenous mixture of the two cultures with no consideration to the uniqueness of each. Ellison also uses the fog that the protagonist sees when he arrived to the paint factory to cast a gloomy atmosphere to express the Invisible Man's experience at the factory hospital and the factory paint plant.

⁴¹ Scott Irwin, "A Bugler of Words: Ellison's musicality and the Jazz/blues Tradition in *Invisible Man*". Oakland journal (2004), p 4

⁴² Ibid., p. 8

⁴³ Dorthy A. Washington, *CliffsNotes: Ellison's Invisible Man*, (IDG Books Worldwide, Inc,2001), p. 98.

In western culture the red color is often associated with love and passion; “...and when she reappeared in the rich red of a hostess gown she was so striking that I had to avert my somewhat startled eyes”⁴⁴. In this context the narrator have a passion with the women mentioned in this quote where she wears a red dress. It generally symbolizes rage and danger, in chapter thirteen, when the narrator meets Brother Jack who have red hair the protagonist is suspicious about him “I had a feeling that somehow he was acting a part; that something about him wasn't exactly real -- an idea which I dismissed immediately, since there was a quality of unreality over the whole afternoon”⁴⁵. By the end we discover that Brother Jack betrays the narrator and the brotherhood and that the Invisible Man was used by him to reach his goals. Ellison refers to Santa Claus as a symbol of evil, when he wrote on Sybil’s belly with a red lipstick.

In most parts of Africa, the color red is associated with blood loss. In chapter twenty one, it have a direct symbol with blood when the narrator gives Clifton’s funeral speech, “...and his blood spilled out like any blood; red as any blood, wet as any blood and reflecting the sky...”⁴⁶, he continues “the blood flowed on the walk in a pool, gleamed a while, and, after a while became dull then dusty, then dried.”⁴⁷, the invisible man describes Clifton’s blood as “The blood ran like blood in a comic-book killing...”⁴⁸, “I only know that you are men of flesh and blood; and that blood will spill and flesh grow cold.”⁴⁹ This show how strong is the symbol of red in relation to blood. Ellison accompanies the color red with blood in multiple occasions.

⁴⁴ *Invisible Man*, p. 314

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 220

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.. 456

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 456

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 457

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 459

Moreover, red color can also refer to sins, power, lust, love and family. In the Norton-Expulsion part of *Invisible Man*, the color red is a prominent symbol in chapter two to chapter nine, highlights the sinful and lustful characters. We mention first Mr. Norton who is revealed as sinful character. “*His face reddened*”⁵⁰ Ellison describes Norton when he knew about Trueblood’s crime. In addition, Norton had “*a red Moroccan-leather wallet*”⁵¹ which emphasizes the presence of red color in Norton’s life. The reader may suspect that Norton shares Trueblood’s crime since he described his daughter lustfully “*her beauty was a well-spring of purest water-of-life, and to look upon her was to drink and drink and drink again*”⁵². The expression of drink suggests a desire to consume something.

In addition, the color red as we mentioned before is associated with blood and the half of Trueblood’s name. The word “blood” refers to him as a sinful character. In the novel Trueblood is a character that took advantage of his daughter’s weakness and innocence and as a result he destroys the family’s relationship. Shamelessly he defends himself alleging that he “*dropped into the dream*”⁵³, “blood” in his name refers to sin and evil not to love and family. Another character that is also associated with the red color is Dr. Bledsoe; His name is partially the past term of “blood.” Bledsoe is an immoral character who is selfish; He believes that he is “*still the king down here*”⁵⁴ which depicts a strong desire to maintain power “*Power doesn't have to show off. Power is confident, self-assuring, self-starting and self-stopping, self-warming and self-justifying. When you have it, you know it.*”⁵⁵, he also states “*I’ll have every Negro in the country hanging on tree limbs by morning if it means staying*

⁵⁰ *Invisible Man*, p. 35

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.142

where I am”⁵⁶, Bledsoe rejects to admit other people needs making himself a power hungry character. All of those characters impacted the narrator’s identity negatively. But also they symbolize reality that the narrator needs to engage within for his identity growth.⁵⁷

Green is generally associated with nature, but Ellison in the novel presents green as the color of money, which is the narrator's motivator. Western culture consider green as the color of nature and rebirth. For example the green tinted glasses “*They were of a green glass so dark that it appeared black, and I put them on immediately...it was almost dark now, and the streets swarmed in a green vagueness*”⁵⁸. The narrator sought to hide himself from Ras the Exhorter made him another person; people mistakes him repeatedly for another person called Rinehart. However, in some places of Africa, green can symbolize corruption, which we also can relate it to Rinehart because he is a gambler, and at the same time a preacher. The flexibility of this character helps the Invisible Man finally to understand the power behind invisibility.

The color wheel makes the red and green colors as opposites. In *Invisible Man* red is an obstacle that hinders the narrator from advancing, and reaching success. While green pushes him to advance forward; green is a symbol of money that stimulates him.

