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Violence in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*

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Submitted by:

Loubna TAOUTAOU

Supervised by:

Mrs. Nadjiba BOUALLEGUE

Board of Examiners

Chairwoman: Mrs.Lilia BRAHMIA (MAB)
Supervisor: Mrs. Nadjiba BOUALLEGUE (MAA)
Examiner: Ms.Soumia MOUMENE (MAB)

University of 8 Mai 1945/Guelma
University of 8 Mai 1945/Guelma
University of 8 Mai 1945/Guelma

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Abstract

The thesis aims at investigating the theme of violence, its causes and its impact on African Americans' lives. The theme of violence will be studied theoretically and analyzed through Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952). The thesis examines the theme of violence from a cultural and psychological perspective. The study explores the hidden injuries of racism on the oppressed. It also shows the difficulties that the African American man endures because of whites' stereotypes. The thesis demonstrates the protagonist's experiences and how he accepts his invisibility. At the beginning, the protagonist conforms to the whites' stereotypes and obeys their orders in order to achieve his objectives. However, he realizes the danger of obeying the whites and seeks an identity of his own. The study aims to show that the acceptance of blackness is the primary way to achieve a self-definition.

Dedication

My foremost gratitude and appreciation goes to Almighty Allah who enlightened my path with faith and courage. I would like to dedicate this humble research to my dear mother who was both a father and a mother. I would like to praise my mother “LIMANE Aicha” for her endless efforts to raise and educate me. I appreciate her guidance and great love; I would like to thank her for her prayers asking God to give me strength and patience to end my thesis. Words cannot describe how much I am grateful for her sacrifices to educate me and teach me good manners. I hope God will save her for me.

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ملخص

تهدف الرسالة إلى دراسة موضوع العنف وأسبابه وأثره على حياة الأميركيين الأفارقة. سيتم دراسة موضوع العنف من الناحية النظرية وتحليلها من خلال رواية الرجل الخفي لـ رالف إليسون . الأطروحة تتناول موضوع العنف من المنظور الثقافي و النفسي. توضح الدراسة أن هناك إصابات خفية من العنصرية على المظلوم. تظهر الرسالة الصعوبات التي يتحملها الأمريكيون من اصل إفريقي بسبب الصور النمطية للبيض. الأطروحة تحلل موضوع العنف في رواية الرجل الخفي لـ رالف إليسون. توضح الأطروحة كيفية تقبل بطل الرواية لحقيقة انه خفي في أعين المجتمع. في البداية، بطل الرواية يتوافق مع الصورة النمطية للبيض ويطيع أوامرهم من أجل تحقيق أهدافه. ومع ذلك، قال انه يدرك خطورة طاعة البيض ويسعى هوية من تلقاء نفسه. وتهدف الدراسة إلى إظهار أن قبول السواد هو الوسيلة الأساسية لتحقيق الوضوح النفس.

Introduction

African American literature appeared with the emergence of slave narratives. Slave narratives are texts written by slaves to narrate their lives under slavery. Those texts were meant to show the cruel conditions that slaves endure. Then, the literary texts evolved to prove its existence within the mainstream culture and literature. African American literature examines the effects of racism upon African Americans. Racism gets the main concern in African American literature, and its effects get the wider concern. Violence of blacks is one of the major themes that are examined in modern American literature. Blacks are oppressed because of racial prejudice and injustice of whites. Racism affects peoples' lives negatively which makes people react violently toward the others. Critics agree upon the consequences of racism on the psychology and behavior of the oppressed. However, some critics blame the African American man for his violence. African Americans are always called as illiterate and uncivilized people. The opinions differ upon the reasons of violence; but they agree on the fact that violence is one of the primary effects of racial prejudice and injustice.

The reason behind the choice of the subject is a way to stress the struggle of African Americans to live in harmony in America. In addition, to support the African Americans' cause in asking for equal opportunities. The thesis seeks to relate blacks' violence primarily to the issue of racism. In addition, it seeks to reveal the other negative impacts of racism on the oppressed. The study will be confined to Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952). The choice of the novel is a mere admiration of Ellison's interest in the individual's life as free and independent person however belongs to the American society.

The thesis uses the postcolonial approach in order to examine the situation of African Americans in America. It stresses the marginalization and alienation they endure as a minority in the mainstream culture. It is also used to figure out the relationship between

violence and racism. Psychoanalytic approach is used to study the behaviors of the protagonist who depicts the experiences of any African American man facing racism. It studies the effects of racism on the protagonist's psychology, and seeks to explore consequences of his violence.

The thesis will be divided into three chapters. The first chapter will be a theoretical overview of violence in African American community. The first chapter is divided into four sections. The first section examines the phenomenon of violence from a cultural perspective in relation to racial discrimination. The origin of the concept of racism will be traced, as well as the reasons behind creating this concept. The second section examines the concept of violence from psychological perspective, to study the effect of racism upon African Americans. All the psychological effects of racism will be traced in the second section. The third section is an overview of African American literature. The scope of African American literature will show how much African Americans struggled to survive in the American society. It also tackles their effort to create an independent zone for African American literature in the mainstream literature. The fourth section is a biographical sketch of Ralph Ellison's life.

The second chapter will be an analysis of Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*. It will seek to show the mechanisms of violence when it is practiced by whites or blacks. The chapter will be divided into two sections. The first section is a study of violence of whites in the novel. It will show whites' violence over blacks. How they treat blacks as inferior. It will shed light on the violent side of Americans. The second section will study violence of blacks as well in the novel. Character analysis will be a tool of analyzing the reason behind blacks' violence. It will show that there is an interchangeable violence between whites and blacks. In addition, the second section will highlight blacks' violence as a way to seek revenge for not being able to prove them.

The third chapter will demonstrate how the feeling of alienation can cause violence. The theme of alienation will be defined sociologically and psychologically. Alienation will be linked to African Americans living in the American society. The chapter will show the protagonist's transition from a naïve young man to a mature person. It will show the journey of the invisible man to self-definition throughout the novel through a series of personal experiences as an invisible man. In addition, it will show life under hibernation and how it helps him seek redemption and self-definition. The decision that the protagonist takes at the end to end his invisibility indicates that he finally achieves reconciliation.

In conclusion, the purpose of the thesis is to highlight the conditions of African Americans through one unnamed character. The thesis aims at emphasizing the dangerous effects of racism on people. Violence does not mean that blacks are violent because they are uncivilized as whites describe them. In case of oppression and discrimination violence must be the result of racism.

Chapter One

A Theoretical Examination of Violence against African Americans

This chapter is a theoretical overview of violence in African American community. It is divided into four sections. The first section examines the phenomenon of violence from a cultural perspective; it emphasizes the racial discrimination that African Americans are subject to. The second section of the chapter tackles the issue of violence from a psychological perspective by showing the devastating impact of white man's violence on the African American psyche. The third section of the chapter is an overview of African American literature. The last section offers key facts about Ralph Ellison's life.

1.1. A Cultural Perspective of Violence

Over centuries, blacks were enduring harsh and cruel treatment from whites, beginning with the merchandise of blacks by the European immigrants to the new continent. In addition, the era of slavery was characterized by discrimination and racism in America. This racial discrimination resulted in violence against blacks. White people were racist because of the feeling of superiority they had, they became violent and they gave themselves the right to dominate the others by all means even violence.

In *The African American Male, Writing, and Difference*, W. Lawrence Hogue argues, "In the United States, the African American is constituted in a white/black binary of signification that defines whites as normative and superior and that represents blacks as victim, as inferior, as devalued other" (1). W. Lawrence Hogue examines the concept of binary opposition¹ of white/ black in his book from a cultural, political and historical concept. Hogue believes that this binary opposition is first built up on the presumption that whites or Americans are superior due to their European origins. This superiority stems from their idea

that they are the first to discover the new world in one hand, and in the other hand, they dominate the world trade.

Hogue argues that, “The so-called voyages of “discovery” inaugurated modernity, catalyzing a new epoch of European colonial expansion that culminated in its domination of the globe. For many revisionist historians, 1492 installed the mechanism of systematic advantage that favored Europe against its African and Asian rivals” (14). The author relates Europeans or whites feeling of superiority to their discovery of America, their dominance of the world trade as well as their exploitation of African and Asian resources. The European colonial expansion gave them the opportunity to think that they are dominant. Also, they give themselves the right to be violent and they show this violence in different ways. This phenomenon goes way back for many centuries ago beginning with the colonization and taking peoples’ lives and belongings, as declared by Hogue:

Europe’s dominance after 1492 resulted not from any internal immanent forces or from an inherent superiority of mind, culture, or environment, or because Europe was more progressive, venturesome, and achievement oriented. Rather, its rise was fueled by the riches and spoils obtained in the conquest and colonial exploitation of America and later of Africa and Asia. (14)

Hogue states that in addition to this classical European colonialism, “internal colonialism” (23) is another factor of the white/ black binary opposition. He explains that, “Internal colonialism, like classical European colonialism, is characterized by a structured relationship of domination and subordination.” In addition to that, he argues that in the United States, internal colonialism does not differ from the European colonialism, in which the white/ black binary signification is built up on the structured relationship of white domination and black subordination.

The author attempts to reveal the concept of white/ black binary opposition and its origin. He also stresses its impact on Africans in the American society in different aspects: social, political and educational. In one hand, racism and discrimination are the core results of whites' colonialism and domination and in the other hand slavery is the beginning of this binary opposition. Referring to Africans as "Negroes" is the first attempt of calling them slaves.

In "Edward Said: The postcolonial Theory and the Literature of Decolonization", Lutfi Hamadi attempts to discuss Said's theory of postcolonialism where he emphasizes on the European colonialism in the east, its impact on people and how it affected them in different ways in their lives. He also shows how this colonialism resulted in cutting the world into two halves the West as superior and dominant and the East as inferior, uncivilized or as the Other². Consequently, the west justifies colonizing the East as a way to civilize it (40).

Hamadi explains Said's criticism of European imperialist intentions where he stresses on the impacts of the European colonialism on peoples' lives and even literature. He shows how it affects their lives even when this direct colonialism is replaced by an indirect form of colonialism. Hamadi argues that Said believes that the ideology of binary signification of West/East is only a preparation and justification for colonizing the orient, as well as the residues of this colonialism. In addition, Hamadi explains how Said emphasizes the situation after independence which does not differ very much from the previous situation of colonialism. Furthermore, it becomes worse than before. Because of decolonization countries enter in a dilemma of civil wars and chaos. People also begin to fight each other for unworthy matters.

Hamadi attempts to reveal that violence is one of the side effects and horrors of colonialism. Furthermore, it does not disappear with the end of colonialism, as a matter of fact, it brings other forms of harm to people as Hamadi mentions as corruption and civil wars.

As a result, violence affects the colonized people in a negative way where the colonized subject turns to be violent toward himself in one hand, and in the other hand, he turns to be violent against his people.

