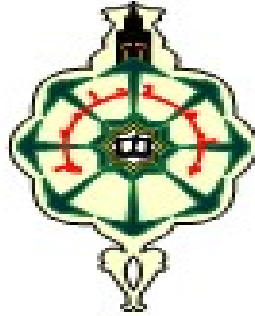


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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH



Identity in African American Literature: the case of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*

*A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Master degree in English language
For Literary and Cultural Studies*

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Dedication

I first dedicate this humble work to my beloved parents, my father with his insight and resourcefulness, and my mother for her endless support and compassion.

I dedicate this to myself; first for believing it was impossible, and second for proving it wrong.

Asma.

To the Alienated on this planet.

Rawida.

Acknowledgement

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To Our loving parents, that supported us and dedicated their lives to fulfill our needs, and without them we would never be where we are today. We will be forever thankful, and whatever we do, we will never be able to turn them back the slightest thing they have done for us. Thank you for being there for us.

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Finally, to whoever helped us in any way and we did not mention them, a sincere

Thank you from both of us!

ABSTRACT

The African-Americans traumatic experience with slavery aroused another battle with identity along the way. The dominance of the white ideology and culture marginalized totally the blacks and the minorities in general. Many African American writers like Ellison dealt with the issue of identity; either to succumb for the dominant power, or to embrace their blackness and their past as the offspring of the former slaves. This present research examines identity from a post colonialist approach and sheds light on African-American literature and its writers who took identity as their central theme, from slavery till the Civil Right movement era. Within the analysis of Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* from a post-colonial point of view; this latter, focuses namely on the theme of alienation and the quest for identity for the main character who narrates his journey towards self discovery in a white dominant world.

Keywords: *Invisible Man*, Otherness, Alienation, Identity, Post-Colonialist theory.

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General Introduction

For decades literary works of the canons have been appreciated by their mastery of the language and its artistic side that literature is. However, more recent theorists argued that literature is not innocent from the outer factors that may indeed affect the production of a given literary work. Therefore, literature has been articulated on multiple platforms to convey an idea or to oppose it. African American literature is not an exception to this rule; their literary works have emerged under different circumstances that are peculiar to the African Americans only.

African American literature, in particular, is regarded as an outstanding kind of literature that sprang from the suffering of the blacks from enslavement and ill-treatment of the whites that stripped them of any rights. Therefore their authors at first wrote to challenge the common controversies that the blacks are not able to produce an adequate literary work besides, to claim their rights to be treated as equal human being as it has been stated in the Declaration of Independence “that all man are created equal”.

Negro writers have always involved in their writings the theme of identity that came to the surface due to the racial discrimination and racism. Ralph Ellison’s work *Invisible Man*, for instance, depicted the social realities of that of the blacks, and their dilemmas they get encountered within a world dominated by white values and ideologies in which they were marginalized from.

The novel took Ralph Ellison a good amount of time to craft his only masterpiece *Invisible Man*. It is known for its richness in black folklore, the use of metaphor and symbolism to depict the racial discrimination in the United States. Due to this, the novel claimed its position in American Literature and became a reference for the African American culture and history.

General Introduction

Ralph Ellison's portrayal of the protagonist's journey towards his self-discovery depicts the harsh reality where the blacks have less chance to participate in a society that marginalizes them. The protagonist is a nameless character who claims to be 'invisible' in the opening of the story. He then proceeds to narrate his voyage while he adopted multiple identities in order to fit with the system that is ruled by the whites only. The story shows the personal growth of the narrator who first believed in the American dream; which hard work can bring success, but he eventually realizes that a colored man will always find obstacles to grant him success and acceptance in a society that is culturally hegemonic and finally he decides to be invisible man.

This extended essay will examine the crisis of identity in African American literature through the novel *Invisible Man*. To achieve a full depth in the analysis, the Post-colonial theory will be applied to help answer the following research questions:

- To which extent enslavement and colonialism of the Africans distorted the Black identity?
- How Ralph Ellison dealt with the case of identity of the blacks in a social context, and how he challenged the social hierarchies and racism to form the perception of the individual's identity and the blacks in particular?

This extended essay will be divided into two chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the post-colonial theory and a literary review of the African American literature, its major authors and its development throughout history.

The second chapter is devoted to the literary analysis of the novel *Invisible Man* with post-colonial theory, which examines the effect of racism and alienation on the identity within the psyche of the narrator. It also sees how Ellison authentically dealt with the problematic of the black identity and how he represented it in the modern America.

Chapter One:
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Chapter One: Literary Review

1.1 Introduction

Literature is said to be the art of language; for decades literary works of the canons have been acclaimed by their mastery of the language and its artistic side that literature is. More recent theorist of the last century argued that literature is not innocent from the ideological and cultural factors that might indeed affect these works. For some nations literature has been a means to assert and resist these universalist standards which marginalized other works of minorities. This chapter explores different literary texts from a Postcolonial angle, that have been written in western dominant countries, such as African-American literature in general; whose works sought to reclaim their identity that has been stripped by colonialism in Africa and slavery in the Americas.

1.2 Literary Theory Definition

Literary theory is a method in which we choose to read a given literary work. And a way to understand literature; a literary theory helps to link between the author and his work, to understand and decipher the meaning that is underlying within the text such as race, class, and gender. Lately, literary theory has sought to explain the degree to which the text is more the product of a culture than an individual author and in turn how those texts help to create the cultures (Brewton, 2017).

Literary theories were developed as a means to approach a literary text and interpret its meaning accordingly through following the principals and the dogmas of a particular literary theory. The theory functions as a lens or rather an angle of view in which we wish to see the text through. The word “theory” now is used as an umbrella term to cover all the literary approaches to reading texts. The founders and the proponents of each theory believe their theory is the “theory”, there is no theory

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that is better than the other since literature is a very complex work, and applying one theory could give a partial understanding to what is aimed implicitly in the text. This approach of literary studies started during the nineteenth century with the influence of Frederick Nietzsche: facts are not facts until they have been interpreted. Nietzsche's critique has had a profound impact on literary studies and helped lead an era of intensive literary theorizing during the twentieth century (Brewton, 2017)

1.2.1 Major Literary Theories

The following is a set of major literary theories, each of them introduced a new method in text reading and analyzing. Some theories concentrated on the form, others dived more into the outer factors in which have determined the production of a given literary work in a given era or a social context.

1.2.2 New Criticism

Many critics like “New Criticism” argued that literature is a special kind of a language, and their concern is based on the interaction of words, figures of speech and symbols; this approach focuses primarily on poetry and the aesthetic level of the language that is regarded as an independent and self-sufficient object. It focuses on the reading of the text while putting aside the historical factors that may have influenced the work. Instead, the literary work is related to the sensibility of the writer and his creativity in producing the work. The distinction between literary genres is not essential in this theory.

1.2.3 Structuralism

Structuralism like “New Criticism”, concentrates completely on the text neglecting the exterior factors; it depends on a large scale on linguistic theory, structuralism related mainly on the ideas of the famous linguist Ferdinand De Saussure. He considers that the signifier (word, symbol) is not related to the meaning (signified); that is to say, words have multiple meanings but some are treated as less important depending on how a particular society treats its language and interpret it. Structuralism decodes the patterns of language to get the appropriate interpretation of the text or other possible interpretations. Therefore it is difficult without some linguistic background. Structuralism has been highly influenced by “Formalism”.

1.2.4 Formalism

Formalism as the name indicated; it focuses on the study of the form. Formalism like Structuralism sought to place the study of literature on a scientific basis through objective analysis of the motifs, devices, techniques, and also set great importance on the literariness of the texts. By analyzing the plot device and narrative strategies and how it contributes to a literary work and the qualities that distinguished literature from other kinds of writing. Neither author nor context was essential for the Formalists.(Brewton, 2017).

1.2.5 New Historicism

New Historicism unlike the previous theories such as New Criticism and Structuralism that focused on the form of the text, New Historicism tries to

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understand the text relay mainly on historical context rather than the form. It sees history as embedded in literary works and the result the product of culture and social power. This approach draws the veil on the economic and social realities, of how ideologies were presented in the text to form power in a given era.

1.2.6 Marxism

The Marxist theory emphasizes the relation between the economic production and literature, And to see how social classes are represented in the text as well as the reinforcement of class distinction (upper/ruler class, bourgeois, and proletarian). The Marxist theory argues that a work of literature is not independent of its time and culture, but rather its product. Nonetheless, Marxists scrutinize the text within an era in terms of the socioeconomic conflict between classes and to see how it has influenced the given work. It also examines the tyranny of the upper class that holds the power and economics, over the lower class that is the victim of exploitation and oppression. “Marxist Theory” seeks to examine how social classes are featured in the text.

1.2.7 Feminism

Unlike Marxism that focuses on the relationship between classes, Feminism focuses on the relationship between genders. It studies the cultural and economic disabilities in a patriarchal society in which prevented women from achieving equal opportunities as men. Women are seen merely as the “Other” and men are the dominating subject. The concept of gender is an entirely cultural construct, affected by patriarchal biases. This theory seeks to examine the literature of the canon writers where women are neglected and trace how women were portrayed in literary text

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and often marginalized completely from the text. This approach is closely related to Post-colonialism and queer theories which emphasize on excluded minorities and people under oppression by the dominant culture or power.