Ellison’s use of the colors helps the reader to understand more the narrator’s feelings and the nature of his surroundings. Ellison's images of the South are alive and fresh with

⁵⁶ Invisible Man, p. 108

⁵⁷APLitGirl. “*The Color Red in Invisible Man*”. APLitGirl’s Blog. Saturday, March 8, 2014. Accessed on 02.05.2019 <http://aplitgirl.blogspot.com/2014/03/the-color-red-in-invisible-man.html>

⁵⁸ Invisible Man, p. 482-483

colors of nature, white magnolias, purple and silver thistle. His images of the North are highlighted mostly in shades of gray.⁵⁹

2. The language of Blackness

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is hailed as a novel that changed the shape of American literature. The novel's main theme is the protagonist's struggle to shape his individual identity in the American society; Ellison incorporates some techniques in order to deliver his message to his audiences.

The first technique Ellison uses is having the narrator speak in the first-person point of view. This technique is used in order to allow the reader to see through his eyes. The second reason for using first-person narration permits Ellison to utilize imagery. It gives the audience a chance to feel what an Invisible Man may feel. The author uses imagery to demonstrate the protagonist's feeling as an Invisible Man, invisibility makes him feel like he has been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. Through the use of imagery the reader can see how the protagonist is affected emotionally.

Ellison's second stylistic device is word-play, as he bases much of his wordplay using vernacular language, the ordinary language of Black American, the novel is rich with proverbs, colloquial expressions, and excerpts from songs and stories rooted in African and African American culture. An example of that is when the narrator cries "*I yam what I am!*"⁶⁰ When buying yam from a street vendor. Another example is the slogan of the Liberty Paint Factory "*If It's Optic White, It's the Right White*"⁶¹ which was given by the black Lucius

⁵⁹ APLitGirl. "*The Color Red in Invisible Man*". APLitGirl's Blog. Saturday, March 8, 2014. Accessed on 02.05.2019 <http://aplitgirl.blogspot.com/2014/03/the-color-red-in-invisible-man.html>

⁶⁰ *Invisible Man*, p. 266.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 217

Brockway, the narrator recalls a similar southern saying, “*If you are white, you are right*”⁶². The common thing between these expressions and many others is the folk wisdom that Ellison sought to use in order to insist on his inherited African American cultural background, in his book *Change the Joke, Slip the Yoke*; Ellison explains the reason behind using folklore in his works “*I use folklore in my work not because I am Negro, but because writers like Eliot and Joyce made me conscious of the literary value of my folk inheritance. My cultural background, like that of most Americans, is dual (my middle name, sadly enough, is Waldo)*”⁶³.

According to Anthony S. Abbott in his guide to “*Ralph Ellison the Invisible Man*”, Ellison includes all types of speech especially varieties of black folk dialect. Almost all black characters such as Jim Trueblood, Mary Rambo, Brother Tarp, and the two black revolutionaries Scofield and Dupree use their own dialect and show a kind of different knowledge of those “white” characters in the novel, a “street” knowledge to borrow Anthony S. Abbott’s words, which was brought from the South to the North and passed from one generation to another.

Professor Anthony continues that Ellison could not hide his affection for music especially jazz and blues music. Ellison studied composition and played different musical instruments, thus the novel includes many references to jazz music. Ellison uses Armstrong’s music to embody the Invisible Man’s struggle as a black man. This is evident in the song’s lyrics, “What did I do to be so black and blue” and “My only sin is my skin”. Through this song the author speaks about the protagonist’s sufferance and dissatisfaction of his identity. Jazz music encounters the protagonist till the end of the novel as he listens to blues music to

⁶² Invisible Man, p. 218

⁶³ Ralph Ellison, *Change the Joke, Slip the Yoke*, (New York: Modern Library, 2003), p. 111-112

show his actual state of mind and feelings. Some of the characters are also named after blues musicians such as Peter Wheatstraw and Trueblood.

3. The Symbol of the Briefcase

In the early chapters of *Invisible Man*, the narrator is given a brand new calfskin briefcase as a reward for his inspiring speech following the Battle Royal. When the superintendent gave him the briefcase he told him that it will be “*Filled with important papers that will help shape the destiny of your people*”⁶⁴. Here the superintendent is stating that the protagonist does not represent only him but all the African Americans like him. Inside it holds the key to the narrator’s future, a scholarship to where his adventure begins a journey of searching for identity and recognition in the American society.

As the novel continues, the narrator moves from the South to Harlem in New York City with the briefcase accompanying him, throughout his journey other important items got into his briefcase such as his high school diploma which represents his academic success, the letter he received in the brotherhood symbolizing a reminder to never try to be someone he is not, Clifton’s Sambo doll which reminds him of how he was used as a puppet by the Brotherhood to achieve white interests. The piece of paper that contains the new name given to him by Brother Jack is a fake name used to represent false ideals of the Brotherhood. Hence the briefcase with these entire items can be considered part of the narrator’s identity.

When the narrator fell into a hole while running away from the police, he was obliged to burn his briefcase in order to light his dark hole,” *If I was to make a torch, I’d have to open my briefcase. In it were the only papers I had*”⁶⁵ burning the papers symbolizes the idea

⁶⁴ *Invisible Man*, p. 32.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 440.

that only by getting rid of old things that represented him, he can establish a new self and identity that is constructed by him and not by others.

4. The Symbol of the Liberty Paints Plant “Optic White”

The Liberty Paints Plant is a symbol of American society regarding race; Americans defines America with liberty and freedom principles, but deeply it integrates racism in most operations. By portraying a factory that produces paint, Ellison is able to make his statements about color literal. Through the use of the Plant’s claim that its trademark “Optic White” can cover up any tint or stain Ellison investigates the American society’s intentions to bury black identity under white culture, to disregard the differences between blacks and whites, and to consider blacks as “stains” upon white “purity.”