In “A History: The Construction of Race and Racism”, David Rogers and Moira Bowman attempt to reveal the construction of the term racism. They also reveal its relationship with the non-white people and how Europeans coined the term race. They show how Europeans invented the term race in order to be superior and dominate the other nations. Rogers and Bowman define racism as follows, “The concept of race was created as a classification of human beings with the purpose of giving power to white people and to legitimize the dominance of white people over non-white people” (2).

Rogers and Bowman argue that Europeans used religion, science, medicine and social science as evidence to dominate people. The immigration of Europeans to the new continent during the 16th and 17th century shows the methods of European imperialism. These immigrants used religion as a reason for colonizing people. Actually, religion was used as means to justify the racist divisions that distinguish whites from people of color as blacks and Indians. As Rogers and Bowman claim that: “With the increasing importance of slavery, religion was used as a means to justify racist divisions, classifying people of color as ‘pagan and soulless’ (3).

Furthermore, the term “people of color” is another justification for racist divisions. Rogers and Bowman claim that, “People of color is not a term that refers to a real biological or scientific distinction between people. People of color in the U.S. share the common experience of being targeted and oppressed by racism. Unfortunately, one of the ways racism operates is to keep people of color divided.” (13). Consequently, black people pay for their biological distinction and all they get back is oppression, discrimination, racism as well as inferiority and otherness.

Violence results from the exploitation of whites and it appears first with slavery which lasted for centuries. Slavery shaped the lives of African Americans in many ways. Authors and theorists discussed the issue of slavery from different perspectives. In “Reflections on the History of White Supremacy in the United States”, William J. Gardiner reflects the reasons behind white supremacy³. He claims that Europeans colonialism was the first important factor behind inventing the “term” white supremacy, in order to maintain power, wealth and privilege (1).

In addition, Gardiner believes that there are several reasons for the invention of white supremacy including maintaining control over Native Americans in the 1500 s as well as the Africans when they were brought and enslaved by whites. They used blackness to justify their enslavement. Gardiner also declares that with the enslavement of blacks came the black race and with the development of the latter came the white race (3). Gardiner argues that: “Just as the conquest of Native Americans shaped white supremacy so did the enslavement of African peoples” (6). Gardiner attempts to introduce the real factors behind ‘white supremacy’. He also explains the direct relationship between slavery and whites’ superiority.

Gardiner explores the factors that have established the superiority of whites and led to the exploitation of other races, he argues that: “Three important factors led to the social construction of whiteness in relation to African peoples: the need for cheap labor, the desire for social control, and the fear of insurrection.” Gardiner attempts to shed light on whites’ treatment of blacks. First, they started to bring and enslave blacks for work and cheap labor; they invented white supremacy in order to justify their actions. Second, European indentured servants were replaced by African indentured workers, because Europeans escaped the horrible social and living conditions in Europe seeking economic opportunity, political and religious freedom. They were working in tobacco farming in much more harsh conditions. As a result, the need for other workers as Africans solved the problem of severe tobacco labor

which caused death for many Europeans. Third, instilling in blacks the feeling of inferiority to prevent any sort of rebellion (6-7). Thus, This black race becomes synonymous to inferiority. The feeling of inferiority has a devastating impact on the psyche of African Americans.

1.2. A Psychological Perspective of Violence

Throughout many years, African Americans endured severe conditions which affected them physically and psychologically. African American people reacted to the horrible conditions of slavery and racism in different ways. As a matter of fact violence was one of the impacts of racism and discrimination. African American literature examines the issues that black people suffer because of racial prejudice and discrimination. African American writers tackle racism and its effects-violence and depression- on the psychology of black people.

In “What is Internalized Racial Oppression and Why Don’t We Study It? Acknowledging Racism’s Hidden Injuries”, Karen D. Pyke examines the injuries of racism on the psyche of the oppressed. He firstly shows how the oppressed reacts and tries to adjust in the white dominant society. Pyke explains that in order to co-exist in the dominant white mainstream, people of color go to “cosmetic surgery”, “skin lightening” and other similar actions in order to get a more “white-like appearance”. Such actions are reactions of the oppressed to feel more confident about himself and enhance his psychology which is damaged by racism (253-4).

The issue of violence has been discussed among youth and the reasons behind their violence. The idea of gangs is stressed where youth integrate in such antisocial groups in order to feel confident and seek a self-definition and to find peer friends. In addition, 90% of

gangs members are of ethnic minority; the majority is either African American or Hispanic (Commission on Youth and Violence 29). “Part of the explanation for the prevalence of gang membership in these communities may lie in the stressful environment of poverty, unemployment, and economic and social inequality in which these ethnic minority youth live” (Commission on Youth and Violence 30). Youth use gangs and violence as a way to achieve self-definition, belonging and self-esteem in a community where they are treated as inferior and underachieving members of the American society. Because of the stressful conditions they face every day, they behave violently to overcome these conditions. Violent mobs like gang participation are another example of psychological needs where youth fulfill their psychological needs: “Mob violence, like gang participation, can serve many psychosocial needs. These include the need to enhance self-esteem, to correct perceived injustices, to devalue the person or property that is the target of the violence, to create social change, or to benefit materially.”

Furthermore, culture is another factor that shapes individual behavior in a community. It is important because it “serves to bind groups together, to provide a set of norms that guide behavior, and to help shape the identity of the group” (Commission on Youth and Violence 36). Culture in the American society differentiates between people since the American society is a multicultural one. A multicultural society is normally a culture that welcomes differences. However, ethnic minority youth receive “hostile and devaluing messages from the mainstream culture”. Their culture is an inferior one in comparison to the mainstream culture. Culture can work in two opposite facets. In one hand, it can protect youth from violence when it connects the mainstream culture with ethnic cultures and create cohesion between the two cultures. In the other hand, it fails to protect youth because of the conflict between the mainstream culture and the ethnic culture (Commission on Youth and Violence 37).

To conclude: “When ethnic minority youth have few pathways to participation in mainstream American culture, the stage is set for violence” (Commission on Youth and Violence 37). Youth of ethnic minority have small to no chances in economic and social opportunities which has a risk for involvement in violence, especially that the ethnic minority culture is underestimated by the dominant culture.

The violence that characterized ethnic cultures is powerfully depicted in literature. African American literature deals with the issues that blacks endure in the American society as racism, discrimination, patriarchy and its effects on blacks physically and psychologically. In “Racialism, Violence and Cruelty in Alice Walker’s Works”, Kumar E and Dr R Mummatchi argue that the contribution of the three notable works Richard Wright’s *Native Son*, Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* and James Baldwin’s *Go Tell it to On Mountain* show the effects of racial prejudice on blacks in white America. The three novels reveal the breaking effects of racism on the psychology of blacks. Kumar E and Dr R Mummatchi reveal those effects as frustration, alienation, despair, fear, shame, humiliation and guilt (39).

In “He Was Something He Hated: “Psychologically Internalized Racism in Richard Wright’s *Native Son*”, Jake Alspaugh discusses the notable masterpiece of Richard Wright *Native Son*. The story of the protagonist is about a young African American Bigger Thomas, whose life is ruined because of the effects of racism on his psyche. Alspaugh believes that his personality is ruled by terror, fear, shame and hatred. Wright also explores the negative psychological effects of racism on characters which are destructive. Bigger Thomas’s life was damaged because he died in the electric chair as a punishment for the crime he committed. Alspaugh argues that through Wright’s novel racism and discrimination destroyed the lives of African Americans and even white Americans. The internalization of racism hatred damaged the psyches of African Americans which are shown through Bigger’s violent, fearful and hateful characterization (3-4).

In their article “Violence in African American Literature: a Comparative Analysis of Richard Wright’s *The Man Who Killed a Shadow* and James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time*”, Ogunyemi and Christopher Babatunde discuss the literary tools that African American writers use in their fiction in order to demonstrate violence. Among African American writers, James Baldwin is one of the writers who chose violence to describe the effects of racist system on black people. Ogunyemi and Babatunde state that James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time* (1963) opens with a dedicatory letter to his nephew where he advises him how to confront racism and discrimination (7). Furthermore, Baldwin’s character Cum in *The Fire Next Time* is a depressed and violent thirteen year old boy. Ogunyemi and Babatunde argue that: “Fire Next Time is a quit warning against depression and intimidation of a thirteen year old boy” (13). The outcome of the boy’s depression and intimidation is explained as violence, Baldwin’s character reacts to the fear and anxiety he feels.

Kumar and Mummatchi discuss Alice Walker’s works and how they contribute to face and fight the effects of internalized racism. Women were the interest of Alice Walker when it comes to racism and sexism together:

Her early poems, novel and short stories deal with themes familiar to readers. Rape, violence, isolation, troubled relationships, multi-generational perspectives sexism and racism. Alice Walker’s works typically focus on the struggles of African Americans particularly women and their struggle against a racist, sexist and violent society.

(Kumar E and R Mummatchi 42)

The psychological effects of sexism and racism on women are the first concern for Alice Walker. Kumar and Mummatchi declare that Walker deals with the difficulties that blacks live and endure in the American society whether individual or family problems. They assume that racism, sexism reflect the psychology of African Americans which lead them to depression, isolation and violence. Kumar and Mummatchi argue that Walker in her novels

as *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970) links the change of a person with the change of the society. Also, violence that the family members impose on each other in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970) is the direct outcome of internalized racism (Racialism, Violence and Cruelty 43).

When black men fail to protect themselves and their families they feel hopeless, weak and worthless. Consequently, they turn on each other when they feel lonely and unable to be themselves. When they pretend to be somebody else to please the society or people around them, their situation worsens. Racism forces black men to hold their pain inside, which complicates the problem and aggravates the mental disorders they already have.

Besides the social and daily-life conditions that African men endure, being a black man is exhausting enough when living in the American society. Furthermore, the situation of black women is more complex; there are many disastrous factors that harm a black woman physically and psychologically, as Kumar and Mummatchi state that African Americans lived in traumatic conditions in America. The societal and psychological restrictions of racism, sexism and classism affected black people as a whole and women, in particular (43).

Kumar and Mummatchi believe that women suffered from sexual abuse which dates back to the era of slavery as a cruel reality of racism, where black women were exploited sexually from white and even black men. Sexism oppressed black women physically and mentally. It made black women grieve and hold the liabilities and burden of being of a black race and a woman at the same time. In addition, because of their race they were relegated as underclass race. Women face another kind of oppression; classism which classifies African Americans as the lowest race compared to white Americans.

Black women had to face daily the truth of being inferior when it comes to race or gender. They also face their class classification as the lower race which makes it hard enough to approximate the norms in the American society. In short, as Kumar and Mummatchi argue

that: “to be black and female is to suffer from the twin disadvantages of racial discrimination and pronounced gender bias” (44). Throughout history, women suffered of being treated as inferior to men. They lived in a male-dominated society where all their rights were neglected. When it comes to black women, they suffer from both gender discrimination and racial discrimination. They deal with two kinds of oppression which make them suffer in harsh conditions.