1.3. Post-colonialism

Post-colonialism before being a literary theory referred much more to the aftermath of the colonial occupation on the colonized. The imperial expansion of that of the Europeans aimed to exploit the resources of these lands; this goes hand in hand with the natives or indigenous people. The colonial expansion did not stop on the political hold over the country, but also intended to impose their beliefs and cultures under the name of “civilizing mission”. As a result of colonialism, the colonized nations had to show a form of resistance toward the colonizer’s ideologies that were far more implemented; explicitly or implicitly. The Europeans believed in the superiority of their race as well as civilization, due to the rise of social Darwinism, in his book *The Origin of Species* where he stated the act of natural selection and that nature selects the best:

There is a frequently recurring struggle for existence, it follows that any being, if it varies however slightly in any manner profitable to itself, under the complex and sometimes varying conditions of life, will have a better chance of surviving, and thus be *naturally selected*. (1861:12)

The use of Darwin's arguments along with Herbert Spencer ideologies _the survival of the fittest_ as a justification that colonization is a natural act, and therefore was manifested in their behavior as opposed to their colonies. Plans to civilize have been practiced at the expense of the colonized culture, religion,

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language and identity. The consequences of the colonizing act were chaotic over the colonized, despite those colonies gained their independence; they were still subject in one way or other to another form of domination. Independence was not the solution to cut the ties with the former colonizer (Ashcroft et al, 1995)

Post-colonial literature, as well as its theory, came as a reaction or a result of the interaction between the imperial culture and the colonized. Most of these intellectuals that come from subverted countries use literature as a form of cultural resistance and reclaim for identity. As a consequence post-colonial theory has existed from the beginning before even that particular name was used for it. (Ashcroft et al, 1995:1)

The term Post-colonialism, however, is used as an umbrella term to cover all the other fields that deal mostly with cultural studies, thus post-colonialism is a coin of two facets. The authors of *The Empire Writes back* (1989) argue that this term should be used to cover “all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989.2) This theory does not try to dethrone other theories, but it uses them to achieve a full perception of a given text. Many fields are interwoven such as anthropology, ethnic studies, history and even politics which are used also in cross- cultural studies. The theory emerged during the 80’s of the last century. Edward Said’s book *Orientalism* (1978) is reckoned to be the ground stone of this field; his book discusses the view of the Occident towards the Orient, or in another word shaped idea about the orient; he states:

To believe that the Orient was created—or, as I call it, ‘Orientalized’—and to believe that such things happen simply as a necessity of the imagination, is to be disingenuous. The relationship between Occident

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and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony. (1989:5)

The Occident did not create geographical boundaries to separate both two entities as *west* and *east*, but rather an imagined line to separate and debase the oriental countries. Edward Said argues also in one of his interviews about Orientalism that the way the USA and the West look at the Middle-East is through the lens that distorts the true reality of those places and people. Orientalism is the actual lens in which is used to see and understand the strange and the unfamiliar. Most of the Orientalist experts who study the orient, they are likely to represent the middle-east as well as the Far East as the same. The orient is a timeless and placid place unlike the west, it does not develop and remains the same “the notion of colony has a strange relation to time.[...] Literary texts offer especially good illustrations of how the colony deranges and disorders the sense not only of place but also of time” (Bennett and Royle. 2004: 215). This creates an image out of history and to what he called “ideal other” for Europe. He then shed light on how the Europeans behold themselves in opposition to the Orient or the notion of the *Self* and *Other* that will be further discussed. Even though Said emphasized on the Orient, his book and theory are used by other post-colonial countries that share an identical and close experience with colonialism, despite the geographical and ethnical differences when dealing with literary works from a postcolonial angle.

Frantz Fanon, Another eminent thinker, and influencer in the field of post-colonialism from the Martinique, who approach post-colonial studies from a different perspective. He took part in the Algerian Nationalist movement and decolonization; one of his significant works in the field is *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) his work examines the psyche of the black in relation to the white world. On

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how the black man encounters difficulties in accordance to find his own identity without the interference of the white that tries to define the black men according to his stereotypical eyes. The black man suffers from inferiority complex and therefore he adopts the white colonizer's culture and language "For not only must the black be black; he must be black in relation to the white man." (1952: 82, 83) the black man assimilates white's culture as well as language in order to achieve certain equality to the white man "To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture. The Antilles negro who wants to be white will be the whiter as he gains greater mastery of the cultural tool that language is." (1952:25) the acceptance of the white culture at the expense of the white's, construct inferiority complex to the original culture of that of the black. But Fanon states that the black makes himself inferior, but the brutal truth is that the black is already made inferior. (1952:115) the book has been a major influence on the study of race and men of color besides cultural differences; it had a notable impact on Civil Right movement in the united states, anti-colonial and black consciousness all over the world. Fanon ideas were highly influenced by his teacher and mentor Aimé Césaire who coined the famous term *Negritude* that means the acceptance of the fact of being black, the destiny and culture. He also criticized the western colonization of Africa and another continent for the sake of Christianity and civilization thus; it did nothing but destroyed great civilizations instead (Discourse on Colonialism, 2000: 32-33).

These scholars may have treated post-colonialism a bit differently in terms of their views and analysis of colonizer's ideology and conduct towards the colonized. Said focused on structural analysis and relying on historical facts, while Fanon explored the psychopathological and psychological mind of the colonizer and his affecting relation with the colonized; however they all examined what is called the

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binary opposition between *occident/orient*, *white/colored*, *center/margin* or *periphery*, *slave/ master*, and *self/ other*. These binaries came into being by the standards of the Eurocentric values: that privileges Europe as the center of historical development, and posits European culture as superior to all others. This leads to believe that one's culture is better and satisfying than others. From the Eurocentric viewpoint, it is only Europe that can make civilization and spread it on other part of the world or the outlying peripheries. Therefore, Eurocentrism is highly linked with colonialism and racism. According to *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary terms* (2006: 75). Post-colonial theory seeks to examine these ideologies that are presented in literary works of the former colonies, writers such as Raja Rao, Dennis Lee, Margaret Atwood and Chinua Achebe and many uncountable writers that presented their criticism in a more creative manner as a form of literary work; their works have been the site of critiques of imperial representation, language and ideological control (Ashcroft et al.1995:7). Simultaneously, they examined works of the colonial fictions that pushed racial differences as the main concern with a colonial stereotypes, such as Shakespeare's *Othello* (1604), E.M Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) even though sometimes the writer is unaware of his deeply rooted racism during his production of his own work, literature therefore becomes a center for examining ideologies and the way they have been articulated. "Ideology appears too easily as a master term for totalizing readings of literary texts" as Louis Althusser suggests that 'subjects make their own ideology at the same time ideology makes them subjects'. He then questioned the working of ideology in literary texts (Andrew and Royle. 2004: 172-173). On this point, the writer is not free from the conceptions that he absorbs from his society but rather they are manifested in his work in unconscious manner. This goes for Conrad's in

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Heart of Darkness, as Chinua Achebe wrote an essay *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness* accusing Conrad of being racist or as he called 'bloody racist' And his novel is racist; Conrad dehumanized Africans and used them as a mere props and Africa as Achebe states: "*Heart of Darkness* projects the image of Africa as "the other world", the antithesis of Europe and therefore civilization" (1975). Despite the novelist motivation was to mock and criticize the western civilization and its horrible act towards the Africans, the writer could not get rid of his Eurocentric ideology of racism towards the blacks within the story. Achebe's criticism of this novel is just one example of post-colonial criticism of colonialism and its long term effects. The post-colonial theory, therefore, tends to examine texts while asking questions to help scrutinize the text. To what extent the literary text reveals explicitly or implicitly about colonial oppression, problems of identity, double consciousness and hybridity, characters that are presented as the other and how they are treated.

1.3.1 The Concept of Otherness

The French philosopher Descartes said, 'I think therefore I am' his notion of the self in relation to the other is autonomous, self-contained, in the individual's mind. Otherness has been for centuries a debatable topic amongst philosophers of whether the other is needed to define the self, or it is an independent entity. The question has been constantly asked, who is the other? According to Merriam Webster dictionary, otherness is defined as follows: the quality or the state of being *other* or different.

In the twentieth century, philosophy of the other has changed from the traditional perception of Descartes, and gravitated towards the social and ideological

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factors that help to construct the other subjectively. Therefore the other is historically and culturally constructed in a given society that project anything that is against its norms and beliefs. On the other hand, those who construct the other define themselves as what they are conversely to them. As a result, the other's differences is relative as stated by the philosopher Jaques Derrida who conceptualized the term alterity; Derrida sees otherness as relational to the self, each constitutes and affect each other while respecting difference. The other then is not an element outside or beyond the self; it is rather implicated within the self (The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms, 2006: 5-6).

From the psychoanalytical attitude to Freud, each individual is ruled or dominated by the unconscious (the ID) that is completely strange to our consciousness and rational thoughts (ego); thereby every self is already inhabited by the other. Jaques Lacan gave a different interpretation of Freud's theory; he argues that the self is not divided by the other but actually is the other. According to Lacan emphasizing on "the mirror stage"(1949), the child is unable to clearly separate itself from the other until a certain period, the 'I' starts to recognize itself in the mirror as a completely autonomous individual from the other that helps the formation of identity.