The optic white is an image of white supremacy. However, it is impossible to reach the “optic white” without adding the black chemical drops to the paint. Once those black drops are added, the mixture produces a perfect white color, but the dark color disappear with no traces into the mixture. This goes on parallel with the society where the invisible man lives. It symbolizes the relationship between the black and white people in the factory; black workers are the hidden knights that perform the essential work as they are generating the products, while white people are trading the paint and get the highest salaries, disregarding their reliance on the black workers efforts. By using this motif, Ellison is mirroring a larger picture within America as a whole; the dark drops are the black workers while the white paint is the white American community that wants to ignore the blacks’ efforts in building the country the flow of American society is due to those minorities, although they have never been appreciated by whites.

Similar to the Paint, Americans are trying to erase the impact of the black identity and culture on the American society. “*If It's Optic White, It's the Right White*”⁶⁶ is the factory’s slogan in which Ellison tends to prove that the American society attempted to cover the Black identity by the white culture.

The electric sign in the front contains the slogan characterizing the company announces: “*Keep America Pure with Liberty Paints*”⁶⁷ The use of this expression represents the white supremacy that dominates America. The company contradicted its slogan of “liberty” when the narrator is dismissed as a result of not succeeding the color paint at first try, which proves the oppressive treatment of the managers in the company acted in an oppressive manner with their workers.⁶⁸

In addition, in the factory hospital scene color symbolism reinforces the imagery of imprisonment; in fact "whiteness" becomes almost synonymous with "imprisonment" when the protagonist, completely at the mercy of his white captors, fails to understand what the doctors say to him.⁶⁹

When the narrator feels the fear from all whiteness surrounding him, he fails to understand anything of what doctors are saying “*But still their meanings were lost in the vast whiteness in which I myself was lost*”⁷⁰. Ellison relates the idea of imprisonment with the white color. The Invisible Man is stuck under the doctors’ mercy, The idea of whiteness was stressed in their uniform and the hospital walls in the scene where he had being released from the machine “*She handed me clean underclothing and a pair of white overalls*”⁷¹ walks

⁶⁶ *Invisible Man*, p. 177

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁶⁸ Imene Sebiane Chikh, *Voice into Text: the Linguistic and Cultural Aspects of Orality in Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God and Ellison's Invisible Man* “Doctoral diss, University of Tlemcen ,2018).

⁶⁹ Per Winther. “Imagery of Imprisonment in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*,” *Black American Literature Forum* 17, no. 3 (1983) p, 116.

⁷⁰ *Invisible Man*, p. 181

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 244

"down a long white corridor"⁷² and when he met the "tall austere-looking man in a white coat."⁷³

Part Two: The Psychology of Invisibility and Racial Identity

1. The Meaning of Invisibility

In an interview Ellison had in Paris in 1954 he was asked about the issue of identity in the American society, and his answer was: "*identity is the American theme. The nature of our society is such that we are prevented from knowing who we are. It is still a young society, and this an integral part of its development.*"⁷⁴ And that what is his first and last novel "*Invisible Man*" is about. The novel is about the search for one's identity as an individual and as a part of collective group.

Ralph Ellison starts his novel "*Invisible Man*" with a prologue where he introduces the concept of invisibility and its causes. The protagonist, as a Black man, describes himself as an invisible man; not because of some supernatural reasons or biochemical imbalance but because of society's rejection to acknowledge his existence as an equal individual who holds the same rights and responsibilities because of his black skin, or more blatantly, his race. Therefore, he chooses to stay invisible without revealing his name or identity. This description is a result of the effect of racism and segregation that happened in American back then. Throughout the novel, the protagonist suffers to understand and search for his place and his true identity and in finding a way to overcome the white people's stereotypical ideas. The narrator confesses his identity on the very first page of the prologue

⁷² *Invisible Man*, p. 244

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 186

⁷⁴ Ralph Ellison. "Ralph Ellison, The Art of Fiction No. 8" Interview by Alfred Chester and Vilma Howard. *The Paris Review*, Spring 1955. <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5053/ralph-ellison-the-art-of-fiction-no-8-ralph-ellison>, Accessed on 28/04/2019.

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allen Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am invisible, understand simply because people refuse to see me. ... When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me.⁷⁵

In the quotation's context, the protagonist's invisibility is related to the white people's stereotypical ideas towards Black people. Ellison defines invisibility as a separation from a society where people do not recognize black individuals.⁷⁶

Ralph Ellison stated in an interview he had with Herbert Mitgang for the New York Time in 1982 that "*Once the book was done, it was suggested that the title would be confused with H.G. Wells's old novel, 'The Invisible Man,' but I fought to keep my title because that's what the book was about.*"⁷⁷ One can assume that the absence of the article "The" in the title was done on purpose in order to represent Harlem's 'Everyman', who might gone through similar situations as the narrator. The novel is the story of million others like him who, as the novel shows, are suffering not only from the Whites stereotyping, but also from elite Blacks too.