1.3. An overview of African American literature

Throughout history, black authors have tackled social injustice and celebrated African folklore, oral culture and traditions in their writing. They have explored different genres as poetry, drama, novels, short stories and essays. Black authors raged against slavery, racism and segregation by all means. During the enslavement era, blacks were denied the right to read and write, however, this did not stop them from achieving their goal. They learnt how to read and write and there appeared some noticeable black slave writings. Those writings narrate the life of blacks under slavery which is known as slave narrative. With time, the genre of writing changed, African American writers upgraded to other themes and genres as poetry, drama and novels.

For some critics African American literature begins with slave writings. There were some noticeable slave narratives either written by the slaves themselves, or written by white writers. In her article “Slave Narratives”, Rebecca Berne discusses the narrative of a fugitive slave named John Thompson. He has written an autobiographical story of his life under slavery entitled *The Life of John Thompson, a Fugitive Slave; Containing His History of Twenty-five Years in Bondage, and His Providential Escape. Written by Himself (1856)*. Berne argues that slave narrative as a literary genre is in fact a piece of history. It depicts the real life of slaves during antebellum period; it is not a fictional story. Slave narratives represent the true identity of an African American far beyond from the dehumanization and

treatment of slaveholders toward black people. Slave narratives serve as evidence for the cruelty and injustice of slavery; it also aims to present African Americans as humans and individuals not as property of whites (1081). Furthermore, slave narratives contribute to show the realities behind enslavement; they falsify the wrong images of white slaveholders who tended to picture the slave institution as a natural phenomenon. They also give space to the oppressed to tell their stories from their point of view which fully contradicts the legends of their holders.

Ability of slaves' intellectual skills to produce a piece of literature was questioned, as well as, the accuracy of their stories. All slaves were illiterate because they were denied the right to read. However, the ability of slave to write his autobiography contributed to acknowledge a slave as a human being who is able of producing a meaningful text. Berne states that: "To have the mental facilities to write one's own autobiography elevated the slave narrator from the status of "chattel" to the status of "human being" (1082). Writing a slave narrative requires the mental ability to produce a piece of literature, and it contributes to change the status of the slave narrator as the author describes from a "chattel" to "human being". In addition, Berne asserts that those slave narratives contributed to authenticate the horrible facts of the life of a slave either of being an illiterate, or the scary truths blacks reveal about their lives during slavery. These authors required a new form of writing to convey the horrible truths of the suffering in a manner that attracts more readers. This manner lied mainly in the art of fiction.

In his essay "Freeing the Voice, Creating the Self: the Novel and Slavery", Christopher Mulvey states that African Americans moved from writing narratives to writing novels. The early written novels were not of a great success since African American writers jumped from writing authentic narratives to imaginative ones. Mulvey states that questions were raised for the origin of African American fiction, is it truly a product of black or white?

Or is it an authentic production or an imitation of American literature? Does it help or hinder the African American cause? (18).

The transition from writing slave narratives to novels or fiction raised many doubts about the originality of African American literature. The emergence of African American fiction has a positive side that differentiates it from other genres of fiction; the African American fiction is related to the slave narratives. Mulvey claims that: "Texts come from texts, and two answers have been given for the starting point of these texts: the black slave narrative and the white popular novel. The fact is that the African American fiction is rooted in both, but it owes its distinctiveness to the slave narrative" (18).

Moving from one genre to another, African American writers succeeded to have a literature of their own based on the slave narrative, however distinctive and unique from the American literature. In his essay "Slave Narrative", Terry Novac claims that after the successful publication of slave narratives, some writers accomplished a career in speaking, as well as being an abolitionist leader. Novac states that Frederick Douglass is an example of success in writing a slave narrative; Douglass became a leader for an abolition movement only by spreading his tales about slavery to the people. Such success in writing slave narratives created a space for new participation in writing fiction by African Americans. African American writers started writing fictional events about problems of slavery. Even white writers attempted to use the genre in writing novels about slavery in order to pursue the publishing success (392). Many African American writers followed Douglass's genre of writing encouraging racial uplift as a quest for freedom and social equality but in different ways and means.

In her essay "Racial Uplift and the Literature of the New Negro", Marlon B. Ross believes that Booker T. Washington's masterpiece *Up from Slavery* (1901) is an uplift autobiography which emphasizes masculinity. As Douglass's autobiography, Washington's

autobiography also draws his way from slavery to a too head of the Negro racial family.

Douglass emphasizes violence against white men's oppression, whereas Washington defies slavery with repressing his hostility in order to achieve manhood and self-assertion.

Washington's way of escaping slavery to manhood and recognition helped him to enter the Hampton Institute. Ross believes that W.E.B Du Bois with *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) reacted to the New Negro leadership. He criticized the idea of accepting the situation of being a slave, as well as trying to prove oneself in a society. He attacked the model of the New Negro leadership, Ross argues that Du Bois believes that they insist on self-respect and at the same time they surrender to subordination (159).

The African American novel has flourished after the period of slavery. Writers joined the contemporary literary movements such as realism, modernism and postmodernism. In his essay "Reconstructing the Race: the Novel after Slavery", M. Giulia Fabi asserts that African American writers tackled different types of novels, they wrote political, utopian religious and historical novels. African American writers raged against stereotypes and prejudices in the mainstream American literature and culture. They used writing fiction as means for standing along with the dominant literature. They created a space for a new literature based upon blending different genres in one novel; to give their novels strength and distinctiveness. Fabi claims that the novels of, Charles W. Chesnutt, Frances E. W. Harper, Pauline E. Hopkins, Sutton E. Griggs, Katherine Davis Chapman Tillman, J. McHenry Jones, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and W. E.B. Du Bois are good examples of blending different genres in one fiction. He claims that they use realism with romance, the use of oral folk tradition, as well as utopian themes with political ones (34).

Response and reaction toward segregation, racial injustice and stereotypes contributed in the flowering of African American literature. Fabi argues that: "literature was a powerful tool to combat prevalent racial stereotypes, to reinforce the cultural pride and self-awareness

of African Americans, and to foster the process of racial uplift” (36). Writers used literature as a tool to address the issues they face of racial segregation and stereotypes; they deal with those issues in fiction through depicting real events in a fictional way. They embrace their case of freedom and equality through writing novels, in order to spread self-awareness among African Americans.

The development of African American literature was widely affected by the Harlem Renaissance that took place in Harlem, New York after World War One. The literary movement known as Negro Renaissance witnessed notable novels tackling different themes, however collectively concentrating on contemporary life. As George Hutchinson claims in his essay “The Novel of the Negro Renaissance”, “despite great variations in theme, cultural politics, and aesthetic approach. Collectively, the novels are notable for their concentration on contemporary life and its social and cultural instability – its “modernity” (50). Beyond the issue of racism and discrimination that African American novels deal with, contemporary life is the common theme between different genres of novels. Black authors focused on the rapidity and instability of life at that time.

Black fiction during the Negro Renaissance saw a blending of race, class, gender, and sexuality in one novel. Hutchinson argues that Rudolph Fisher’s first novel, *The Walls of Jericho* (1928) depicts the blending of different themes in one black fiction. Hutchinson claims that the focus of the novel is on black men. Fisher also emphasizes on the class division between professionals and working-class men. In addition to how black men should join together and fight the barriers to self-knowledge, Hutchinson believes that Fisher tackles the psychological impact of white racism and historical trauma. Hutchinson states that: “Men turn the anger born of that trauma toward each other, or remain imprisoned by an obsessive hatred that isolates them and prevents self-knowledge ... affects their relationships with each other as well as with women” (55). Black fiction during the Negro Renaissance tackled

several issues that black people suffer in the American society. It also focuses on the impact of this suffering on the psyche of African Americans and their lives.

In response to the literary works of the New Negro Movement of the 1920's, a series of works that emphasized nationalism and critiques of racism were produced. In their essay "Reform and Revolution 1965-1976: the Black Aesthetic at Work", James. E Smethurst and Howard Rambsy II claim that the black literary art of 1960's and 1970's achieved a high level of "national visibility". Black poets, theorists and literary critics have written works that witnessed the turning point in the development and value of African American literature. Smethurt and Rambsy argue that this progressive era and burst in black literary art is known as the "Black Arts Movement". Two books illustrate the success of the era of the Black Arts Movement, *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing* (1968) edited by Le Roi Jones (Amiri Baraka) and Larry Neal (1937–81) and *The Black Aesthetic* (1971) edited by Addison Gayle (1932–91). Smethurt and Rambsy state that: "poets, playwrights, fiction writers, and essayists composed works that celebrated African American culture, critiqued anti-black racism, and promoted black liberation. At the same time, anthologists, magazine editors, and publishers created or sustained venues for the wide transmission of black literary art" (405).

The high production of aesthetic works contributed at identifying an era entitled the Black Arts Movement. The celebration of black culture and the demand for blacks' freedom were very encouraging at creating such noticeable literary works. In addition, the role of editors, publishers and magazine editors helped in achieving their goal and transmit their culture.

In the article "Introduction", Pankaj states that, during the mid twentieth century and after the influential socio political texts of Washington's *Up from Slavery* (1901), Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,

the literary works of Richard Wright, James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison shaped the contemporary African American literature. Wright's *Native Son* (1940), Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Baldwin's volume of essays *The Fire Next Time* argued for social and cultural liberation of African Americans. Their writings supported and boosted the cause of Civil Rights Movement; they tackled the psychology of an African American man in the American society (1-2).

Women's writing contributed to the recognition of African American literature with noticeable literary works which reinforced its position within the mainstream literature. In her thesis "Discovering African American Culture through African American Literature", Magdalena Hajkova argues that women writers reacted to the male-dominated last decade of literature. Hajkova asserts that because of the claim and fight for black peoples' rights, women realized that they are fighting on two fronts: a white-dominated society and a male-dominated society as well. As a result, women decided to explore the literary stream, women's writing depicted the real images of all the prejudice, hatred and racism that the black community is subject to. They tended to show the true situation of blacks that contradicted the image of a unified and harmonious community (21).

In "African American Women Writers of the 20th Century", the issue of African American women's oppression is discussed. African American women suffer from unfair treatment from their black men as they suffer from white men. African American women were raped, humiliated and beaten by white men as they did with African American males. Oppression of racism, gender and classism worked as a motivation for women to defend their rights through writing. African American writers tackled the issue of a black woman living under oppression and patriarchy because of her black color. When both African American men and women were asking for equal rights with white people, black males were supporting patriarchy, as well as encouraging women to settle for a submissive role in the society (8-9).