The relationship between the self and the other is not narrowed between individuals, but the circle is widened between social groups, gender, and race. It is important to note that binary opposition here, is not objective rather is influenced by social hierarchies. Post-colonialism, in particular, tries to deconstruct those hierarchies that are formed about the self by colonizers, the self here is conceived as man, white, European, Christian and heterosexual. "the growth of Empire proceeded from a single ideological climate and that the development of the one is intrinsically

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bound up with the development of the other [...] where it leads to the naturalizing of constructed values (e.g. civilization, humanity, etc.) which, conversely, established ‘savagery’, ‘native’, ‘primitive’, as their antitheses and as the object of a reforming zeal.¹” (Ashcroft et al, 2002:2).

Its antithesis is formed as opposite to these criteria, female, non-white/colored, non-European, non-Christian. Gayatri Spivak argues that it is a process through which colonial identities formed themselves within their ideology of social and racial hierarchies. Furthermore, such constructions are related with power, the other is the negative reflection of the European, he is the inferior, the other is the product of the western supremacy or in other words, to justify its superiority.

The discourse between the self and the other in post-colonialism is partially taken from ‘Deconstruction’ by Derrida; “It is a critique of concepts and hierarchies which, according to Derrida, are essential to traditional criteria of certainty, identity and truth; but which, nevertheless, achieve their status only by repressing and forgetting other elements which thus become the un-thought, and sometimes the unthinkable, of Western philosophy” (Routledge Dictionary of literary terms, 2006:48-49) that is to say, Derrida’s philosophy seeks to deconstruct the western ideology that is centered to itself while neglecting other elements that were repressed in order to achieve power. Edward Said was highly influenced by this critique, in his colonial discourse *Orientalism* (1978) he used binary opposition between the familiar (us) and the strange (them), the rational and the irrational, the center and the margin. These binaries are not only used to separate between the two but also to form an identity contrasted with the other.

1.3.2 The Concept of Identity

Post-colonialism has been always concerned with the effect of colonization on cultures and consequently, identities that were shaped with and after colonization as Ashcroft states in the *Empire Writes Back* "more than three-quarters of the people living in the world today have had their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism" (2004:1) most post-colonial nations had a problematic with identity crisis; to establish a national identity and culture was far more complicated since the intended colonialism was not political but also cultural, and decolonization took political dimension and ignored the core issue which its national identity. (Dizayi, 2015)

The issue of identity begins as Mercer states "identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty" (1995:43)

According to Oxford English Dictionary, identity is the fact of being who or what or thing is. In post-colonialism identity is more of a complex concept to define due to many factors. After decolonization these nations were in a process of recovery from the rule and the tyranny of the ex-colonizers, identity was the major issue to solve since the colonizers stripped many nations their ethnic identity as well as their culture, religion, and language as a form of submission. Therefore postcolonial countries opted to regain their genuine and authentic self-identity as resisting reaction for freedom and have a sense of belonging. Identity crisis emerged to the surface since in postcolonial era the identification of the individual has been always linked with *us* in relation to the *other*, binary opposition created an identity dislocation, therefore identity that was settled in postcolonial era remained unresolved. "Identity emerges as a kind of unsettled space or an unresolved question

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in that space, between a number of intersecting discourses” (Hull,1989: 10) identity issue took several dimensions depending on the psychological level of an individual and a nation, besides the racial differences that played a major role in the forming of identity.

1.3.3 Identity in Post-colonial Literature

The Development of post-colonial literature has been going through several stages of national and regional consciousness in which it serves to assert difference from the imperial center, rather than mimicking the center and denying one owns heritage and culture. In addition to that, post-colonial literature focuses on the issue of place and displacement that made identity crisis into being. (Ashcroft et al, 2002:4-8) the main features and characteristics of this kind of literature is the problem of race, ethnicity, culture and identity. These characteristics emerged due to social factors such as immigration, nations with cultural and ethnical diversities and colonial impact the decentered the colonized identities (Dizayi, 2015).

Identity in postcolonial literature is a crucial theme to make a cut between the identification of previous heritage and the identity that has been implemented by the imperial doctrines. Chinua Achebe in his famous novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) which he depicts the chaos that was left behind after decolonization; It tells the story through the main character Okonkwo that witnesses his rise and the fall after the white Christian men came and colonized, while they destroyed the culture and identity of the Igbo tribe. His novel has been a response to Conrad, he wrote an alternative version from the eyes of the colonized instead of what the colonizer's false assumptions that dehumanized the Africans. Achebe among other prominent

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writers in this field such as Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said and Frantz Fanon argued:

The Western discourse of colonialism is constituted by the other subject –by alterities of race, colour or ethnic origin. Western notions of human identity itself as universal or unchanging may be recognized as a historical construct constituted by the exclusion, marginalization, and oppression of racial others. Literary studies is far from free of the discursive marginalization of racial and ethnic other” (Bennett and Royle. 2004:210)

Homi Bhabha, unlike Edward Said, he shifted from the binary opposition, and introduces the concept of hybridity that stands in the middle and challenges the traditional and fixed identification; "this interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains the difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha, 1994:4) the deep impact of colonialism on the individual's double-consciousness and the loss of the former identity, leads to the imitation of colonizer's identity. Hybridity thus is the result of mimicry; the act of imitating another culture. A more proper example is *The Mimic Man* (1967) by the Caribbean writer V.S Naipaul, in his main character, Ralph Singh a politician from the West Indies who attempts to write a political memoir in his exile in London; he then realizes after having a flashbacks about the definitive moments that shaped him from infancy to adulthood were entirely, from the beginning, a European-made one. Consequently, Bhabha states that identity is never pure and unchanging, but is in a constant process of formation.

1.4 African-American Literature

The African-American literature is regarded as an outstanding kind of literature that is very peculiar to its people, their literature is an accomplishment of people who suffered and yearned in silence for the first two decades. The blacks were deported with violence from their mother land Africa, to the new world in (1526), which they have been dehumanized and stripped from their culture and language. They were simply deprived of living. African-American literature rose from the fields of crops under the sound of lashes and heavy shackles (Andrews, 2017)

This literature came as a response to the common controversies and those theories about the black race that legislated slavery; for the reasons that a Negro is mentally unable by any means to produce an adequate literary work as the white man. The Negro found himself from the start a prisoner of these prejudices, therefore his literature served as a double standard first, to reclaim his equality with the white and second, to defend and justify his humanity. Af-Am literature has been from the beginning a literature of necessity.

The hardship that the black slaves endured in the south of the United States, led many slaves to cross to the north to have a better living and escape from torture and ill-treatment of the whites. By that time many blacks learnt to read and write the language of the master and soon, in the mid-eighteenth century, respectable black writers started to be distinguished through their outstanding writings, their mission was dedicated to prove that “all men are created equal” as it was scripted in the Declaration of Independence in (1776). These writings were called ‘Slave Narratives’ that were autobiographies that depict the experience of the fugitive slaves besides their final resort to the north. Before the civil war, these writings were

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used as an anti-slavery argument. In (1845) appeared *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* by Frederick Douglass who was later known as an abolitionist and a protest writer and amongst the first Negro writers. He divided the book into two parts, the first part narrates his story under slavery, and the second his escape and liberation in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855). This novel has a remarkable importance in regards to the individual and social achievement and a story that epitomizes the torture, exploitation, child torn from his parents and all kinds of inhuman treatment by the whites. From this Douglass decided to get rid of slavery through learning to read and write and then escape (McDonald, 317-318). *Incidents in the Life of a Slave girl* (1861) the first autobiography written by formerly enslaved Af-Am woman Harriet Jacobs that narrates her experience of sexual exploitation which made slavery for women unbearable; Recording her as she called 'the war' of her life which ultimately gains her freedom as well as her two children. Her work as anti-slavery and a feminist oratory who named herself after Sojourner Truth, her remarkable works and her eloquence, enriched the early Af-Am literature and became a model of the heroism of black women (Andrews, 08-20-2017).

1.4.1 Oral Tradition

When the Africans stepped in the shores of the Americas, they did not come empty-handed but rather they had their history, tradition, and culture brought with them. Black slaves after have been forced and suppressed from practicing their customs, they tried to keep their heritage and folklore alive by oral tradition. That involved storytelling and singing as an expression and a refuge from the drudgery and hardship of slavery.

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Oral tradition in the African American literature provided a solid platform that shaped as well as fostered their literature. Most of their literary works prove the inevitable importance of the folklore, since the lives of ordinary Negroes formed the core topic of many poems such as the works of Paul Lawrence Dunbar, and Langston Hughes in *The weary Blues* in the sense of using the aesthetic side of the 'Blues' and its rhythm, and the short story of Charles Weddell Chesnut in his collection *The Conjure Woman* in which he relays on the voodoo traditions, black magic, and superstitions. And Richard Right's novel *Native Son* that undertakes an evil character from the folklores, besides Ralph Ellison in *Invisible Man* where he utilizes the myth of the Brer Rabbit that is always chasing as an image of his main character, and James Baldwin in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* as he uses all the religious black folklore from different angles. Folklore also has been a subject of interest in academic research by Zora Neale Hurston who traveled the Bahamas, the Seal Islands of the southern coast of the United States in order to collect stories in order to study their origins. A collection titled *Mules and Men*; Amiri Baraka also in *The Blues People* which includes a study in the Negro's music.

1.4.2 African American Literature in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries

After the abolition of slavery, many blacks had the opportunity to have an education which led to the rise of the black middle class that was quite aware of its position in that society. Very eminent poets and writers emerged in that era which had a lasting impact on the 20th century. Despite that slavery was abolished the blacks were still treated with contempt by the whites who totally ignored a partial part of the American society or minorities. Writers like Paul Lawrence Dunbar who

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has been famous by his poetry such as *Oak and Ivy* (1839), still he managed to produce literary works; most notable of his novels is *The Sport of the Gods* (1902) in which he portrayed the injustice and the tyranny that forced a black family from the south, to move to the north in order to seek freedom but they end it up tragically; here he suggest that no other place will feel like home than the south, that is unlike the industrial north in which they found no meaning of the freedom that they have paid for it.