All the people who meet Invisible Man through his journey invoke a certain idea of selfhood in him. George Mayberry puts it very clearly:

On the road to invisibility, our pilgrim encounters the Southern small businessman, the Uncle Tom educator, the Northern do-gooder, the Negro military racist, the Harlem messiah with a sideline in numbers, the socio-scientific, highly organized Brothers whose Sisters most frequently discussed the dialectic in the boudoir, a journey that would have left Bunyan's Christian without care or hope for redemption. Ellison's solution, with a little aid from

⁷⁵ *Invisible Man*, p. 3.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁷⁷ Mitgang, Herbert. Interview. "'Invisible Man' as Vivid Today as in 1952." *New York Times On The Web*. 1 Mar. 1982. Web. 14.03.2019

Dostoevsky and Kafka, is ingenious and original—perhaps a little too much so of both.⁷⁸

Invisibility, however, may also have positive possibilities, a certain power and a certain freedom in being invisible. In Ellison's words "*I am not complaining, nor am I protesting either. It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen, although it is most often rather wearing on the nerves....you often doubt if you really exist. You wonder whether you aren't simply a phantom in other people's minds*"⁷⁹. Moreover, the narrator can be seen to be caught in a duality of existence between the role he is supposed to play for existence and his grasp of who he actually is, and he is restricted because of his inability to unite and reconcile his 'black' identity with his 'American' identity which was previously discussed by W.E.B. Du Bois's in his concept of Double- consciousness.

Furthermore, Ellison tries to portray the theme of Invisibility multiple times in the novel. At first, the protagonist links his invisibility to electrical power where he manages to steal from Monopolated Light and Power in order to lighten up his hole that he describes as "*warm and safe*" using exactly 1,369 lights. The electric company is aware of its losses but cannot locate their source. In this respect, the narrator proclaims, "*And full of light. Yes, full of light. I doubt if, there is a brighter spot in all New York than this hole of mine... Perhaps you'll think it strange that an invisible man should need light, desire light, love light. But maybe it is exactly because I am invisible. Light confirms my reality, gives birth to my form*"⁸⁰. Light confirms the Invisible Man's reality and gives him his form: "*without light I*

⁷⁸ George Mayberry, "George Mayberry's 1952 Review of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man," The New York Republic (September 25, 2015), <https://newrepublic.com/article/114842/george-mayberry-ralph-ellison-invisible-man>, Accessed on 24.04.2019.

⁷⁹ *Invisible Man*, p. 2.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6

am not only invisible, but formless as well”⁸¹ living in his hole, the narrator fights the abyss of formlessness by embracing the light that renders him invisible.

Throughout the prologue, Ellison also ties the central character’s invisibility to music. The narrator was passionate about Louis Armstrong’s music in which he declares, “*Perhaps I like Louis Armstrong because he’s made poetry out of being invisible. I think it must be because he’s unaware that he is invisible. And my own grasp of invisibility aids me to understand his music.*”⁸² Accordingly, the protagonist explains that Armstrong’s invisibility enabled him to produce his art in the same time the narrator’s invisibility allows him to comprehend Armstrong’s music.

In the opening of the first chapter, the nameless narrator came to realize, that he had been obedient to the way society thinks he should be because of his race, but here he discovers the existence of his invisible identity. “....*That I am nobody but myself. But first I had to discover that I am an invisible man!*”⁸³

According to James B. Lane in his article entitled “Underground to Manhood” “*the invisible man was emasculated and left rootless by people who either paid no attention to his inner existence or visualized him only as a symbol, as abstraction*”⁸⁴ Maybe the most remarkable example is the scene of the Battle Royal. The Invisible Man has been invited to give his graduation speech to a group of prominent white men. At the event, however, the protagonist is shocked to know that he had to fight a group of other young black students while blindfolded for the amusement of those white. The protagonist realizes for the first time that he is viewed by white people only as a tool for shaping their own visions of the

⁸¹ *Invisible Man*, p. 5

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 8

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 15

⁸⁴ James B. lane, “Underground to Manhood: Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man”, Negro American Literature Forum. No.7 (1973), p. 66

world⁸⁵. After finishing the battle, the narrator tries to deliver his speech while bleeding, having difficulty to speak the narrator makes an error in saying “social equality” instead of “social responsibility” to illustrate the limitations a White, wealthy power-structure place on the Black individual. The speech the Invisible Man delivers grants him a scholarship to a Negro college, “*He makes a good speech and some day he’ll lead his people down the proper paths... This is a good, smart boy so to encourage him in the right direction.*”⁸⁶ In this case, the “proper path” and “right direction” for white people is a defection for finding identity. Here Ellison indicates the limitations imposed on Black identity as a result of racism, but he is also invoking important and varying traditions in Black political thought which also give shape to the narrator’s identity.

Ellison attempts to depict the characteristics of the American racism during the twentieth century under the concept of invisibility. In chapter six Dr. Bledsoe the head of university addressed the protagonist by saying “*you’re nobody, son. You don’t exist – Can’t you see that?*”⁸⁷ Hence revealing the social invisibility the Black people were suffering from in American society.

Furthermore, the protagonist struggles to identify himself in the American society. Once again he came to realize his invisibility when he was asked by the lawyer in the Liberty Paints’ hospital: “*What is your name... who are you?*”⁸⁸ The invisible man is unable to answer, he kept asking himself the same question and he thought: “*Maybe I was just this*

⁸⁵ *Invisible Man*, p. 17

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 120

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 240

blackness and bewilderment and pain”⁸⁹ He eventually realizes that blackness unveil his invisibility.