Whites' exploitation of the African American women exceeded to black males, unity and harmony in black families were questioned and the reality of oppression, violence of women appeared in African American female writing. The shameful reality about black males' patriarchal prejudice raised criticism about women's writing that it showed the black community as only patriarchal and sexist ("African American Women" 9).

In his thesis "Postcolonial African American Female Writers and their Three-Way battle against Imperialism, Canonization, and Sexism: Developing a New Multicultural Feminism", Damion O.Lewis states that Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is one of the successful and noticeable female writing. However, *The Color Purple* was criticized for depicting black males as sexist and abusive men as Lewis claims that: "Walker's writing has been criticized for themes that include a negative portrayal of black men" (33). In addition, Walker was criticized for representing the sexual history of her protagonist Celie. The ugly truth about women's subordination is shown through Celie's character, "Celie reveals the ugly, but very real existence of male bigotry" (34). Besides portraying black men negatively, Walker is also criticized for tackling only the issues of patriarchy and sexism.

Female writing sheds light on the role of woman in a community, woman-mother and mother-daughter relationship. Hajkova states that: "Examples can be found, among others, in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), June Jordan – *His Own Where* (1970), and Alice Walker – *The Color Purple* (1982)" (22). The literary works of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker are the most crucial works that defend women's rights and equality with men (22).

In the progress of the African American literature, the era of the 1970's witnessed a variation in the literary genres. Authors have experimented different genres of writing and created new ones. The neo-slave narrative is one of the new genres of African American fiction. In his essay "Neo-slave Narratives", Madhu Dubey claims that writers have honored their past known as slavery in the contemporary African American literature. Dubey states

that: “Since the 1970s, African American writers have insistently revisited earlier historical periods, in particular the era of slavery” (332).

The neo-slave narratives are similar in themes with the earlier slave narratives, whereas the difference lies in the fictional events about slavery that constitute the events of the novel. Dubey argues that Margaret Walker’s *Jubilee* (1966) motivated writing fiction about slavery. The neo-slave narrative was popular until the twenty first century. In addition to neo-slave narratives a multiplicity of genres appeared as science fiction and realist historical fiction. The neo-slave narrative is a term coined by Bernard Bell and defined as “modern narratives of escape from bondage to freedom” (qtd in Dubey 332). The term is used to describe fiction about slavery published since the 1970’s.

Toni Morrison is one the most celebrated authors in modern African American literature. In *African American Writers*, Philip Bader argues that: “Toni Morrison popularized what has come to be known as the neo-slave narrative, in which modern authors use the context of slavery as a political and creative framework for their fiction” (x). When Toni Morrison published the Pulitzer Prize winning *Beloved* (1987), Bader argues that the novel is “one of the most acclaimed examples of the neo-slave narrative and a classic of contemporary American fiction” (x). In 1993, Morrison won the Noble Prize in literature; the prize demonstrated the value of African American literature and fruitful, limitless efforts of its writers. African American writing is a literary canon that reflected America and the world.

1.4. Authorial background

Ralph Ellison is one of the key figures of African American literature. His masterpiece *Invisible Man* (1952) shaped the history of African American literature. It is considered to be a distinguished novel of the century. *Invisible man* mixes art, literature and music in one outstanding African American novel. Ellison uses irony to describe and depict the harsh conditions that African Americans endure in a racist community.

In his book *Ralph Ellison's invisible man*, Harold Bloom states that Ralph Waldo Ellison was born on March 1, 1914, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. His father, Lewis Ellison died when he was three years old; he was a construction worker and tradesman. His mother, Ida Millsap, worked as a domestic servant but was active in radical politics for many years. He attended Douglass High School in Oklahoma City, where he learned the soprano saxophone, trumpet, and other instruments, playing both jazz and light classical music (12).

In *African American Writers*, Philip Bader states that Ralph Ellison was an excellent student in the Douglass High School. He attended the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama; in 1933 he earned a scholarship to study music composition and literature. He left school because of financial difficulties. In 1936 he moved to New York where he met Richard Wright and became friends. Wright encouraged him to pursue a career as a writer. In 1938, he joined the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration as an author of African American folklore. He published several essays and stories in small periodicals, and in 1942 he worked as a managing editor of *Negro Quarterly*. He began to work on his first novel when he received the Roesnwald Fellowship (79).

Ellison married Fanny McConnell in 1946, published reviews and short stories, and worked as a photographer to support himself while writing his first novel. An author, novelist, short story writer, essayist, literary critic, and educator, Ralph Ellison achieved international acclaim as a writer with the publication of his first novel *Invisible Man*.

In his book *Ralph Ellison's The Invisible Man*, Anthony S. Abbott argues that as soon as *Invisible Man* was published in 1952 by an unknown African American named Ralph Waldo Ellison, reviews were enormously being held. Soon later, in 1953 Ellison won a prestigious National Book Award for Fiction. Suddenly, he was asked for interviews, lectures and he was compared to other notable authors like Richard Wright, Herman Melville, Mark

Twain, Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner. In 1965, the novel took much credit when it was distinguished as one of the most influential novels of the past twenty years (7).

Harold Bloom claims that Ellison was preparing to publish another novel after the publication of *Invisible Man*. The novel remained unfinished because he has published parts of it as short stories. He also published another collection of essays entitled *Going to the Territory* (1986). He lectured at several colleges for two decades after the publication of *Invisible Man*. Ralph Ellison held a fellowship of the American Academy of Arts and Letters in Rome from 1955 to 1957 and received the United States Medal of Freedom in 1969. He worked as a trustee of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Ralph Ellison died in New York City on April 16, 1994 (13).

Philip Bader asserts that after the death of Ralph Ellison, two collections were published, *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison* (1995) and *Flying Home and Other Stories* (1996), and the publication of his unfinished novel *Juneteenth* in 1999 (80). The city of New York built a monument of Ralph Ellison in West Harlem on May 2nd, 2003. The monument depicts a human figure that represents the protagonist of Ellison's classic novel *Invisible Man*.

The story of *Invisible Man* opens with a prologue. In the prologue, the unnamed narrator describes his "hibernation" in a basement which is illuminated by 1369 lamps. The African American male protagonist describes the social and political situation of the first half of the twentieth century. Racial prejudice and black oppression uncover reasons behind his "invisibility" when he says in the prologue "I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me" (Ellison 5).

In the prologue, the protagonist tells about the humiliation and injustice that he suffers from, and how this leads to his hibernation and invisibility. He also shows that he benefits from his invisibility. Through this hibernation, he struggles to understand his own identity.

The narrator listens constantly to Louis Armstrong's song "What did I do to be so black and blue".

Throughout the story, the invisible man explains how he escapes to live in the basement to hide and get away from all the betrayal, humiliation and confusion that he suffers from. In his various roles as promising college student, factory worker, and associate of Ras the Destroyer, an influential leader of a Black Nationalist movement, the narrator attempts to identify with various social and cultural groups. Inevitably, though, these efforts lead to alienation and the threat of physical harm (African American Writers 80).

In the novel's epilogue, the narrator explains how he decides to abandon his hibernation and return to society. He is conscious that the former conceptions he has about the world are not all true; he knows now that people are not all similar. His decision to confront the world and abandon his hibernation depicts the end of the story, but symbolizes his new beginning with an optimistic view about the world and how it operates.

African American literature attempts to show the horrible conditions and violence that blacks endure. It seeks different goals. Freedom was the first goal to achieve. African American literature enhanced the demands of blacks and reinforced them. It created a zone for African American people in a society monitored by racism and discrimination. The combat of black authors succeeded to achieve the demands of social equality and recognition of African American literature.

Chapter Two

White Violence versus Black Violence in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*

The second chapter is an analytical chapter of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section examines white men's violence against African Americans. It sheds light on African Americans' suffering, misery and marginalization within American society. The second section of the chapter explores the phenomenon of violence by African Americans against whites and among each others as well. It seeks to show how violence of African Americans is just a response to the racist issues in American society.

2.1. Violence of Whites in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is argued to be an outstanding African American achievement of all times. *Invisible Man* is a tragic fiction which depicts the story of an anonymous protagonist in struggle to search for his identity. The story of the unnamed narrator depicts results of racism on black people. He represents a black person who faces humiliation, invisibility and hibernation. The hardships that he goes through depict the life of an African American facing racism and discrimination. Ellison depicts in his story the protagonist as one of the oppressed in a society dominated by white culture and values, the main character represents every African American living in America.

Ellison attempts to highlight the situation of African Americans who suffer from racism. Ellison intends to hide his protagonist's name in order to represent every black man's condition. Ellison uses invisibility as a major theme to uncover a lot of hidden effects of racism on black peoples' psyches. The series of events that the narrator experienced could depict a story of any black man seeking to find his identity. Ellison's intention to unname his

narrator is the first hint in showing the situation of African American people. African Americans feel the need to prove themselves in order to exist in the American society. Ellison uses invisibility as a justification for the ignorance and marginalization that the African Americans feel.

Marginalization and invisibility are two primary results of racism in America. Ralph Ellison emphasizes invisibility in order to prove his point of view concerning racism and its massive consequences on the psyches of an African American during the 1950's and 1960's. In "The Catastrophic Effects of African Americans' Marginalization in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and August Wilson's *Fences*: A Comparative Study", Reza Deedari and Mahdis Faghih Nasiri explain the state of invisibility of Ellison's protagonist which he confesses at the beginning of the story in the prologue: "I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me" (5). Deedari and Nasiri argue that the state of the protagonist's invisibility is due to the whites' image about black people who are considered as sub-humans in the American society. Deedari and Nasiri argue that throughout the story, the different situations of racism that the invisible man endures remind him constantly of his invisibility (1704).

Alan Bourassa in his article "Affect, History, and Race and Ellison's *Invisible Man*" claims that there are two important moments when the protagonist faces racism. The first one occurs before he goes to college and the other when he arrives to Harlem, New York. Bourassa states that the first scene in chapter one, the Battle Royal scene evokes the idea of racism. As stated by the narrator, the Battle Royal is when he is asked to give a speech to the white men. The Battle Royal is set up for entertainment for the white big shots. The narrator admits: "It was in the main ballroom of the leading hotel . . . I was told that since I was to be there anyway I might as well take part in the battle royal to be fought by some of my schoolmates as part of the entertainment. The battle royal came first" (Ellison 12). The source

of entertainment is the young black men who are amazed of seeing a naked white woman dancing to the audience. Afterwards, the young men set to fight each other for money (5).

The white big shots are enjoying the scene of the young men fighting each other. The incident of the Battle royal extends to make the young men to get the coins on an electrified rug. The brutality of the scene makes the white big shots more entertained. Whenever the young men take more coins they get electrified. As a result, they were laughing in a hysteric way in order to hide their embarrassment. The Battle Royal ends with the protagonist's speech to the white men. The narrator wins a scholarship to college after enduring such humiliation and violence from the white people. Bourassa argues that the situation of the boys fighting each other for the money is a total chaos. They humiliate themselves, white upper class men are laughing, and they see them as a source of entertainment (6).