While was the aim of Dunbar's writings to entertain the readers with white majority, Sutton E. Griggs took another path in the writing of his novels; in which he wrote five novels and established a publishing house to attack through it racism, as well as a means to implore those middle class to dispose of 'whiteness' as a criterion for values, beauty, and morals, as to relay instead to achieve the sense of selfhood by racial solidarity. His characters are portrayed in an unorthodox way, to break those inherited molds in *Imperium in Imperio* which is considered ahead of its time, which calls for social protest and the demand for equality and full citizenship rights.

After segregation took over in the south in the late 19th century, with the assent of the rest of the country in the north, many found console in Booker T. Washington in which they adopted his idea to depend on oneself in his autobiography *Up from Slavery* (1901) he suggest that racism and oppression are similar to poverty which is a normal thing, and dignity could be obtained by proving oneself worth by contributing to society which later brings respect and equal treatment before the law. *Up from Slavery* brought to Washington great success and reputation in the new century; however it did not linger after the coming of William Edward Burghardt Dubois, whose work *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903) the

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remarkable style of this book _which is a collection of essays_ has made it the most important work in classic English written by a Negro (Andrews). Whose work heavily criticized Washington's idea and asserted that freedom and the right to vote and other civil rights are far more important to help improve the life of the blacks. He also was against what Washington thought about racism that will gradually disappear but argued in the first lines of the book that the issue of color will be the core problem in the 20th century; reassuring that with work, culture, and freedom the AF-Am will be able to transform what he called “Double- Consciousness”; ethnic and national consciousness, in which it contributes to positively change the cultural as well as political sphere in the United States. (Andrews, 2017)

Dubois’s *the souls of black folks* is considered to be the most accomplished books in the Af-Am literature and most influential on the black's consciousness through many generations. Moreover, the book lays in its folds one of Dubois famous theory “Double- Consciousness” where he states:

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 never feels his two-ness, ___ an American, a negro... two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (2007: 13).

1.4.3 The Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem renaissance is an undeniable era for the black flourishing literary and artistic innovations; this movement was born from the unbearable conditions the

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Af-Am lived in the south, the lack of economic opportunities and segregation in public places which urged many black to immigrate to the north as coincidental with the first world war 1917, jobs held by the white males were soon open and replaced by the blacks. Most of them settled in the northern cities and namely New York City and more precisely Harlem district.

African Americans from various parts of the country and social classes joined together in Harlem, which became a focal point of the Af-Am culture: Jazz, blues, art, theatre, fiction, and poetry. Harlem became also the pioneering of African American institutions like the Advancement in of Colored People, the National Urban League and W. E. B. Dubois *The Crisis* magazine which was the vital organ of the (NAACP) led by James Weldon Johnson, in his turn was a poet, diplomat, and a journalist; Johnson and Dubois were the key figures of this movement.

Harlem Renaissance was the climax of the new negro movement of 1920's, embodied in *The New Negro* (1925) a selection edited by Alain Locke which collected famous and most notable early works of the Harlem era, included writers and poets such as, Countee Cullen, Claude Mckay and Langston Hughes who is a central figure in the movement. Besides other novelists like Rudolph Fisher, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jean Toomer; locke states that "The New Negro" is different from the "Old Negro" that gave them a sense of pride in their origins and heritage. Writers were too, influenced and began to question the 'white' aesthetic standards; instead, they started to experiment with personal self-expression and literary experimentation with the use of Blues and Jazz. The alternative term of the Harlem renaissance was also referred to as "The New Negro Movement". The Harlem Renaissance was indeed a great success for the Negro artists in general and writers in specific that lasted until 1930's with the coming of the Great Depression.

1.4.4 The Civil Right Movement Era

Migration of the blacks toward the north increased over the years and reached the peak during the Second World War. During this period black people left the racism and lack of opportunities in the south and remained in the northern cities like Chicago where works in industries and factories were available.

This mass migration gave a sense of independence to the black communities which in its turn empowered the rising Civil Right Movement. The latter affected the black writers at the midst of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. Writers have been as well fueled by the black nationalism of that movement, the example of that was James Baldwin, whose works have been a bit uncontroversial to the American society; he addressed the issue of sexuality and race; writing stories about how it is like to be black and homosexual. Most of his significant works are *Go Tell it to the Mountain* (1953), *Another Country* (1962) and *The Fire Next Time* (1963). Baldwin has been evidently influenced by Richard Wright whose well know work is *Native Son* (1940) which speaks about a character who struggles to find acceptance in Chicago. Baldwin got inspired by the novel and so he wrote a collection titled *Notes of a Native Son*, a hint to Wright's novel. Other Wright's books are the autobiography novel *Black Boy* (1945), *The Outsider* (1953), and *White Man, Listen!* (1957). Another eminent novelist, Ralph Ellison, best known for his only novel *Invisible Man* (1952); even though the novel has been his only achievement, still its position remained ensured in the African American literature.

The Civil Right movement also gave rise to female black poets such as Gwendolyn Brooks, to become the first African-American to win the Pulitzer Prize for her *Book of Poetry* (1949). Alongside other female poets such as Nikki Giovanni and Sonia Sanchez that became known during that period.

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The mentioning periods of the African American literature are brief since the course of the research is focused on other issues in this literature; however, the above mentioned writers and poets, played a major role in making this literature alive, and contributed in maintaining the Af-Am identity despite the ordeals and struggles these people have endured.

1.5 Identity in African-American Literature

The notion of identity has been a focal point in postcolonial studies; nations that have been formerly colonized were required to revisit as well as reconstruct the distorted identity in which the westerns have implemented for them. African-Americans are not spared from colonization even if does not seem to be so, but the Africans were forced to leave their homelands and suffered a great deal from the cruelty of colonialism more than any other nation; since they have been stripped of their identity, language and culture (Andrews,2017).

Many Af-Am writers pushed identity as the central theme for their artistic works and novels. These works were merely a reflection of the bitter reality the blacks were forced to cope with as any minority groups in the United States like Jews, Hispanics, homosexuals, and women. Blacks were the most to suffer from this marginalization mainly because of their skin color which is very distinctive and easily spotted in the crowds. As Frantz Fanon asserted “The real world challenged my claims. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema.” (1952, 83) the color has been always the source of rejection form the racist society and therefore, they were marginalized and not accepted as American citizens. Black Identity, especially at the wake of the 20th century has been the main concern as W.E.B Du Bois predicted that the 20th century

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would be the century of the color line. As ethnic identities are perceived differently throughout history, there is a necessity to revisit the struggles in which the Af-Am writers articulated identity in their writings. The concept of identity and its association with race put it in a position that it cannot be overlooked or taken for granted. (Gilroy, 2000: 97-98).

To speak of Af-Am black identity one needs to examine the voice that gave its true essence, such as slave narratives and autobiographies which were more close to depict the conditions that hindered the African Americans to attain spiritual as well as physical freedom; From Frederick Douglass' narratives, Langston Hughes *Big Sea* (1940) to Toni Morrison *Beloved* (1978) and others. These selection works represent in general the themes of their literature and the cultural, economical as well as political dimensions in a given period. Slave narratives, for instance, portrays the effect of slavery on the mind of the black which aimed to dehumanize and treat them as merely props and objects for buying and selling. The oppression of the white and the lack of literacy and language made the blacks in crisis to define themselves or give terms to define the Self, thus slavery has been the principle factor for the crisis of identity in the black man. Since the black were made inferior, they could not intermingle with the white on basis of civil, and socially equals according to (Allan Johnston, 1982: 17)

The imposed identity on the African-Americans did not end with the abolition of slavery, but it carried on till the twentieth century; as James Baldwin says in his book *Collected Essays*, "...The missing identity aches, one can neither assess nor overcome the storm of the middle passage. One is shipwrecked forever, in the Great New World" (1998: 242) he boldly articulated the issue of race and democracy and American identity. He argued the Africans lost their sense of self,

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the moment they stepped in the shores of America which was the starting point of all their dilemmas. The role of literature and specifically slave narratives were a storage and reservoir of the African American history and documentation of their culture which in a way contributed a great deal in shaping the Black identity. Thus the narrative of Frederick Douglass is from the start a story of man's search for identity and his development from a slave to a free man through literacy which was against the wishes of the masters and he stated "By far the larger part of the slaves know little of their ages as horses know of theirs, and it is the wish of most masters within my knowledge to keep their slaves thus ignorant" (Gates, 1997: 310). The lack of knowledge about his ages or his father did not help to form his identity and define him as a 'person' instead of a 'thing'. Douglass knew then, by education he can gain his mental freedom which later leads to physical emancipation.

Black Men were not the only victims who suffered from the identity crisis but also women and at times it was a lot worse since they were not only oppressed as blacks but also as women. Black women's literature has been constantly double standard; novels such as *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker (1982), and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). "Black women are silenced both as black and as female. But it is precisely this doubled otherness which might help us begin to move beyond racial essentialism, beyond the repressive politics of identity. » (Bennett and Royle, 2004: 212). Toni Morrison in *Beloved* has portrayed slavery from the perspective of women, whose suffering as women and as mothers has been unbearable and traumatic for them. Morrison links 'memory' with identity; the character in the story Sethe was forced to kill her daughter Beloved in order not to suffer like she did in slavery, but the memory haunts her all her life. These awful experiences in the past

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are what construct the persons in the present, memory here is tightly linked with identity since it is the main thing that helps to shape it.