In the chapter twenty three the theme of invisibility appears again when the protagonist was wondering in the streets of Harlem, he is seen as another character called Rinehart when he wears a hat and sunglasses. The invisible man goes to the church; he came across a pamphlet written by Rinehart which was about invisibility. After reading it the unnamed narrator concludes that having multiple identities reveals someone’s invisibility and despite the fact that invisibility may provide safety, decisions made in secrecy cannot have any significant impact. In the epilogue the invisible man realizes that his journey is defined by his skin color, meaning that he is seen only as black man. Eventually, he decides to wake up from his hibernation and accept his reality as an invisible man “.... *I finally rebelled. I am an invisible man*”⁹⁰ and to face the society who stood in his face during his journey of self-recognition.

2. Racism as an Obstacle for Black Identity

In 1865 slavery was abolished in the United States of America; however this act did not prevent white people from treating black people as inferior or having stereotypical ideas towards them. The events in *Invisible Man* occurred in the years between the 1920s and the 1930s which was also the time in which Jim Crow laws of segregation were introduced, along with African Americans suffering racism in all fields of life in the American society.

Ellison’s main character can be considered as one of those who happened to go through similar situations of living in racist societies and seek for an individual identity to

⁸⁹ *Invisible Man*, p. 241

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 573

represent them in the American society which is the main theme of the novel. That is to say, the narrator embodies the life of every African American living in America. In fact, the protagonist's attempt to escape north was an aspiration to build his own identity away of all the racism and segregation laws he faced during his days in the south. Unfortunately, he did not achieve his goal. The invisible man was a victim of those laws. The best example of the narrator struggling from racism can be seen in the prologue where he incidentally bumps into a white man in the streets leading the white man to insult him for the reason of not having the same skin color. In the next day the *Daily News* published about this accident stating that the white man was beaten by a black man while in fact he was not but rather he was bitten by his prejudices and stereotypes. In other words, the white men have fixed ideas about black people such as black people are violent by nature and savage which in fact just stereotypical ideas.⁹¹

According to Gayathri .T in her journal “*Racism as an Obstacle to identity in Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man*” the reason that led Ellison to present his protagonist as a nameless character with only few information about his past is to prevent the reader from treating him as a person in addition to deny the narrator from the identity. Therefore, in order to identify the protagonist the reader tries to connect him to a society or a group he belongs to.⁹²

Throughout his journey, the narrator passes through series of communities from the college of Negroes to the Liberty Paint Plan and till joining the Brotherhood. Hence the protagonist goes under a psychological evolution: First, from being a naïve student in college of Negroes to a simple worker in the Liberty Paint Plan and eventually an orator in the Brotherhood. By the end of his adventure, the protagonist gradually comes to realize that as a black man he is supposed to act differently according to each institution and that his identity

⁹¹ *Invisible Man*, p4; Selena Ward, Brian Phillips, Katie Mannheimer, and Aglietti Boomie, *Sparknotes on the Invisible Man*, (York: SparkNotes LLC, 2002) p17. ; Anthony S. Abbott, *Ralph Ellison’s The Invisible Man*, (New York: World Library, 1985), p46-47.

⁹² Gayathri. T, “*Racism an Obstacle to Identity in Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man*”, (EIJFMR), (2017).

is not only being limited by mere racist ideas and attitudes but also by people's more general ideologies, which had a great influence on the development of his identity; as he contemplates; "*everybody wanted to use you for some purposes.*"⁹³ The white people create him according to their needs and not allowing him to be himself leading him to suffer from an identity crisis.

The protagonist in his manhole realizes that throughout all of his life he has been living with a self-imposed identity by social expectations, communities as well as individuals. The narrator declares "*And my problem was that I always tried to go in everyone's way but my own. I have also been called one thing and then another while no one really wished to hear what I called myself. So after years of trying to adopt the opinions of others I finally rebelled. I am an invisible man*"⁹⁴ Through this quotation the invisible man declares the reasons behinds adopting invisibility, although he did not choose to be invisible in the beginning of the novel. He was busy switching identities thrown to him by white people in order to satisfy them yet never getting the change to demonstrate his own.

Black Skin, White Masks by Frantz Fanon is an outstanding work about the aftermath of colonialism on colonized people, but it is also concerned with how race and racism are constructed on the psychological level, both in the individual and the collective unconscious. Fanon argues that once the black man acts and thinks as a white man, he finds himself as a phobic object. Fanon illustrates: "*A normal Negro child, having grown up within a normal family, will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world*"⁹⁵. He continues: "*The Negro is unaware of it as long as his existence is limited to his own environment; but*

⁹³ *Invisible Man*, p. 294

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 573

⁹⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lamm Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 463.

the first encounter with a white man oppresses him with the whole weight of his blackness”⁹⁶.

For Ellison’s nameless protagonist, these realities occurred to him both before and after moving from his home in the South to Harlem city.