The incident of the Battle royal witnesses the narrator's knockout when he gets on the electrified mat, however, he returns to get more money. In addition, the Battle Royal ends with the protagonist's speech to the careless audience when he is still sweating and spitting blood. The result of this humiliation and embarrassment is a college scholarship. Bourassa argues that the invisible man gets his prize only after enduring shame and humiliation. Ellison describes the situation of the boys and the narrator during the fight for money where he narrates the shameful condition of the invisible man enduring electricity. He represents the protagonist's state under pain and embarrassment; how he tries to overcome the humiliation with hysteric laughter. In addition to all the pain and struggle the boys go through; they curse and call some outrageous names, "Leggo, nigger! Leggo!" (18).

The invisible man tries to cover his embarrassment with laughter and endure the pain of battery and electricity for the benefit of the good result. In his thesis "Blindness and Invisibility in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*", Bc. Radka Noskova claims that despite the humiliation the invisible man is subjected to; he feels

important because of the graduation speech he gives to the important white men. Noskova argues that: “Even though the invisible man is obviously impressed by the interior, he has misgivings about his participation in the battle royal” (15).

The invisible man goes to attend the battle royal in order to represent himself in a good way. However, he is humiliated when he joins the group of young man to entertain the white big shots. Noskova confirms that the feeling of accomplishment that the protagonist has at first vanished as soon he joined the group of young men. When the invisible man is within the group of the boys he is invisible, even when he gives his speech he is invisible. The white audience notices him only when he wrongly says social equality instead of saying social responsibility. They attack him in a horrible way; they question the purpose behind his use of this word. The narrator says: “What's that word you say, boy?" . . . "What you just said!" . . . "Social responsibility, sir," I said. . . "Oh, yes, sir," I said. "I was swallowing blood." "Well, you had better speak more slowly so we can understand . . . but you've got to know your place at all times” (19-20). The embarrassment that the invisible man and his fellow boys felt shows the degree of racism the African Americans are subjected to. The scene of beating each other for entertaining the white big shots symbolizes the conditions of African Americans as inferior and invisible to the white people (15-6).

The invisible man is very disappointed finding out that Dr. Bledsoe’s recommending letters for job are in fact totally the opposite. The incident of betrayal that the invisible man is exposed to by Dr. Bledsoe is related to his taking of Mr. Norton to the slave quarters. The protagonist is assigned to take Mr. Norton in a tour around the campus. This journey is a reason behind a great deception for the protagonist. In his article, “Alienated, Anxious, American: The Crisis of Coming of Age in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* and the Late Harlem Bildungsroman”, Tamlyn E. Avery states that taking Mr. Norton to the slave quarters and to an African American bar called The Golden Day are the two primary reasons behind

his expulsion from college. Avery argues that Dr. Bledsoe reprimands the protagonist for showing Mr. Norton the cruel conditions of African American life. As a result, he tricks the protagonist by giving him seven recommending letters to help him find a job in New York to come back the next year to pursue his studies in college. The protagonist goes to New York to obtain a job where he figures out that Dr. Bledsoe deceives him (11-2).

Afterwards, the protagonist applies for a job in a Paint Factory. In *Ralph Ellison's Invisible man*, Harold Bloom argues that the narrator gets the job because “the company does not have to pay union wages to the “colored college boys” (26). The scene in chapter ten evokes the evident racial symbolism in the novel when an office boy tells the protagonist: “Oh, you know. The wise guys firing the regular guys and putting on you colored college boys. Pretty smart,” he said. “That way they don't have to pay union wages” (108).

Furthermore, when the invisible man's boss Mr. Kimbro comes to see how the protagonist is doing in his new job, he shows racial views in addressing the invisible man, “White! It's the purest white that can be found. Nobody makes a paint any whiter. This batch right here is heading for a national monument!” (110). Insisting on whiteness of paint symbolizes the prejudice of whites' racism; even the paint for the government should be pure white. The slogan on the electric sign that the protagonist sees when he enters the paint factory summarizes the symbolism of the incident “KEEP AMERICA PURE WITH LIBERTY PAINTS” (107).

The second incident is in the factory-hospital scene in chapter eleven, when the narrator goes under another shock of electricity, the factory doctors experiment an electrical shock therapy on him that lead to his loss of memory when he describes it as:

A whirring began that snapped and crackled with static, and suddenly I seemed to be crushed between the floor and ceiling . . . flash of cold-edged heat enclosed me . . . I tried to remember how I'd gotten there, but nothing came.

My mind was blank, as though I had just begun to live. When the next face appeared, I saw the eyes behind the thick glasses blinking as though noticing me for the first time. (127)

Bourassa believes that through the different scenes of racism, the narrator is assaulted, his rights are violated. As a result, the invisibility that the protagonist undergoes is not a matter of emotions, rather it is imposed on him, and Bourassa states that: “Invisibility begins as a condition imposed upon the narrator by others” (6). Bourassa claims that a person cannot feel disrespected and overlooked just simply. There should be reasons behind the feeling of invisibility and the constant stereotypes and prejudices of racism that an African American faces. The reason lies mainly in his being considered by whites as different, as Other.

In chapter eleven, the incident of electric shocks that the narrator endures takes place in the factory hospital. The narrator describes his state of invisibility through narrating his suffering in the factory hospital when the doctors show carelessness about his health, and focus on their trials: “Hush goddamit,” one of the faces ordered. “We’re trying to get you started again. Now shut up!” (127). The protagonist is treated as a thing, or a machine; as a sub-human. Moreover, when the protagonist awakes he calls for the doctor to help him know what happens to him and where he is. The narrator tells that he calls for the doctor but he does not respond. At first, he thinks that the doctor does not hear him calling, but, he hears people talking near him. Because of pain and shock that the invisible man feels, he is struggling to hear voices around him (128).

The invisible man witnesses different aspects of racial discrimination either personally or collectively along with people of his race. In *Ralph Ellison’s The Invisible Man*, Anthony S. Abbott claims that the protagonist witnesses an eviction of a strange old couple in chapter thirteen. The protagonist has never witnessed an eviction before. The invisible man is sad about the reality of black life in America. He feels close to the old couple as if they are his

grandparents. The protagonist wonders about the cruelty of white men who are taking the belongings and furniture outside the house. For the first time the protagonist feels the need to help his people.

Harold Bloom believes that the eviction of the old black couple that the protagonist saw symbolizes an elevated kind of discrimination and racial prejudice. When the white men are getting the old couple's belongings to the street, the crowd is protesting and defending the old couple (28). The scene in chapter thirteen evokes the idea when the protagonist narrates the conversation between the crowds before they attack the white man: "Look at that," a slender man near me said. "We ought to beat the hell out of those paddies!" ... "Sho, we ought to stop 'em," another man said" (146).

The couple is forbidden to enter to the house by one of the white men; the crowd goes furious shouting and threatening the men to grow violent. The narrator tells that the crowd threatens to kill the men if they touch the old woman. The protagonist narrates how the crowd tries to help the old woman reenter the house. However, when the white men forbid her, some of the crowd is very angry, they threaten to kill them. When the white men refuse to let the woman enter to the house, one of the crowds carries a gun and threatens to shoot them down (Ellison 149). The protagonist intervenes to stop and end the fight before it worsens. The narrator doubts his ability to control himself if chaos starts. He anticipates his furious and violent ways, he says: "I knew that they were about to attack the man and I was both afraid and angry, repelled and fascinated. I both wanted it and feared the consequences, was outraged and angered ... nor for the man or of the consequences of an attack, but of what the sight of violence might release in me" (Ellison 150).

The invisible man delivers a rousing speech. He manages to hide his rage and anger. He is able to calm down the crowd and he advises them to take back the furniture inside the house. He also controls the event until the police arrive. When he escapes from the policemen

he meets a white man called Brother Jack who convinces the protagonist to join the “Brotherhood” (28). In “Alienated, Anxious, American: The Crisis of Coming of Age in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* and the Late Harlem Bildungsroman”, Tamlyn E. Avery declares that the Brotherhood is a political movement and the leader of that movement is a white man called Brother Jack. The invisible man joins the Brotherhood as a spokesperson for the movement. The Brotherhood is a radical movement that appears to work for the greater good of people (Ellison 14). In chapter fourteen, there is a scene that evokes the mission of the Brotherhood when Brother Jack tells the protagonist the reason behind forming that movement. Brother Jack admits: “What are we doing? What is our mission? It's simple; we are working for a better world for all people. It's that simple. Too many have been dispossessed of their heritage, and we have banded together in brotherhood so as to do something about it” (Ellison 165).

Noskova states that the invisible man is deceived about his role in the Brotherhood. The protagonist thinks that he is getting a chance to prove and define him. The Brotherhood appears to be the organization that helps the oppressed people. However, the real intentions of the Brotherhood appear later when the invisible man experiences several moments that makes him think about his true role in that organization. He realizes that he is used to accomplish higher and greater political causes that the Brotherhood seeks to achieve under any circumstances (Blindness and Invisibility 20-1).

The invisible man joins the “Brotherhood” as spokesperson for the association and members of the brotherhood are all called brothers. Brother Tod Clifton is one of the members. In chapter nineteen, the protagonist is informed that Clifton has disappeared and abandoned the brotherhood. Clifton’s act is seen as a betrayal of the brotherhood cause. Clifton betrays his own black community by selling Sambo Dolls that: “perpetuate stereotypes of blacks” and through them, “he also conforms to the represented stereotype by

trying to please his audience in a servile way” (Sparknotes 60). The narrator feels betrayed by his black brother, he admits: “I felt betrayed. I looked at the doll and felt my throat constrict” (234).

Clifton’s death is both a betrayal and a benefit to his black community. While his selling of the dolls has reinforced white stereotypes about blacks, the act of murdering the policeman shows a great resistance to white men’s abuse. Selena Ward, Brian Phillips, Katie Mannheimer and Boomie Aglietti argue that despite Clifton’s acceptance of racial stereotypes of white men about African Americans he is able to fight those stereotypes. Clifton’s standing against being a “good slave” leads to his death (61).

Violence of the cop is very clear when he attacks Clifton for selling sambo dolls on the street, after a long struggle between Clifton and the cop, the protagonist describes the struggle: “I could see the cop bark a command and lunge forward ... And between the flashing of cars I could see the cop propping himself on his elbows like a drunk trying to get his head up ... I heard rapid explosions” (235). After Clifton and the cop finishes their struggle, Clifton ends up dead killed by a gunshot from the cop, as the narrator describes: “and Clifton still facing the cop and suddenly crumpling ... and seeing Clifton up closer now, lying in the same position, on his side, a huge wetness growing on his shirt ” (235-36).