In the realm of poetry, Langston Hughes was a central figure in the African American literature, primarily in the Harlem renaissance during the 1920's. His poetry was colorful and insightful that depicts and portrays the Af-Am people. His love for the jazz influenced his works and especially in poetry; the poems he produced spoke not only about his personal experience but on people as well. Hughes' artistic works reflected his actual cultural heritage and black identity.

His poem "The Negro Speaks of River" (1921), Hughes uses memory as well to reconstruct his identity by stories about his native land African and some famous sites like pyramids and Congo River as a connection to his origins and assert to maintain it regardless of the distortions and oppression that erased who they are:

What is Africa to me:

Copper sun or scarlet sea,

Jungle star or jungle track,

Strong bronze men, or regal black

Women from whose loins I sprang

When the birds of Eden sang? (Gates, et. all, 1997: 1311)

Hughes celebrated his culture and heritage in his works like any African-American Harlem artist did during that era which celebrated the African history and heritage. The quest for Identity has been a central theme in many of their works whether a slave narrative, novel or poetry to empower the blacks that lived in racism and oppression, as well as to face the tyranny of the whites. "Henry Louis Gates has argued that all black texts are necessarily 'two toned', or 'double-voiced', that they both engage with white canonical discourse and, at the same time, express a black consciousness." (Bennett and Royle, 2004: 212). Black identity

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was the key issue in their works but paradoxically enough, it was the solution to conquer racism and marginalization in the United States.

1.6 Conclusion

Literature was the voice and a weapon for minority writers and ethnicities that were not accepted or simply did not fall for the western standards, post-colonialist thinkers and novelist, however, tried to move beyond ethnic and cultural barriers in order to achieve tolerance and see cultural differences as a natural act instead of a threat. Black writers amongst Ralph Ellison contributed in the shaping the black identity and helped to portray what is like to be black in a racist society.

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Invisible Man

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2.1 Introduction

Ralph Ellison, in *Invisible Man*, devoted his novel to give insight to the African American life through his protagonist who goes through his journey of self-discovery in a Eurocentric society, dominated by the white culture and values. This chapter explores the effect of racism, marginalization, and alienation on the personal growth of the character; and how these external factors did influence the development personal identity of the African American individual through the *Invisible Man*; using postcolonial theory to analyze the effect of oppression and racism on the identity of the blacks due to racial discrimination.

2.2 Ralph Ellison's Biography

The personal experience of Ralph Ellison with racism and social inequality sparked his motivation to write his novel *Invisible Man*. Ralph Ellison, he is an African American writer, a literary critic, and a scholar. He was born on March 1, 1914, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. A grandson of slaves; Ellison's father Lewis Alfred Ellison was a construction foreman, he died when Ralph was three years old. His mother; Ida Millsap was a domestic servant. Ralph has shown an abiding interest in jazz music, from his earliest years; which led him to study the cornet and the trumpet. In the late 1930's, he won a scholarship to study music. So, he left Oklahoma to join the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama which is now called Tuskegee University. The Institute was founded in 1881 by Booker T. Washington, one of the well-known black figures in American history, later on, this institute became one of the nation's most important black colleges. In Ellison's *The Invisible Man*, this college was depicted as the model black college the narrator attended.

In 1936, Ellison left the Tuskegee and moved to New York City and settled in Harlem, where he studied sculpture in addition to photography. Ellison met and befriended the most

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important modernist figures of the African-American literature, such as Langston Hughes and Richard Wright, in addition to the socialist Albert Murray. Ellison's most important, complicated, and long relationship would be with the author Richard Wright, it is considered as the starting point in Ellison's career as a writer. Wright was Ellison's motivator and guide to the writing by supporting him to write for him.

At the end of the W.W.II, Ellison started writing *The Invisible Man*, after serving in the segregated army as a cook in Merchant Marine. In 1946 he married Fanny McConnell, who supported him financially and spiritually. Ellison published a few critics but devoted most of his time to the editing of *Invisible Man*, published in 1952 by Random House. Where in one of his interviews about the novel, said that "All novels are about certain minorities: the individual is a minority. The universal in the novel – and isn't that what we're all clamouring for these days? – is reached only through the depiction of the specific man in a specific circumstance."(Rahim, 2014). He emphasized that his writing is universal and anyone can relate to it as an individual, despite the color or race. In the year after, he won the 1953 U.S National Book Award for Fiction. In 1985, Ellison returned to the United States where he started teaching American and Russian literature at Bard College and began "*Juneteenth*", a second novel.

Ellison wrote for the Communist party, before their betrayal towards the African Americans just with the beginning of the W.W.II. In 1955, Ellison moved to Europe where he wrote his Essay *A New Southern Harvest*. During the 1950s, he worked with his lifelong friend Albert Murray and they published *Trading Twelve*, which is selected letters of both of them. In 1964, he published *Shadow and Act*, and became a teacher at Rutgers University and Yale University, and carried on working on his novel, at the same time. In 1969, Ellison received the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Then in 1975, he was elected to The American

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Academy of Arts and Letters. Nine years later, he received the New York City College's Langston Hughes Medal, in 1984. Ellison was awarded the National Medal of Arts, in 1985. Then in 1986, he published his collection of seventeen essays, *Going to the Territory*. Ralph Ellison died on April 16, 1994, due to pancreatic cancer. Following his death a lot of manuscripts were discovered in his house, resulting in the publication of *Flying Home and Other Stories* in 1996, and his novel *Juneteenth* in 1999. On January 26, 2010, Ellison's last work *Three Days Before the Shooting*, was published by Modern Liberty. (AMARI, 2015)

2.3 Plot Summary

Invisible man is a novel narrated in first person point of view, by a nameless character who undergoes his journey from the south, toward the north to seek opportunities. At the beginning, the narrator states that he is invisible and lives in a hole underground. After, he starts to narrate his adventure of self-discovery and experiences that eventually made him decide to become invisible.

While he undertakes his journey, the narrator is constantly hunted by his grandfather's advice who tells him to always obey and to succumb the whites in order to succeed. Before going to college, he was forced to participate in a battle called "the battle royal" in which he had to fight against other blacks in order to win the scholarship. The narrator after a while was forced to leave college when he takes an important guest to a wrong place. Dr. Bledsoe the president of the college, cunningly betrays him by giving him a recommendation letters that were suppose to open job opportunities for him, after convincing him to move to New York, but he soon discovered that he did the opposite.

In New York, the narrator managed to get a job in a paint factory where he was injured and rushed to the hospital and was unexpectedly tortured by white medical professionals through giving him electric shocks. This incident was degrading since he was treated as a

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laboratory rat. After this humiliating experience, he joins an organization that claims to defend minorities called the Brotherhood. The narrator was soon betrayed since they used him just to promote and bring a better picture to the organization. A riot breaks out and one of the members gets killed by the police, the protagonist gets confused and finally refuges to underground and rejects both, his grandfather's advice and that of the society that tried to define him.

2.4 Racism in *Invisible Man*

Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* is a representation of African American history. It is about the reality of racism and the problem of black identity from the late 1920s until the beginning of 1930s. The key to understanding the *Invisible Man* is through the protagonist's experience with the racist American society and his escaping from the segregationist south to the racist north.

In *Invisible Man*, race is a fixed subject of inquiry. The protagonist always confronts the idea of race through experiencing other's racism - from the degradation he went through in the Battle Royal to his realization of his token role in the Brotherhood. However, the novel also explores the question of whether race could be a genuine/authentic tick of individual's identity, far from the context of racism and other narratives imposed by other writers. The narrator quickly realizes that his blackness is very significant, but cannot easily decipher what it should mean to him.

2.4.1 Racism Reflected in the Growth Process

The character in invisible man is a black man who lives in a segregated racist south where the blacks are still poisoned by the ideology of slavery. They still believe in the superiority of the whites and that the only way to coexist is to serve them without any

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hesitation. In college, the narrator endured the unfair treatment he was given by the whites which made him understand the real meaning of racism and the apartheid policies of the United States and feel alienated.

Growing up the narrator experienced the spiritual shock repeatedly. The poor black youth kept asking himself, Who am I? Where am I from? How can I be a true man? These were both the most abstract and natural questions. Growing up, the protagonist began to know the definition of visibility and invisibility and transformed himself from visible man to invisible man so often. From the young's inner change, the author presented the issue of racial discrimination multiple times.