Kun Jong Lee’s article “Ellison’s Invisible Man: Emersonianism revised” states that the narrator utilized the Emersonian theory to mediate his past and seek for his identity⁹⁷. Lee argues that racial differences are obvious and that despite the social movements in the American history, the concept of racial segregation did not disappear. Emerson claims that “*Nations and races, like individuals, have each an especial destiny: some are to rule and others be ruled. No two distinctly-marked races can dwell together on equal terms*”⁹⁸. Regardless of the existing differences such the narrator’s fluent speeches that provided him a sort of an identity, Emerson asserts that segregation and racism are in the superior races’ side and by that making it the dominant race.

During his life the invisible man continuously finds himself going through a series of dramatic events. A naïve black student who accepts the life of obedience with all its complexity and unpredictability, but by the end he decides to emerge from his underground “hibernation” as he calls it and force the world to acknowledge his complex identity and acknowledge his existence outside their prejudiced expectations.

3. Being a Part and Apart

One of the most crucial problems the Invisible Man as an African American was having throughout his entire journey is the problem of belonging, he was not accepted in both

⁹⁶ *Invisible Man*, p. 466

⁹⁷ Kun Jong Lee, “Ellison’s Invisible Man: Emersonianism Revised”, *PMLA* 10, no.2 (1992): 331

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 334

societies and the black and the white one, and therefore he was unable to assert his individual identity.

According to Du Bois in his book “*Souls of the Black Folks*”, “*the problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line*”⁹⁹. This problem for him is also called double consciousness of the African Americans. He suggests that in order to fight injustice and prejudice they should work together, He defines double consciousness in an impressive passage:

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...He wouldn't bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face.¹⁰⁰

In this quotation Du Bois explains one of the racial conflicts the African Americans face within the American community. Besides, Du Bois came up with the term “double-consciousness” especially to serve individual whose identity was divided into two facets. Invisible Man is suffering from an identity crisis, torn between the collective and the individual identity, American and African self. Indeed, the novel explores both external and internal issues that face the modern educated black man, who holds two different identities. Consequently, the “*juxtaposition of the white and black races has created a massive*

⁹⁹ William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, (New York, N.Y., U.S.A: Penguin Books, 1989), p.41.

¹⁰⁰ *Souls of Black Folk*, pp 02-03.

psychoexistential complex”¹⁰¹ which is symbolized by Mr. Norton’s look; the inferiority complex is derived from the white supremacy. This racial conflict affected the black’s identity makeup. Black alienation is activated through the eyes of Mr. Norton.¹⁰²

Ellison’s expresses how blacks and whites destinies are interrelated, as a result of the pluralistic needs of American society. This paradoxical unity is captured in *Invisible Man*’s notable exclamation, “*weren’t we part of them as well as apart from them?*”¹⁰³ Blacks are considered as a part of American society whenever they serve it, but once the white interests are done they are considered apart from American society. In the novel blacks and whites’ self-consciousness rise up by the presence of the Other. Norton thinks that his fate is in the protagonists’ reflection; he approves that from the start “*that your people are in some important manner tied to my destiny*”¹⁰⁴

Double consciousness is a fundamental theme in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and this is live expressed in the crying of the protagonist:

About eighty-five years ago they were told that they were free, united with others of our country in everything pertaining to the common good, and, in everything social, separate like the fingers of the hand. And they believed it. They exulted in it. They stayed in their place, worked hard, and brought up my father to do the same¹⁰⁵.

The invisible man emphasizes the internal individual conflict persuaded by the racial conflict in America. Indeed, the issue that affects the protagonist is the inner conflict between what he is expected to be by whites and his innate disposition as a black person. This conflict

¹⁰¹ Frantz Fanon, “*Black Skin, White Mask*”, (New York : Grove Press ,1994) : p14

¹⁰² Adam Winstanley, “Being apart and a part: Fragmented identities in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible*”, body in American literature. P.2.

¹⁰³ *Invisible Man*, p. 575

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

affects the realization of his true-self. This was the reason behind his crying “*Still I was more afraid to act any other way because they didn’t like that at all*”¹⁰⁶

Ralph Ellison in his novel *Invisible Man* recreates the racial conflict at the physical and psychological level of both individual and society in general; it also recreates racism as a fundamental issue of American society in vivid manner.¹⁰⁷

The protagonist of *Invisible Man* is not blind but blinding himself purposefully from the truth of the African American reality. By doing so he is escaping from and toward his self-consciousness, he is avoiding his annoying awareness and preferring the blissful forgetting. In the first speech of the protagonist with the brotherhood declares that African American people are dispossessed of one eye. He is trying to convince himself with the Brotherhood principles that whites and blacks can live in peace together as brothers, after discovering that even the brotherhood used him for their personal interests,¹⁰⁸ he suffered from psychological and physical trauma because of his feeling of double identity and vision. However finally after the invisible man discovers his true self he understands the importance of diversity. This moment holds Ellison’s philosophy which is self-discovery through the novel.¹⁰⁹

4. The Search for Voice and Identity

The main theme of Ellison’s *Invisible Man* is the protagonist’s struggle to search for his individual identity in which throughout of his entire journey the narrator is confused and lost not knowing to which society and group he belongs. According to Parr and Savery

¹⁰⁶ *Invisible Man*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁷ Eshna Paul Kennedy Ndubuisi, “Conflict And Double Consciousness in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*” (the creative Artists, Vol. 11, No. 1 , 2017) p. 24.