Ward, Phillips, Mannheimer and Aglietti believe that “In the end, Clifton’s selling of the dolls, whether undertaken as a last resort to fit into society or as a veiled act of defiance, proves much more dangerous than the other former Brotherhood members’ retreat into silence” (61). Defying the stereotypes of a racist society appears to fail using any means of fighting for freedom and self-proving, and it turns to be dangerous more than joining the brotherhood. Clifton’s sambo dolls symbolize the behavior of black Americans who are considered as means of entertainment. They live according to the whites’ stereotypes and expectations. They behave against their own belief and culture. The fear to challenge the

stereotypes of a racist society makes them act against their own will. African Americans failure to struggle whites' dominant power makes them confused about how to prove themselves effectively in the white-dominated society. As a result, black Americans think that they can fight for self-definition by using violence to prove that they exist. They also think that they can stand up against the image that the whites have against them.

2.2. Violence of Blacks in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*

Ellison attempts to reveal the stereotypes that whites have about blacks. Whites tend to underestimate black people; they see them as sub-humans. African Americans are affected by racial discrimination and prejudice. Their self-esteem is very low because of the psychological stress and bad treatment they receive from whites. In *Invisible Man*, Ellison tackles the search for identity that blacks seek in order to fit in white society. The act of obeying the whites or pretending to obey them is a strategy that some African American characters followed to be accepted. Others try to use violence to prove themselves. They think that the only way to fight for their existence is to be violent. However, it affects their lives negatively because they primarily harm each other.

In "Conflicts and Invisibility in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*", Dianne Shober traces the reasons behind the protagonist's violence and aggression. She declares that the protagonist's search for identity leads to a sense of uncertainty and ignorance. Shober states that rage, aggression are reactions of the protagonist's feeling of confusion and uncertainty. The invisible man could not control his anger and violence when a white man accidentally bumps him (259-60). In the prologue, the scene of beating the white man evokes the concept of violence. The narrator admits that when he asks the white man to apologize he refuses. The white man starts to struggle when the invisible man grabs him from his coat. The narrator admits: "I pulled his chin down sharp upon the crown of my head, butting him ... and I felt his flesh tear and the blood gush out, and I yelled, "Apologize! Apologize!" But he continued

to curse and struggle, and I butted him again and again until he went down heavily” (Ellison 5) the narrator describes the degree of his anger and violence. He stresses his outrage and aggression toward the white man’s blindness.

Ellison emphasizes the invisible man’s confession; he admits that he could not control his outrage. He keeps kicking the man in a hysteric way because the white man keeps insulting him and calling him names. The invisible man gets angrier and he almost kills the white man, he admits: “Oh yes, I kicked him! And in my outrage I got out my knife and prepared to slit his throat, right there beneath the lamplight in the deserted street, holding him by the collar with one hand, and opening the knife with my teeth” (Ellison 5). However, he realizes that the white man did not see him. He lives him on the ground until the next morning he reads about it in the newspaper. It is said that he was mugged, the narrator mocks the idea of the mugging, he says: “Poor fool, poor blind fool, I thought with sincere compassion, mugged by an invisible man!” (Ellison 6).

African Americans try to give a positive image about African American society. Anthony S. Abbott introduces the idea through invisible man’s act. The protagonist is assigned to take one of the trustees Mr. Norton in a drive around the college. The narrator drives to the countryside, when Mr. Norton asks him to stop in front of Jim Trueblood’s cabin. Trueblood is an illiterate black man who impregnated his own daughter. Trueblood claims that he does not plan for this; he feels that it is a dream. Abbott believes that all blacks in college hate Trueblood, because he brings shame to the black community. He reminds them for the person that they do not want to be. The invisible man does not want to stop and let Mr. Norton meet Trueblood because the college officials will be very angry. The narrator is ashamed of Trueblood and blames him for bringing humiliation and scandal for his community (58-9).

Trueblood's wife Kate attacks him with an axe. She almost kills him because he raped his own daughter. The invisible man narrates the fight between Trueblood and his wife. The narrator admits that Kate pulls a gun to his face when her daughter stops her. After that she grabs an iron, but he begs her not to kill him. She keeps cursing him and calling him names: " 'You low-down dog,' she says, 'it's better to spill than to foul!' ... " 'Shut up, niggah. You done fouled!' (37). Blacks detest Trueblood whereas whites are fascinated with his story because Trueblood's savage act reinforces their stereotypes about blacks. When the protagonist and Mr. Norton were listening to Trueblood's story, the narrator admits: "As I listened I had been so torn between humiliation and fascination that to lessen my sense of shame I had kept my attention riveted upon his intense face" (40). He tries to hide his humiliation by focusing his eyes on Trueblood while he is telling his shameful story.

Mr. Norton is shocked after hearing Trueblood's story. The narrator takes him to the Golden Day to drink a whiskey to wake him up from the dizziness he feels. After driving Mr. Norton back to the college, Dr. Bledsoe hears the story from Mr. Norton. He is very angry and expels the narrator from college only because he took Mr. Norton to Jim Trueblood and the Golden Day. The narrator is shocked after hearing insults from Dr. Bledsoe. He uses to be his example, everything he wants to be. When he is alone with the narrator, Dr. Bledsoe is "blunt and brutal" (Ellison 62). However, he changes to be polite and humble with Mr. Norton.

Dr. Bledsoe is a selfish and treacherous person. He is capable of doing anything to achieve his desires and maintain his position and wealth. In the presence of whites he behaves as a loyal man who obeys orders of white men. In chapter six, Dr. Bledsoe reprimands the protagonist harshly. Bledsoe tells the protagonist that the position he has is due to the role he plays as an obedient to the whites. And that he should lie in order to satisfy the white folks (25). The scene of warning evokes the idea of harming people of his race for his own

benefits, when Dr. Bledsoe admits: “I’ve made my place in it and I’ll have every Negro in the country hanging on tree limbs by morning if it means staying where I am” (Ellison 80).

Bledsoe is supposed to use his position to help his own people. However, Bledsoe depicts a treacherous character that prefers its well being rather than the community’s well being.

Similarly to Trueblood and Dr. Bledsoe, Ras the Exhorter is a disturbed character that depicts violence in an African American person. In chapter seventeen the narrator meets Clifton in the brotherhood meeting. The protagonist and Clifton goes to the streets to raise a speech against evictions. The invisible man’s assignment is to talk about blacks’ evictions because he joined the brotherhood after his speech about the old couple’s eviction. Clifton with his young groups is assigned to protect the protagonist and other members of the brotherhood from any attacks on the streets. A fight starts when the narrator’s speech is interrupted by Ras the Exhorter’s men.

Ras is a black nationalist. The narrator starts fighting with one of Ras’s men, while Clifton goes to confront Ras himself. The narrator beats the man and goes to help Clifton (Ralph Ellison’s *The Invisible Man* 100-01). The narrator describes the fight he and Clifton has with Ras and his men. He admits that there is violence and chaos; everybody is fighting in the dark because the lights were broken. After he finishes fighting with one of the man he looks for Clifton. Suddenly, a light glows he sees Clifton on his back and Ras above him with a knife. He tries to kill Clifton but he could not, Ras admits: “I ought to kill you. Godahm, I ought to kill you and the world be better off. But you black mahn. Why you be black, mahn? I swear I ought to kill you. No mahn strike the Exhorter, godahmit, no mahn!” (200).

The protagonist describes how much Ras is furious and violent because Tod Clifton is a member of the brotherhood. Ras stresses the infidelity of the white men in the brotherhood. He claims that Clifton and the invisible man should join the Black Nationalist Movement for

one cause. He states that they are all black, of the same race and sons of Africa. And that the white men will betray them some day (201).

Ellison proclaims that Ras is proving his point using violence. Ellison stresses on the use of the knife by Ras when he is persuading Clifton to leave the brotherhood and join his movement. Ras criticizes the narrator because he is an intellectual person. He blames him for joining the enslaver and betraying his own people. He also accuses Clifton and the narrator for betraying their own people for exchange of white women.

Ellison represents Ras as a violent character that he will fight for anything he wants to achieve. Ellison stresses violence of African Americans through the character of Ras. Ras proclaims that he is not an educated man, but he is not a fool. He will never believe the whites' lie that things will be settled between whites and blacks. Ras admits: "Blood calls for blood!" (203). He argues that the white civilization is held upon blacks' hard labor and effort "It's three hundred years of black blood", Ras insists. Ras thinks the only way blacks get their freedom is by destroying whites. Black characters such as Dr. Bledsoe and Ras tend to represent themselves positively. However, they do exactly the opposite by sticking to their own idea of blackness. If someone does not behave according to their "formulaic roles", he is considered to be treacherous. Persons like Dr. Bledsoe and Ras are the first to betray their people ("Sparknotes" 17). Ellison reveals that violence of African Americans appears to be more dangerous than the whites' stereotypes. African Americans' violence will only lead to self-destruction.

Pursuing his work with the brotherhood and witnessing Clifton's death in the street, the protagonist is awakened to the hidden purposes of the brotherhood. In chapter twenty two, Bloom claims that the narrator wanders the streets of Harlem. He sees Clifton selling Sambo dolls; he is shocked that he left his work in the brotherhood to sell paper dolls. Before being able to confront Clifton, a police officer shouts at Clifton. Clifton runs away but he returns to

hit the policeman. As a result the policeman shoots him dead. The protagonist describes how Clifton attacks the cop. Harold Bloom claims that the narrator is shocked when he witnesses the horrible scene of Clifton's death. He questions himself, what leads Clifton to act in a violent way. He also wonders Clifton's abandonment of the brotherhood. With his exclusion from the brotherhood meeting, the narrator feels betrayed by the brotherhood. And he thinks that Clifton as well is betrayed and deceived by the brotherhood promises (Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* 30).

Chapter twenty five witnesses the race riot that the Brotherhood has planned. Ras the Destroyer is the leader of the riot, the Brotherhood uses him for its benefits. In "Analysis by Chapter *Invisible man* (1952)", Michael Hollister claims that Ras the Destroyer appears in the chapter twenty five on a horse as a primitive person who is willing to attack the policemen by a spear. Ras sees the invisible man passing by and he orders his men to catch him. Ras orders his men to hang the invisible man and he throws the spear, however it hits a dummy hanged on a store. Ras looks crazy and his intentions seem to be harmful. The race that Ras plans for is not peaceful it aims at killing people and destroying everything that stands against his will.

Ras is manipulated by the Brotherhood to start a race riot and get African Americans fight each other. Hollister argues that "Ras is parallel to a murderous white racist" (Hollister 22) , Ras acts as a puppet used by the white men to get blacks fight each other in order to forget claiming equality with whites. Ras's violence is a result of his revenge that comes from his sense of anger and hatred. To overcome the feeling of alienation and inferiority to whites he behaves violently in order to justify his presence in the American society. Ras's concept about race is that in order to refuse oppression blacks need to stand against whites by using violence. The idea that Ras has about using violence turns out to be a self-destructing plan. Ras ends up fighting with the police when he figures out the real intentions of Brother Jack and the Brotherhood ("Analysis by Chapter" 22-3).