In the story, the narrator's grandfather warned his family members in which he said:

“Son, after I am gone, I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country ever since I give up my gun back in the reconstruction. Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome'em with yeses, undermine'em with grins, agree'em to death and destruction. Let'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open.” (*Invisible Man*, 1952:13)

By these words, his grandfather wants to say that as blacks they should always keep two identities. On the one hand, they should pretend to be a good slave, behaving as their former masters' wish. However, on the other hand, they should remember their resentment and bitterness, and fight against this enforced false identity. It was the usual way Blacks would do to fight against the racial discrimination. They sorted out a way to protect them but never fought for their rights and identity. This shows how the blacks were highly influenced by the American racial discrimination. They believed that in order to have a better life in a white society they must wear a mask, and never try to impose their true identity in any way. The

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narrator claimed submission and humility as the key to the advancement of black Americans. “On my graduation day I delivered an oration in which I showed that humility was the secret, indeed, the very essence of progress. (Not that I believed this -- how could I, remembering my grandfather? -- I only believed that it worked.)” (*Invisible Man*, 1952:14)

All they wanted was equal human rights to the whites, so they can be real Americans, too, but instead they got nothing but a series of grave insults and humiliation, which led them to think that their rights are just dreams and illusions and that the whites will always be superior and more equal than them. (Amari, 2015)

2.4.2 Racism reflected in Social Life

After being excluded from college, the young man's journey to enter the large society began. In the bus on his way to his new home, New York City, he was sitting in the last row although it was vacant. This shows how blacks were not considered as equals as the whites; neglected, marginalized and do not have the right to share the same places and positions as them. In that same bus, he met a vet who showed sympathy to the blacks' situation in the American society that is so unfair to them, and who was treated as a mental patient from this society, because he illustrated the fact of its racial discrimination. The vet could easily express his thoughts while the young man did nothing but listen because he has no freedom of speech. Before he got off, the vet gave the narrator a very important piece of advice that the narrator did not understand its meaning at that time. He told him that the blacks should learn to be their own masters if they want to be free. When the protagonist came to New York, he was so confident and believed that he can build his own value through his efforts and hard work. He wanted to become visible, attain an important social status in this industrial society and obtain acknowledgment through his efforts and struggle. (Jing, 2016)

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He went to a paint factory that was named Liberty with the help of the son of a trustee, Emerson; thinking that he can make his dream come true, in this place. The first thing he saw when he walked in was a huge electric sign that says “Keep America Pure with Liberty Paint.” At first, the narrator was satisfied with everything in the factory, from the work environment to the way the paint was produced. The way the product was made did not differ much from how the American society works; different races working together to produce one flawless product. In other words, the American prosperity and development cannot be separated from the contribution of the blacks; both races complete each other, just like the way this factory works. But, unfortunately, most of the times, people only focus on the final product; they only see the big image and forget about the details and how things were made.

One of the most significant events in the protagonist's journey is when he got injured during his work in the Liberty Paints factory and was sent to the hospital where he was treated as a test object by the white doctors. He temporarily lost his memory and the ability to speak due to the electric shock treatments he received there. When the doctor asked about his name, his mother's name and about Buckeye The Rabbit, but the narrator could not remember anything related to his identity (his semi-conscience) (Ellison, 2014: 233). After leaving the hospital, the protagonist could not return to the paint factory, although he knew that it is difficult for an injured black man to find a job in American industrial society. (Jing, 2016)

The narrator's experience in the hospital symbolizes the racist behaviors towards the blacks even in public places, the narrator claims that “I was setting in cold white reject chair, a man was looking at me out of a bright third eye” this description refers to the white men who are white and cold, just like the doctor who enjoyed giving him the electric shock treatments, and saying that the blacks had such a rhythm dancing. Furthermore, the doctor's questions about his name and the Rabbit song related to his origins; aimed to remind him of his African origins and his slave roots (Abbot et al, 231).

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Later on, by joining the Brotherhood which is an organization that focuses on social activism, banding together to fight for people who have been “dispossessed of their heritage”, the narrator’s position within, provides him with the opportunity to impassion public speaking, he becomes the Brotherhood orator. He soon realizes that the organization does not care about individuals, but only about its benefits. They used the Invisible man as means to achieve their goals. The Brotherhood evaluates the narrator not as an individual human being but rather as an abstract symbol of his race; which is a real depiction of the reality of the American society. Foley argues, that the Brotherhood is a stand-in for the US Communist Party, with which Ellison was closely associated in the 1930s and early 1940s. As such, the text has become something of an anticommunist classic, using a sophisticated array of rhetorical strategies to link radical politics with white racism and ultimately promote an ideology of American exceptionalism”(Foley, 1997). (AMARI, 2015)

Indirectly, Ellison criticized the communist party that pretended to fights for justice and equality for all people; however, it exploits blacks and uses them to promote its own political agenda, similarly, to the novel’s event when the narrator was exploited by the Brotherhood organization and used him as means to achieve their goals (Ward et al., 2002: 50-58; Prudchenko, 2012). Ellison's protagonist experiences and memories with the racist American society show the powerful social and political forces that conspire to keep black Americans in their place, far away from equality, prosperity, and freedom.

2.5 Post-colonial Power in *Invisible Man*

Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952) brings to surface a number of post-colonial issues on a close reading. Ralph Ellison narrates the tale of African Americans being on the margin and at the bottom of the social hierarchy. African Americans have an unparalleled history which is different from any other group in America. They have a unique past which

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comprises of Africa, the Middle passage, slavery, liberation, migration to north, racism, dual identity etc. White people hold the center and their civilization is glorified, while the rest of the world comes after and is marginalized. *Invisible Man* is a story of a nameless black narrator who travels a hard and rough route to find out the hidden faces behind the mask of whiteness and even blackness.

2.5.1 Center/ Margin

The novel opens with its protagonist who tells us in the prolog that he lives in a “hole in the ground”, which is a “basement” of a building that is “rented strictly to whites”. This "section of basement" "was shut off and forgotten during nineteenth century". This means that the whites are at the "center" of the building and he is living "rent-free" in a portion which is neglected and out of use. His living away from other people, under the surface instead of on the ground among other folks shows that he is marginalized, and does not enjoy life in the center, in the hustle and bustle of civilization. He says that “I'm invisible and live in a hole, I am dead. I am neither dead nor in a state of suspended animation...I am in a state of hibernation” (Invisible Man, 1952:6). He is cast out of human beings and acquires the quality of an “other” species since hibernation is the quality of some particular animals. Then he goes on to inform the reader that his “hole is warm and full of light.” This light comes from the center "Monopolated Light & Power". The narrator carries on “a fight” with the company, and uses “their services and pay them nothing at all”. (Invisible Man 1952:5) This was his way of taking revenge.

Whenever the protagonist had to deal with people from the center, he felt marginalized and "invisible", because they would see "everything and anything except me [him]". (Invisible Man, 1952:1) This creates “invisible music of my [his] isolation” (Invisible Man, 1952:13) and made him start questioning his color and his being, “What Did I Do to Be so Black and

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Blue” (Invisible Man, 1952:8) having the answer in itself. Here the categories are fixed as white and black, colonizer and colonized. Beating up "a tall blond man" with "blue eyes" at the beginning of the prolog shows the consequence of the colonial distinction and exclusion. The colonial suppression and denial of one's/margin's proper place in the society are bound to offend and “cause us tragic trouble.” (Invisible Man, 1952:14)

As the title of the novel indicates, the protagonist has no name which symbolizes those marginalized people who possess no identity and are cut off from the center. In the first chapter, the narrator does not know himself, he is still searching for who he really is, he says "I was looking for myself", realizing that he is "nobody". After his grandparents got their freedom they were still not totally free and equal to the whites. They were told that they are "united with others" of the country but "separate like fingers of hand". (Invisible Man, 1952:15) The inability of unifying the marginalized and neglected segment of the society with the center and the advantaged shows the failure of breaking the monopoly of the colonialism. They are to remain "separate", on the edge, on the margin.

Also, the narrator's grandfather's advice makes it evident that people on the margin should develop tactics in order to be able to survive in “enemy's country”. “Our life is a war”, he says. (Invisible man, 1952: 16) This is due to colonial injustice produced by the colonial binary division of the world into the center and margin, more privileged and completely deprived. The narrator's grandfather is conscious of the whites as "other". His words show the binary of "them” and “us”. (Invisible Man, 1952:16)

On the graduation day, the narrator delivers a speech about “humility” being the “secret” and the “essence of the progress”. He is invited to make a speech again at “a gathering of the town’s leading white citizens.” (Invisible Man, 1952:17) The ceremony starts with a white "magnificent blonde stark naked" dancing in the center. The "big shots" start

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yelling at the protagonist and the other boys. "Some threatened us if we looked and others we did not". (Invisible Man, 1952:20) The colonial center does not know what they actually want from those on margin whether to enjoy the white beauty or not. Their attitude towards that woman demonstrates that they are even unable to give respect to one of their own kind. The way this blonde was treated is another example of being marginalized despite being part of the center. She is an example of "margin-in-centers". The white men "caught her" after the dance and "tossed her as college boys are tossed at a hazing". The narrator sees "the terror and the disgust in her eyes, almost like my own terror and that which I saw in some of the other boys." Here both the blonde and the black boys are marginalized and share the same feels, hate and fear for the powerful white. Both are there for the "entertainment" of the town's "big shots". (Invisible Man, 1952:17-20)

The battle royal follows the dance. Ten boys including the narrator are "ordered to get into the ring." They are "blindfolded with broad bands of white cloth." indicating whiteness is blindness because it hinders the vision to see the world around. In the ring "everyone fought hysterically" and "everybody fought everybody else". Blows, blood, sweat, smoke and shouts of the "white faces" filled the atmosphere, some crying, "I want to get at that ginger-colored nigger. Tear him from limb." others screaming, "Kill him! Kill that big boy". The whites have got mad in their frenzy. "The harder we fought the more threatening the men became." (Invisible Man, 1952:21-24)

The dehumanizing behavior of the whites reaches its peak when the boys are taken to the "electrified" "rug covered with coins". They are asked to come down "on their knees" to get the money. The whites enjoy the shrieks of the boy, their "muscles twitching like the flesh of a horse stung by many flies", their dancing on the "charged rug". It all happens "amid the booming laughter" of the whites telling them "Leggo, nigger! Leggo." (Invisible Man, 1952: 26-29)

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Fonteneau (1990) has reasoned that the narrator fails twice to see his engagement “in an ideological war between "us" and "them"” once on the occasion of the "Battle Royal" and second in the event of "Trueblood" (*Invisible Man*, 1952:411)

Those who are in the center have a terrible attitude towards those who are in the margin. They do not give any importance to them as a human being with feelings that can easily be hurt. For them, they are toys and devices that they can control and use whenever they want to feed their egos. When the narrator mistakenly utters "social equality" in his speech instead of "social responsibility", they went mad and furious and made him repeat the phrase to assure that he did not do it on purpose, it was just a mistake. And they did not miss the chance to remind him “you’ve got to know your place at all times.” (*Invisible Man*, 1952:31)

At the end of the ceremony, the narrator gets a "calfskin briefcase" with "a scholarship to the state college for Negroes." In the same night, he dreamt of his grandfather asking him to open the briefcase and read the document. The statement engraved on it “Keep This Nigger Boy Running” puzzles and perplexes the boy. But what he will endure in the future proves that his grandfather has more insight and knowledge of the colonial thinking and dealing with “them/other” than he does.