¹⁰⁸ Klara Szmanko, “the concept of double consciousness and striving for self-consciousness in W.E.B.Du Bois double consciousness formula and Ralph Ellison’s *invisible man*” (Angelica Wratlaviaeasia L Wroclaw, 2012) p. 109

¹⁰⁹ Eshna Paul Kennedy Ndubuisi, “Conflict And Double Consciousness in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*” (the creative Artists, Vol. 11, No. 1 , 2017) p. 24.

“Ellison believed that true identity could be revealed by experiencing certain endeavors and overcoming them”¹¹⁰. Despite the fact that the narrator faces so many obstacles and reincarnating several identities the Invisible Man eventually manages to discover his true identity.

In the prologue the protagonist cries “*All my life I had been looking for something, and everywhere I turned somebody tried to tell me what it was*”¹¹¹ in this quotation the narrator is referring to his identity in which he was searching for. However, he is misled by other members of the society and treated as if blackness is his identity. As a result he is seen as an invisible man who possesses an invisible identity throughout the novel.

The quest for voice is also a major theme in the novel; the Invisible Man is searching for his voice throughout his journey. Though he is depicted as a well orator that is able to deliver good speeches during several events, the Invisible Man simultaneously was lacking a personal voice for himself in order to communicate with people oppressing him.

In the early chapters of the novel, the narrator is expelled of the Southern Negro College for a silly reason. When he tries to explain the situation for the dean he is rejected and scolded; “*your poor judgment has caused this school uncalculated damage. Instead of uplifting the race, you’ve torn it down*”¹¹² the superintendent added: “*boy, I’m getting rid of you!*”¹¹³ Here the Invisible Man is given no chance to provide an excuse for the problem he caused or to ask for forgiveness.

Another example of the protagonist’s search for voice is when he made an accident in the Liberty Paint Plant and is directly sent to a lawyer with an amount of money for his

¹¹⁰ Parr Susan Resneck and Pancho Savery, eds. *Approaches to Teaching Ellison’s Invisible Man*. Modern Language Association of America, 1989, p. 86

¹¹¹ *Invisible Man*, p. 17

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 117

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 118

service there. The factory did not allow him to rejoin again nor to give explanation to what happened. Even Mr. Brockway an old senior in the factory defied him and caused him to stay voiceless.¹¹⁴

Once more, the Invisible Man is dismissed from the Brotherhood for delivering a speech that was not prepared by the community and is accused of getting too big for his breeches as well as straying from the road of the Brotherhood. The narrator once again gets betrayed, therefore he realizes it is time to change and take responsibility of his creation, *“The world is just as concrete, ornery, vile, and sublimely wonderful as before, only now I better understand my relation to it and it to me.”*¹¹⁵

The Invisible Man’s experience in several communities made him realize that he is invisible for the rest of the world he is no longer invisible to himself. His search for identity was not over yet. *“Our identities continue to evolve throughout over lives and the people we are at old age are probably not the people we are as children. Nevertheless, even if that identity remains the same time it had been challenged over and over by different aspects of life so that the identity that remains is the true one.”*¹¹⁶ By the end of the novel, the Invisible Man starts his adventure wearing his true identity while shaking off the old identities society imposed on him. *“The hibernation is over. I must shake off the old skin and come up for breath.”*¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ *Invisible Man*, p. 223

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 563

¹¹⁶ Kate Prudchenko, “The Brotherhood in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*”, *Intentional creativity* 20 August 2012. <https://kprudchenko.wordpress.com/2012/08/30/the-brotherhood-in-ralph-ellisons-the-invisible-man/>. Accessed on 15.05.2019.

¹¹⁷ *Invisible Man*, p. 580

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The years between 1920s and 1930s were characterized by the African Americans' struggle of racism and segregation not very long after taking their freedom leading them to suffer an identity crisis Black Americans, notably those of Harlem City, gradually started to demand for their rights and integrity in the dominant community as they became self-conscious and proud of their culture. The literary and musical achievements of African American were the great mechanisms that challenged whites' racism and fostered their elusive dreams of full rights and integrity to the whole American system. Accordingly, African American authors selected racism and identity as their main theme in order to give a voice and defend the rights of these minorities.

Among these African American writers we find Ralph Ellison, An African American novelist, literary critic and a winner of National Book Award. For Ellison, black and white cultures were highly intertwined, with almost every aspect of American life influenced by the African-American presence, for instance, in music such as jazz and blues which led to the birth of modern music such as Hip Hop music, language and clothing style are no exception. Ellison's "*Invisible Man*" and the essays in "Shadow and Act" as well as "*Going To The Territory*" tackle themes of race, identity and what is meant to be American. Ellison saw the struggle of being black in the American society as a metaphor and a case study that needs an exploration. Ellison's writings were source of inspiration to many other writers such as Toni Morrison and Kurt Vonnegut.

Ellison managed to gain his popularity through his most known novel *Invisible Man* as he brought onto the scene a new kind of black protagonist, one at odds with the characters of the leading novelist at the time, Richard Wright. If Wright's characters were angry, uneducated, and inarticulate – the result of a society that oppressed them- Ellison's main

character was educated, articulate, and self-aware. *Invisible Man* tells the story of a nameless protagonist as he suffers to discover himself in the context of the American racist society. Ellison uses the quest for existence and identity “outside” history as a tool to show that identity cannot exist in vacuum, but must be formed in response to others. To live outside history means to be invisible, ignored by the writers of history. Invisibility is the central feature of the protagonist’s identity. Through the narrator, Ellison highlights the mental and physical traumas and anxieties the African American encountered during their fruitless and disastrous search for a new identity.