The protagonist realizes that Jack and the Brotherhood sacrificed Ras for their cause. In addition, the protagonist is used as a tool to manipulate the minds of other African American people to get as much support for the Brotherhood. The death of Tod Clifton and the race riot that he witnesses make him realize his true role in the Brotherhood. He is confused by the big mission that the Brotherhood has drawn for him.

The narrator starts to uncover the brotherhood's intentions. He realizes that he is used for hidden purposes by the white people and by the brotherhood's leader Jack. The invisible man starts to suspect his role in the Brotherhood. In chapter eighteen, the invisible man receives an anonymous note which tells him that the Brotherhood does not support his success. The protagonist becomes famous because of the speeches and parades that he gives as a member of the Brotherhood. The success he gets is supposed to strengthen his role in the Brotherhood. Yet it becomes a threat to him, he is afraid and angry because of what he reads in the note. In addition, the note is not stamped what makes the invisible man suspect that the writer of the letter can be a co-worker.

Another incident that strengthens the narrator's suspicion is his relationship with Brother Wrestrum. When the narrator is in his office talking to Brother Wrestrum, one of the members of the Brotherhood, he receives a phone call from a magazine. The magazine wants to make an interview with him but he tells Brother Wrestrum that Tod Clifton is better for the interview. However, Wrestrum insists on the narrator to do the interview and he agrees. Two weeks later in the Brotherhood headquarters the protagonist is accused by Brother Wrestrum. Wrestrum accuses the narrator of using the interview for his personal interests. Even though the narrator is found innocent the Brotherhood decides to hold off the narrator's activities in Harlem for a while. The narrator is shocked because of the decision of the Brotherhood which he accepts in order to remain active (103-6).

What widens the gap between the narrator and the Brotherhood is the narrator's decision to make a funeral for Clifton. The narrator decides to plan for Clifton's funeral where he gives a touching speech about Clifton. In "Alienated, Anxious, American: The Crisis of Coming of Age in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and the Late Harlem Bildungsroman", Tamlyn E. Avery states the protagonist describes his friend Clifton as a hero not a traitor as the Brotherhood accuses him. The invisible man is in a state of bewilderment because of the Brotherhood's response toward the funeral especially the Brotherhood's leader Jack. Jack argues with the protagonist and calls Clifton a traitor. Suddenly the protagonist is shocked because Jack removes his eye glass and drops it in a glass of water. Avery argues that the removal of Jack's eye symbolizes the revelation of the real intentions of Jack and the Brotherhood. The narrator realizes that the Brotherhood exploit him and people of his race for the propaganda (15-6).

In chapter twenty five, the narrator witnesses the race riot that took place in Harlem. The protagonist arrives to Harlem and he is caught in a police fire, he is shot by a bullet. He feels blood on his head, but it seems a superficial injury. He is unable to move, until a man called Scofield helps him. He joins Scofield's group that seems planning for something. They get women and children out of the tenement house and set it on fire. Scofield says: "then when you git 'em out start splashing coal oil. Then when you git it splashed I'm going to holler, and when I holler three times I want you to light them matches and git. After that it's every tub on its own black bottom!" (295). The narrator admits that they plan for the fire of the tenement house and Scofield is in charge. He is ordering the men to empty the houses and make sure nobody is in there, and then set it on fire.

Afterwards, the narrator is horrified because of the mess he sees during the fire. He admits: "It was as though I had been aroused from sleep and for an instant I stood there looking, listening to the voice almost lost in the clamour of shouts, screams, burglar alarms

and sirens” (296) He wanders the streets and wants to be out of all the voices that surrounds him. Abbott states that when he is walking in the street someone called him with his brotherhood name. He runs away so that Ras’s men will not catch him and take him to Ras. He faces another shooting that Scofield is participating in. The riot is upgrading, people are fighting each other and fighting the cops. As the narrator is escaping the violence of the riot, he faces Ras the Destroyer.

The narrator knows that Ras the Destroyer is behind the race riots. And that the race riots are planned by the brotherhood from the beginning. He runs from Ras who wants to kill him, but he escapes to encounter two policemen who ask him for the contents of his briefcase. The protagonist manages to escape another time to fall in a manhole. He is trapped in the hole, and then he starts to burn the contents of the briefcase. He resolves to burn the content of his bag because he wants to erase his past life (“Sparknotes” 66-7). The narrator decides to stay underground after facing the trauma of the race riot, and discovering the truth about the brotherhood. After getting tired and exhausted in the manhole he falls asleep, the narrator describes his feeling, he says: “It was a state neither of dreaming nor of waking, but somewhere in between” (307).

The protagonist narrates the nightmare that he is the prisoner of a group consisting of Jack, Old Emerson, Bledsoe, Norton and Ras and others he could not recognize. He dreams of a bridge that he wants to pass through but they would not let him pass. They are holding him and he refuses to stay, he says: “No, “I said. “I’m through with all your illusions and lies, I’m through running.” They are mocking and abusing him in his terrifying nightmare and the narrator is insisting to Jack, saying: “No, thank you; I’ll free myself”. He awakes with a sense of agony, anger and grief, and declares: “I would take up residence underground. The end was in the beginning” (Ellison 308). This nightmare only stresses the protagonist’s tormented

self; it reveals the damaging consequences of the violence he receives from both white and blacks.

The journey to self-definition that the invisible man goes through witnessing a series of changes in the protagonist's personality. The feeling of alienation, disillusionment and invisibility changes his perspective in life. The underground hibernation helps him to decide how to live his life. The people's opinion about the protagonist's invisibility does not affect him anymore.

Chapter Three

A Journey from Hibernation to Self-definition

The third chapter is also an analysis of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section examines the state of hibernation that the protagonist undergoes. It examines the situation of alienation that African Americans endure. The second section of the chapter mainly deals with the protagonist maturation. It shows how the protagonist is transformed from a naive, irresponsible man to a responsible and mature individual.

3.1. Invisible Man's Alienation

Ralph Ellison uses an anonymous character in his novel *Invisible Man* in order to highlight the life of every African American man who endures alienation and marginalization. African Americans tend to behave in violent and irresponsible way to cover their feelings of alienation and marginalization. Racism is the primary reason behind African Americans' isolation and alienation. Ellison's protagonist decides to stay underground because of his invisibility; however the decision of hibernation helps him discover himself. He finally finds out his true identity, he is ready to live his life without fear. The journey that the invisible man goes through begins with a naïve person and ends with a person who is conscious and aware about his status in the white community.

Alienation has been a concern to many psychological and literary studies. Defining alienation plays a role in understanding the characters in literary works. In her thesis "Nuances of Alienation in George Orwell's *1984* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man: A Comparative Study*", Bounasri Aicha states that alienation in sociology is a conception that "refers in its sense to a psychological status found in the individuals, which in turn is underlined and promoted by a social status" (15). Bounasri claims that alienation is related to the psychological and sociological status of the individual. In addition, alienation in

sociology is identified according to two principles. First, the individual feels controlled and he cannot manage his actions; he is affected by external factors. Second, the individual feels restricted when it comes to his creative activity, he is also enslaved by his own means of activity. Bounasri uses Marx's theory of alienation as a basis for her definition of alienation in sociology. Marx's theory of alienation says that individuals feel alienated because of the capitalist system they live in; because they function as instruments rather than human beings. Bounasri insists that individuals never feel responsible for their own actions and feel that they "will never become autonomous, self-realized human beings" (16).

The concept of alienation takes a considerable concern for sociological and psychological studies. In "The Invisible Man: An Alien in New York Searching for Identity", Alpaslan Toker defines the term of alienation as "a state of being detached or separated from someone or something" (25), and in psychology he defines alienation as "an individual's psychological detachment from his/her community" (25). Toker argues that the alienated person feels isolated and estranged from human beings who surround him. Moreover, the person who feels alienated can experience alienation and isolation with all the people around him, or with himself. Alienated individuals tend to behave anxiously and violently and they lack direct communication with other people. Toker adds that people behave in hostile and aggressive manner against each other. Toker confirms that African Americans sense of alienation comes from exposure to racism and discrimination. African Americans struggle to seek self-definition and recognition through portraying their isolation and alienation (23).

In "The Theme of Alienation in Modern Literature", Abdul Saleem and Hussam Bani-ata declare that the term of alienation has other names as isolation, separation and estrangement. The term is defined as "the word alienation is used to convey the emotional tone which accompanies any behaviour in which the person is compelled to act self destructively" or "Most usages of alienation share the assumption that some relationship or

connection that once existed that is ‘natural’, desirable or good, has been lost” (285-6). In Saleem and Bani-ata’s opinion alienation means that the human relationships are broken because there is a stress and hostility felt by the alienated person toward others. Toker argues that alienation can have a negative impact on the person what leads the individual to self-destruction. Individuals who suffer from alienation are highly exposed to feel unwanted, unrelated to their family even close partners and the community. However it can have a positive impact on people what leads to self-realization and self-definition. People can use alienation to seek their identities and improve themselves in a good way (24).

Psychologically speaking, Bounasri believes that different psychological status can be attributed to alienation as loneliness, isolation and powerlessness. The individual feels that the group that he belongs to does not fulfill his needs and fit his demands. For that purpose the alienated individual claims that “alienation is a social phenomenon” (19). In short, the person feels that his actions are monitored and he is incapable of achieving the desirable objectives. Furthermore, the person feels limited by the society’s norms and ideologies. Alienation has been identified in relation to sociology and psychology as well as in relation to racial prejudice. Racial prejudice refers directly to ethnic minorities as African Americans who live in United States. Bounasri adds that whenever people feel that they are pre-judged according to their membership to a group of people along with misconceptions and beliefs about that group; they feel estranged and isolated (20-1).

The theme of alienation takes a very wide place in modern literature. Toker states that the story of *Invisible Man* narrates the personal experiences of a black person who discovers his true self at the expense of coexisting under racial prejudice and invisibility. *Invisible Man*’s story sheds light upon the relationship between racism and alienation concerning African Americans experiences. Toker believes that the title of *Invisible Man* symbolizes the theme of alienation and isolation that the protagonist experiences. Invisibility of the

protagonist evokes the high degree of inhabiting a world which does not recognize black persons' existence. Invisibility exists only with African Americans in *Invisible Man* and takes a wide space in their lives. Blacks are unseen, unappreciated and rejected in the American society which makes them feel isolated and alienated. Toker argues that: "invisibility emerges as the extreme and the highest form of alienation" (26).