The founding father of the Negro college is nameless like the narrator indicating the lack of identity of the margins. The whites view themselves as a homogeneous group and not a heterogeneous one. The idea of considering the colonized as stereotypes lacking individuality and distinct personality is reinforced by keeping other black characters nameless such as the founding father of the Brotherhood organization which the narrator joins later. (Samina, 2013) The statue of founding father with “his hands outstretched”, “empty eyes” and

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“a kneeling slave” implies that those marginalized have to be submissive and obedient if they want success in the white world.

At college, the narrator is designated as the driver of Mr. Norton, a white trustee of the university, "a bearer of the white man's burden". The narrator blunders first in taking him away from the center to the margin "down this road" where there is "log cabin" of a sharecropper named Trueblood and then to the Golden Day, a brothel. (Invisible Man, 1952:46) Mr. Norton listens to the account of Trueblood getting his daughter pregnant. Afterward, he comes across "vets, a little shell-shocked" in the Golden day. (Invisible Man, 1952:73) He sees and listens carefully what is too much for a man of his status and [so-called] sensibilities. Norton symbolizes the center which aims to create havoc by approaching the margin that is why he was paying attention to every word he has been told; while the encounter symbolizes the meeting of the two categories the center and the margin. The two characters belong to two different and opposite races, black and white. Norton refers to the center which is at the same time the "Other" for the narrator and the narrator who is the margin and also is the "Other" for Norton. So, each of them subtends his opposite, the "Other" in this ride. (Samina, 2013)

Later on in the Brotherhood, the narrator is given a "new name" by a white brother Jack.(Invisible Man, 1952:309) The name is not exposed or revealed which means that it is the center's right and duty to decide and draw who the margin should be and what identity suit them. Those in the margin have no chance or right in deciding who they want to be and how they want to be projected to the world. It seems like "blacks and whites" work in "complete agreement" and are "absorbed with the cause" but the protagonist realizes that it is "a white man's world", where no black can share this place/center with them even after independence.

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Ralph Ellison minutely interweaves the issues of center/margin in his work *Invisible Man*. The "civilized center" conceives the margin less than men "a thing not a man" and the margin's perception of the center is more than men, "a God". The forces at the center are equated with God because of their powers to make or mar the lives of the marginalized. The niggers are "other" for the whites, different from them in status, color, they are an alien race. The vet tells Mr. Norton that the narrator believes in that "great false wisdom" which makes the slaves to learn the lesson of "white is right". (*Invisible Man*, 1952:95) The weak cannot challenge and deny those who are in power. He has no choice except to believe in the righteousness of the whites/center.

The idea of equality is unbearable for the colonial minds even at the time of post-independence as it is contradictory to the enlightened and civilized center and opposed to any savage, barbaric margin. The incidents tear apart the mask of civilization from the face of the colonizers revealing their brutal and bestial nature. Their white complexion tries hard to hide their inner ugliness and hideousness but fails miserably in achieving desired results. The tall claims of civilization and refinement are as false as the coin on the electrified rug which the narrator finds out to be fake and useless later on.

2.6 Invisibility and Blindness in *Invisible Man*

During the 40s and the 50s of the last century, new concepts emerged in the African-American literature and were revolutionary in the perception of racism and social discrimination. Ralph Ellison amongst other writers of that period went beyond the classical portrayal of the white oppression like Mark Twain's sequence *Huckleberry Finn*, and dived more into the psychological viewpoint of the black's psyche as well as the whites'.

Invisibility as Ellison argues, comes from blindness "I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me [...] When they approach me they see only my

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surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination - indeed, everything and anything except me.” (Invisible Man, 1952:3) In addition, blindness is the result of stereotypes and prejudices that were formed to view the blacks which hinder the whites to see beyond them. These prejudices are a blindfold to the whites that limits the horizon of thinking only of the skin color rather than the individual himself. The blacks also are limited in the way they conceive themselves as inferior beings than the whites. Invisibility could be interpreted as “the situation of men whose individual identity is denied.”(Lieber, 1972: 86) Ellison reflected this in his work, *Invisible man* which the title itself is self-explanatory:

That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality. (Invisible Man, 1952:3)

Many incidents in the novel about invisibility and blindness are presented in the novel using metaphors and at times symbolism. For example, when the protagonist is invited to deliver a speech about freedom in a white party, he was forced to participate in a The Battle Royal "as a part of entertainment" ; a racist show where he has to fight other blacks with blindfolded eyes which was humiliating but the blacks failed to see this act as humiliating. "All ten of us climbed under the ropes and allowed ourselves to be blindfolded with broad bands of white cloth" (Invisible Man, 1952:17). The blacks' blindness is emphasized when they allowed themselves to be blindfolded while accepting this humiliation and submit to the white stereotypes, furthermore, white bands are symbols of the whites blindness just as well, to dodge them with their traditional stereotypes were conceived by the blacks which made them believe in their inferiority to towards the whites and see themselves as mere servants.

In the royal battle, the boys were not only blindfolded but also were forced to fight against each other:

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Everyone fought hysterically. It was complete anarchy. Everybody fought everybody else. No group fought together for long. Two, three, four, fought one, and then turned to fight each other, were themselves attacked. (*Invisible Man*, 1952:19)

The blacks do not realize their humility, in addition, their blindness when they fight against each other while they should be fighting the whites instead. The blindness is mutual since both the blacks and the whites see each other as a mass rather than a distinctive individual. The blacks are disabled to perceive their personal self-worth and esteem, and the whites are trapped in their prejudices. The character has been deceived by the reality of society and its norms that tried to impose on him its expectations and limited his true self-identity, by wearing masks in order to meet people's expectation of him rather than accepting him as a human being. "I myself after existing twenty years, did not become alive until I discovered my invisibility" (*Invisible Man*, 1952:6) the protagonist embraces his invisibility after his awful experience with the whites in which he was convinced the only path to gain success and approval is by serving the whites, that are the most powerful and superior to him as he was taught.

2.7 Alienation in *Invisible Man*

Alienation has become the result of the oppression black folks had endured after they were plucked from their native lands and were dropped to distant lands by slave ships so as to be slaves. Even after the abolition of slavery, black folks were bereft of social and legal rights that White race benefited from, this led them to grow a kind feeling of estrangement. Alienation has become a constant element within the literature produced by blacks. In *Invisible Man*, alienation is formed by his society that refused to see him as an individual and from his true identity in terms of imposed stereotypical cultural heritage that he views too limited and restricted.

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The Invisible Man states, after discovering the truth about his society that keeps neglecting him, he decides to assert himself to be Invisible on account of the surrounded blind people who cannot see him for what he is. He said, "I might even be said to possess a mind. 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." (Invisible Man, 1952:03) The protagonist is able to see and notice his surroundings, but in return, he goes unnoticed; their blindness leads him to consider himself as invisible. This blindness derives from the racial prejudices about the blacks in which they were still considered as inferior to the whites, and have no privilege to be among this white society that is dominated by the whites. However, he is highly aware of a universe in which his existence is disregarded, annulled and rejected. This latter, caused him to develop a sense of alienation and estrangement from his true self. In other words, when he attempts to work in order to prove that the values of society are misguided, he developed the most hatred to himself by his society because he tried to voice the truth. Ultimately, he was left with no solution but to become invisible. The unnamed narrator, therefore, annotates, "That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality."(Invisible Man, 1952:03) This means the relationship of blind and invisible increases the development of difficulties and estrangement for his identity to be identified due to the limitation of the social prejudice. That is why, when he finds a hidden room in a "closed-off section of a basement, his mind agitates him, stirs him to thought" ("SparkNote on Invisible Man" par. 3). It is conveyed from the above that he stays in a hole to make his mind think about whom he really is and what he really wants in fact. (Bounasri, 2016)