This study focused on the issue of racism in America, and its impact on the life of African American individuals, it also investigated the protagonist’s identity and his experience throughout his journey in the novel, which sheds light on his memories and flashbacks in the American society that refuses to see him. As a result, he was misplaced and affected by the injustice and inequality of that society.

The first chapter of this study provided a socio-historical base for the analysis of the selected novel. It offered a synopsis of the dominant movements during twenties with some main events that were to change the fate of the African American people such as Harlem Renaissance Movement and Civil Right Movement. We have also stated the reasons behind the birth the Harlem renaissance movement. Moreover, we shed light on how African Americans used music to preserve their culture from the first day they were brought to America as slaves which made Jazz music one of the greatest black achievements in the American culture. We have also stated the historical path of the types of music that contributed in the emergence of the jazz music such as blues music, and the famous of African American musicians such as Armstrong, W.C. Handy and Bessie Smith.

Within Chapter one, we provided a short definition of literary theory and introduced the literary theories suitable to study the selected novel which are Critical Race Theory to demonstrate the protagonist's struggle with racism in the American society, we also presented the concept of Double Consciousness developed by Du Bois in order to highlight the protagonist's duality. And finally we presented Frantz Fanon most prominent works "*The Wretched of The Earth*" and "*Black Skin, White Mask*" in order to use them as a background in analyzing the protagonist's psychology. By the end of the chapter we provided a small background of both Du Bois and Frantz Fanon.

The second chapter was entitled "the Aesthetic and Psychology of Invisibility and Racial Identity" we attempted to provide a look at the stylistic side of the novel and how Ellison used Symbolism in order to serve his theme; Ellison mastered the use of colors to demonstrate the gap founded between black and white people in the American society. Other symbols we analyzed are the briefcase which the protagonist carried with him throughout his journey, this latter symbolized the protagonist's identity. The last symbol we examined is the Liberty Paint Factory in which the protagonist worked after being expelled from the Negro college, Ellison used this symbol in order to implicitly expose the American society and how they treat Africans. As a musician and composer, Ellison enriched his novel with metaphorical style in which he added musical lyrics and some the old African American folklores. Ellison was also highly influenced by Louis Armstrong from whom he learnt to detect struggle and sadness of the Black Americans' life throughout the jazz music that he included within his novel. In the second part of this chapter we aimed at analyzing the protagonist's psychology; we analyzed the meaning behind invisibility and how the protagonist used it as a veil in order to escape the world's criticism. We also have provided a study of his dual identity using Du Bois's concept of double consciousness. And the person

should not be defined by his race, group or in the case of African Americans, color. Moreover, we examined the effect of racism on the black identity using critical race theory with a look to the protagonist's search for identity and voice by the end of the novel.

To sum up, we can say that both literature and history are interrelated, where both influence each other; Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* was impacted and influenced by the historical realities and events that happened during the novel's period of time, where African Americans were suffering from racism and segregation. Therefore, literature is not just mirror of reality but it can also be used as a weapon writers use to deliver their messages and fight for their rights and the rights of the oppressed people.

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ملخص

التمييز العنصري كان و لازال آفة اجتماعية خطيرة و سائدة في المجتمع الامريكي، و اكثر من يعانون منه هم الأفارقة الأمريكيون او كما يطلق عليهم السود. تهدف هذه الدراسة الموسومة بالهوية العنصرية في رواية "رجل غير مرئي" للكاتب رالف اليسون الى رصد مدى تأثير التمييز العنصري على تكوين الهوية لدى الأفارقة الأمريكيون ما بين فترة 1920 حتى بداية 1930، في محاولة لتوضيح مفهومه و أبعاده الاجتماعية و جوانب تطوره في المجتمع الأمريكي من خلال دراسة البطل (الشخصية الرئيسية). الرواية تشرح معاناة شاب مثقف و مجهول الهوية. يمثل بطل الرواية كل الأفارقة الامريكيون و قضاياهم المتمثلة في التمييز العنصري و التهميش و احلامهم في العيش بسلام جنبا الى جنب مع البيض.

القسم الاول يتناول الجانب النظري من الدراسة و الذي يتضمن شرح و تعريف للنظريات المعتمدة في هذا البحث العلمي بالإضافة الى العوامل التاريخية منها نهضة هارلم و عصر الجاز، للحدثين حضور قوي في الرواية و تأثيرهما على الكاتب و الشخصية الرئيسية جلي. القسم الثاني يتناول الجانب التطبيقي من الدراسة علاوة على ذلك شرح تفصيلي لمصطلح "غير مرئي" و جزء اخر يتضمن الولوج الحالة النفسية للشخصية الرئيسية و توضيح اثار التمييز العنصري عليه. يركز هذا البحث على تطور الشعور بالاغتراب لدى الافارقة الامريكيون و مواجهتهم للثشتت بين حضارتين - الافريقية و الامريكية - و ما ينتج عنه من تشوهات في الهوية الشخصية .

الكلمات المفتاحية:

التمييز العنصري، الهوية، ازدواجية الوعي، عصر الجاز، نهضة هارلم.