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Accordingly, the narrator at the end comes to understand that hiding underground makes him realize that his relationship with himself does not resemble that of his society and that he is invisible but not blind. He claims, "I'm an invisible man and it placed me in a hole—or showed me the hole I was in, if you will—and I reluctantly accepted the fact," said the narrator. (*Invisible Man*, 1952:44) Consequently, the invisible man makes a deal that life is not to be controlled, life is to be lived, and "humanity is won by continuing to play in face of certain defeat. "[Their] fate is to become one, and yet many" (*Invisible Man*, 1952:447). In the hole, his grandfather's words come to his mind "agree 'em to death," and that nothing results from saying "yes" to the Brotherhood, for instance. These words, for him, must be questioned again in terms of their true meaning. He begins to wonder whether the yeses that his grandfather spoke about were an affirmation of the stereotypes and prejudices on which the country is based or are really meant to transcend the cultural heritage of that society instead. Furthermore, the nameless narrator highlights on a mishap happened on a subway, where he meets an aged white man who seemed to be lost but is ashamed to ask for direction. He then, recognizes this person or Mr. Norton that he used to accompany when this latter comes close to him and asks him how to arrive at the Centre Street. There, the narrator tries to remind him of the Golden Day, while he answers him with wanderings about why he should remember him, just for the narrator to tell him: "Because I'm your destiny . . . I made you. My destiny, did you say? , Young man, are you well? , I've lived too long in this world to be ashamed of anything [he responds]." (*Invisible Man*, 1952:448) At this stage, when a lost man asks an invisible man for direction, this seems for the narrator to be a dangerous thing which makes him see this world of estrangement as none seems to know who he is or where he is going. This very moment makes him realize his way to his identity and eventually declares, "My problem was that I always tried to go in everyone's way but my own. I have been called one thing...while no one really wished to hear what I called myself. So, after years of trying

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to adopt the opinions of others I finally rebelled. I am an invisible man.” (*Invisible Man*, 1952:444) In other words, he is now aware that if he trusts his guts and own identity, he would not allow others to complicate things as it is. He now discovers that identity lies in its authenticity which is consequently a path to his freedom. Moreover, by declaring his rebellion when he says, “I am an invisible man” (*Invisible man*,1952:03), this, in fact, means that his true identity is his real true self even if others refuse to see it and that’s the point. (Bounasri, 2016)

In the case of *Invisible Man*, the feeling of alienation is brief and prosperous for one to discover who he really is in such a world. His experience with the white society forms his initial resentment of normlessness and alienation as a result of the values of his community. It shows how blacks should be in accordance to the superior white in a first position.

2.8 The quest for Identity in *Invisible Man*

The whole novel, from the start, is wrapped upon the nameless character who takes his journey from the south to the industrial, modern north in order to seek opportunities just as any black individual at that time. Toward his adventure, the protagonist goes through a psychological journey to discover his true identity. After his confrontation with the society, the character begins to become more aware of the obstacles that he faces with the outside world, and eventually decides that he is Invisible Man.

The Case of identity has been a major concern for the African Americans; over centuries they felt the urge to define themselves and reassert their identity in various ways like literature. The novel *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison on a close reading brings to the surface the social issues of the African Americans which they encounter with a white dominant culture and values. The blacks face a hard time to establish an identity of their own without the interference of whites’ prejudices which instruct them on how they should be, instead of

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being their genuine selves. “The white world, the only honorable one, barred me from all participation. A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man—or at least like a nigger.”(Fanon, 86). In the novel, the character finds difficulty in developing his identity especially in a society that is predefined by the whites which do not recognize or see him as equal as them. For this, he tries to follow the ideals of the whites in order to have status in the society, so he neglects himself and acts in accordance to what the white man expect him to be.

“For, like almost everyone else in our country, I started out with my share of optimism. I believed in hard work and progress and action, but now, after first being 'for' society and then 'against' it, I assign myself no rank or any limit, and such an attitude is very much against the trend of the times.” (Ellison, 446)

The Invisible Man after he immigrated to the north, he believed that by serving the whites which he perceived as superior to him, will grant him success and usher him towards his true being. But he eventually realizes that he is invisible to them, and they are blind to see him without putting their prejudices on him.

“I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination -- indeed, everything and anything except me.”(03)

The protagonist struggles with white man’s prejudices and their racist view of him, they see their perception of him and their formed thoughts about the blacks, which they see him only as an inferior race but failed to see him without the interference of all these social factors that does distort his identity. These realizations were formed after the character had multiple

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experiences and situations that urged him to adopt different identities, believing that with representing to people what they expect from him to see, will ultimately earn a place in that society and they are the responsible for defining him. “I would have to weigh many things carefully before deciding and there would be some things that would cause quite a bit of trouble, simply because I had never formed a personal attitude toward so much. I had accepted the accepted attitudes and it had made life seem simple” (206).

The cultural hegemony in America privileged the European ideals and looked down upon the African American culture which planted in them the sense of inferiority. The American culture did not welcome the blacks and always put them in the margin. Invisible man because of his inferiority complex, he rejected his black heritage and identity in order to be recognized by whites, through joining the Brotherhood and working for the white leader in which he was used and manipulated for their purposes. Still, he was not acknowledged for his blackness by the whites. The psychological battle in the mind of the narrator results from the rejection of society of him he feels neither American nor African which made him ask questions like “Who am I? But it was like trying to identify one particular cell that coursed through the torpid veins of my body. Maybe I was just this blackness and bewilderment and pain, but that seemed less like a suitable answer than something I'd read somewhere.”(186)

As W.E.B Du Bois describes this phenomenon that is “peculiar” to the blacks which result from Double Consciousness where he describes it as:

“...the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his

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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.”

This double consciousness is a state of mind and a feeling where the American Negro had to endure, to live with two conflicting ‘thoughts’, ‘two souls’ and ‘two ideals’. The black is not granted any place in the white world, and his identity construction is constantly dependent on how the white will see him and define him. The western ideals are privileged and beheld as ‘right’, and anything that is outside these criteria is wrong and put in the margin. The invisible man before reaching his full realization, believed by adopting the western ideologies and mingle with the whites, he will attain success in society and will be respected. “I am not ashamed of my grandparents for having been slaves. I am only ashamed of myself for having at one time been ashamed.” (13). Before, In the Battle Royal where he was supposed to deliver a speech to the white folks, he was obliged to participate in the battle along with his black schoolmates against his will in which he knew it was going to affect the dignity of his speech. In spite of the humiliation he received from the whites, he was blind to recognize it until further incidents that happened to him.

Another marking incident is when he joined the Brotherhood; for the narrator, it was an opportunity to become visible and achieve a social hierarchy within his society. In order to accomplish his goal, he impersonated a new identity. When the leader of the association tells him to use a new name, he accepts without any hesitation, thinking of him this new identity will lead him to what he hopes. Although he adopted a new one, the protagonist still feels alien to himself and he is only embracing somebody else's' ideology. The invisible man's perception of himself is constantly affected and especially by white people who regard them as superior.

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After he was tracked down by the society, he breaks free from people's expectations and restriction that were imposed on him, whether his own black community or the whites. He finally refuges to a hole in a basement and ultimately decides that he is nobody but himself (Pryse, 9). "I was looking for myself and asking everyone except myself questions which I, and only I, could answer. It took me a long time and much painful boomeranging of my expectations to achieve a realization everyone else appears to have been born with: That I am nobody but myself." (12-13). through deciding to be himself, it enabled him to set himself free from his past and his grandfather's advice of living with two identities and embrace himself as he is and not what society told him to be. Even though living in the basement might seem as a prison, for him it was a resort from the world and the exterior conditions that may influence his decisions, and finally his identity. "So after years of trying to adopt the opinions of others, I finally rebelled. I am an *invisible* man. Thus I have come a long way and returned and boomeranged a long way from the point in society towards which I originally aspired." (Invisible Man, 1952:444)

2.9 Conclusion

Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison discussed one of the complex topics that are particular for the Africa-American literature that sprang from the social conditions of racial discrimination, alienation, and searches for identity in a white dominant culture. Ralph Ellison by writing his novel, he challenged the traditional views and ideologies that limited the perception of individual identity in the United States, instead, he wanted to show the universality of identity and it should not be restricted to race or culture.

General Conclusion

Invisible Man is reckoned to be an eminent work of African American literature, due to its bold statement about racism and the cruelty of the whites towards American minorities that are refused the rights of full citizenship and involvement in the white community.

Even though the novel shows the story from the first-person point of view, it does, however, speak for all the black Americans' condition during that period of tension and segregation in the mid-twentieth century. Ellison portrayed his character going through multiple settings like the immigration from the south to the north, as any black man used to endeavor in order to seek opportunities. He also exposed the protagonist to different situations in which he was urged to adopt different identities to fit in the white society. As an individual, the Protagonist's ambition to reach his dream was soon crushed by the bitter reality and obstacles they were put for him. He realizes that as a black man in a racist society, he will always remain at the bottom of the social hierarchy amongst the superior white race.

Ralph Ellison in his novel gave a new image of the blacks through diving to the psyche of the black individual, revealing how the blacks feel, think and react to racism and discrimination by the whites. He emphasized on the problematic of the skin color which is a burden the Negro has to cope with; the blacks will always feel inferior and as he showed in the novel, the narrator at the beginning of his journey was ashamed of his past and as a consequence he adopted many identities in a hope to be a part of the society, even if he was conscious it does not reflect who he really is.

The writer through his novel challenged the traditional views and ideologies that limited the perception of individual's identity in the United States, instead, he wanted to show the universality of identity and it should not be restricted to race or culture. The individual as

General Conclusion

Ellison claims is a complex being as he said, “We all have at least double identities.” And the person should not be defined by his race, group or in the case of the African Americans, color.

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