In his essay "Alienation as Narrative Strategy in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*", Aimable Twagilimana claims that Invisible Man's alienation is self-imposed because of his total obedience to the whites' orders. Alienation is forced upon him by the authorities, but he manages to end this alienation by hibernating underground. The protagonist is finally aware about his invisibility and at the end he declares that his hibernation is over which means alienation also is over. The solution to end his alienation is through telling his story (101). Twagilimana describes the protagonist's telling of his story in the epilogue as "personal declaration of independence" (102). In addition, the protagonist gets the chance to criticize the American society according to the tragic experiences that he went through. Invisible Man's alienation made him realize the catastrophes that the world has to people whether in personal or political level.

The journey from south to north shows the protagonist's escape from injustice and hope for a new life and opportunity. However, the invisible man faces a deeper kind of alienation. The invisible man thinks that he succeeds to fit in the society and get freedom and rely on himself. As a matter of fact, he witnesses two kinds of alienation. Twagilimana declares that:

After surveying the prejudice, racism, and segregation of the South as well as the accommodationist and hypocritical college he attended there, Invisible Man heads to the North to do more surveying. In the South, the Invisible Man

first witnesses African-American alienation: where the master-slave structure of slavery is in full effect. (104)

Escaping the south is not the end of the protagonist's suffering. Once he is in New York, he faces all kinds of discriminations. He is deceived by his people and white men. This double marginalization adds to his sense of despair. However, falling down the hole saves his life even living in hibernation means death. He is far from all the betrayal, disillusionment, alienation and fear. He has all the time to think for himself where he starts writing to heal his wounds.

The invisible man writes his journey in search for his identity. The *Invisible Man's* naïve and ambitious protagonist suffers from racism, hypocrisy and betrayal. The young black man endures expulsion from his dream life college. He faces frustration after he finds out that Bledsoe's recommending letters are a fraud. He starts working in a Paint Factory where he falls in a terrible chemical explosion that almost took his life. In the factory hospital doctors use him for their experiments. They use the electric shocks which makes him lose his memory. To the disillusionments of the brotherhood that affects him physically and psychologically. A decision to start his hibernation by living underground helps him to achieve self-redemption.

In "The Catastrophic Effects of African Americans' Marginalisation in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and August Wilson's *Fences*: A Comparative Study", Reza Deedari and Mahdis Faghih Nasiri claim that the invisible man confesses his invisibility at the very beginning of the novel (1704). The protagonist admits: "I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me" (Ellison 5). The invisible man aches from being invisible, he wonders his existence when he says: "you often doubt if you really" (Ellison 5). Deedari

and Nasiri argue that the protagonist faces different incidents which oblige him to remember his invisibility.

Anthony S. Abbott states that the invisible man explains that his invisibility is related to the way white people treat black people. They refuse to see them as individuals, they consider them as sub-humans. In addition, they always follow the orders they get from whites and play the roles imposed on them by whites (“Ralph Ellison” 51). Abbott declares that the narrator’s invisibility is due to whites’ vision of black people as sub-humans. They do not see them as individual human beings. The issue of racism and discrimination is mirrored through the invisible man’s story. In other sense “invisibility suggests separation from society” where the narrator explains that he lives in a hole. The invisible man admits that he lives underground and that his separation is described as hibernation (“Ralph Ellison” 45). The invisible man confesses: “And remember, a bear retires to his hole for the winter and lives until spring ... I say all this to assure you that it is incorrect to assume that, because I am invisible and live in a hole, I am dead ... I am in a state of hibernation” (Ellison 6).

Later on, the invisible man refers to music when he smokes weed and listens to Louis Armstrong’s song *What Did I Do to be So Black and Blue?* Abbott explains how Ellison uses the Blues to mirror the suffering of the blacks; they are traumatized because of racial prejudice. The blues symbolizes the depression and pain of the invisible man. The narrator confesses:

Perhaps I like Louis Armstrong because he's made poetry out of being invisible. I think it must be because he's unaware that he is invisible. And my own grasp of invisibility aids me to understand his music ... Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you're ahead and sometimes behind. (Ellison 7)

The invisible man questions his existence. Armstrong's song is only mentioned by Ellison to reinforce the invisible man's situation as a black man living under racism of whites. The song explains the suffering of black's struggle for self-proving. The protagonist narrates his fight with Monopolated Light & Power Company. He steals electricity from whites and they do not know the source of consuming this enormous power ("Sparknotes" 25). Because of the racism and the discrimination, Invisible man is transformed into a violent, irresponsible and alienated man. Invisible man experiences a procession of deceptions that contribute to his sense of despair. In his way to self-definition, the protagonist meets many deceiving persons that push him into a vicious circle. Despite the numerous deceptions he faces, Invisible man is able to overcome his misery.

In his article "Citizenship and Invisibility: Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Race, and Democratic Prospects", Richard A. Rosengarten argues that the protagonist's experience for finding a job reveals his frustration and disappointment. He finds out that the reason behind his failure to find a job is his college president Bledsoe. Rosengarten claims that the dilemma is followed by one-day employment at Liberty Paint Factory. It ends with the invisible man's injury in a chemical explosion (6). In *Ralph Ellison's "Invisible Man": A Reference Guide*, Michael D. Hill and Lena M. Hill believe that the invisible man's incident at the Paint Factory hospital "invokes the concept of rebirth"; the protagonist lost his memory because of the electrotherapy he received. His name and his identity are erased from his memory. Although the protagonist experiences violence and fear he feels that he benefits from this incident. The narrator admits: "I was no longer afraid? ... Not of important men, not of trustees and such; for knowing now that there was nothing which I could expect from them, there was no reason to be afraid. Was that it? I felt light-headed" (Ellison 137). Hill claims that the narrator thinks that he deceives the doctors. He feels that he succeeds in overcoming

the powerful white people, those who manipulates him and destroys his dreams. The narrator thinks that he is getting a chance for a new beginning (103).

In his thesis “Blindness and Invisibility in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* and Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*”, Bc. Radka Noskova argues that the invisible man loses his chance to self-definition when he moves from the south to the north because he did not complete his education. The invisible man believes that he has a chance for a new beginning in the north. He wants to accomplish visibility and for that reason he joins the Brotherhood. The invisible man sees the Brotherhood as a means for his personal success. He acquires a new identity when he is given a new name by the brotherhood. Despite changing his name, the invisible man still adopts the brotherhood’s ideology and not his own ideology. Furthermore, the invisible man is disillusioned about his role in the brotherhood. He is excited about his job with the brotherhood because he is unaware of his true role in the brotherhood. In addition, the invisible man is fascinated about Brother Jack’s ideology of working for a big cause (19-20). Brother Jack admits: “What are we doing? What is our mission? It's simple; we are working for a better world for all people. It's that simple. Too many have been dispossessed of their heritage, and we have banded together in brotherhood so as to do something about it” (Ellison 165). Noskova claims that the mission given to the protagonist by the brotherhood seems to be the next plan to prove him. He is excited about the big salary and the popularity he will get in Harlem after the speech he gives during the old couple’s eviction.

Richard A. Rosengarten argues that the invisible man’s new job with the brotherhood requires a new appearance. He is given a new name, new clothes and a new place to live in. The protagonist’s new job turns to be a visible appearance. He behaves according to the Brotherhood’s principles. In one hand, he accepts the new identity given to him and agrees to all the orders, he expects to be a successful person. In the other hand, he thinks that this is the

opportunity to prove that he really exists and shows his abilities (14). The invisible man confesses: “This was a new phase, I realized, a new beginning, and I would have to take that part of myself that looked on with remote eyes and keep it always at the distance of the campus, the hospital machine, the battle royal—all now far behind” (Ellison 181).

Noskova claims that the invisible man thinks that the mission is another opportunity to achieve visibility. Noskova explains that the protagonist always links his current experiences to his past. The invisible man uses his grandfather’s advice which implies obeying the orders of whites in order to achieve his goals (20). The grandfather’s advice proposes that: “I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction” (Ellison 12). Noskova argues that the invisible man constantly relies on his grandfather’s advice whenever he is disappointed or when he feels disillusioned. The protagonist decides to use his grandfather’s advice and agree to all the Brotherhood’s orders. Noskova believes that the invisible man realizes that the Brotherhood used him for its benefits. Furthermore, he realizes that he is supposed to follow and obey the orders and never tries to “think for itself” (21).

Harold Bloom claims that the invisible man starts to realize his true role in the Brotherhood when he is assigned to give a speech on women’s issues. The narrator begins to suspect that the Brotherhood is trying to get him out of the brotherhood. In addition, he discovers that Brother Clifton has disappeared. Also, the narrator is excluded from the committee’s meeting. Afterwards, he goes wandering the streets when he faces Brother Clifton selling “Sambo Dolls”. The protagonist witnesses Clifton’s shooting because he attacks a police officer. Bloom confirms that Clifton’s death arose many mixed feelings in the narrator’s psyche. He blames himself for not helping Brother Clifton escape from the cop (“Ralph Ellison’s” 30-31). Thus, he wants to compensate Clifton. This recompense constitutes a noticeable change in the protagonist’s personality.

3.2. Invisible Man's Self-definition

Anthony S. Abbott asserts that Tod Clifton's death changed the narrator's perspective. For the first time, he acts according to his own will, he does something not because he is told to do, but he decides to do. The narrator confronts the brotherhood leader Brother Jack and this incident represents the climax in the protagonist's story of self-discovery. Abbott confirms that the protagonist uncovers the real intentions of the Brother Jack and the other brothers. They are not interested in the black men's problems anymore; they are interested in other matters (116). The narrator sees Ras the Destroyer holding a speech about Clifton's death in the streets. Ras blames the brotherhood for Clifton's death and he accuses the protagonist for co-operating with the brotherhood to get rid of Clifton. Two of Ras's men tries to attack the protagonist but he escapes. He buys a pair of sunglasses and a hat in order to avoid any other harassment. The disguise that the narrator uses makes a woman mistake him for a man called "Rinehart".

The protagonist realizes that the character of Rinehart has many identities. Rinehart depicts a character of multiple identities in the novel; a symbolic character that never appears in real events. Rinehart's character depicts the visibility that the invisible man seeks throughout his journey of self-discovery. When the narrator disguises with the sunglasses and the hat he encounters different identities that Rinehart has. Encountering different identities make the protagonist realize his invisibility and that he always adopts an identity given to him. For that, he decides to be visible to himself and not for others: "He vows that, though he may remain invisible to others, he will from that moment forward be visible to himself" ("Sparknotes" 64-5). This improvement helps the narrator to overcome his disillusionments with the brotherhood and face the Harlem riots and Ras the Destroyer.

Chapter twenty-five opens with the Harlem riots. Sounds of alarms and gunshots are very loud. The narrator admits: "When I reached Morningside the shooting sounded like a

distant celebration of the Fourth of July, and I hurried forward” (Ellison 288). When the protagonist passes through the streets of Harlem chaos and violence arises. Suddenly the narrator is shot on his head but a group of men helps him (32). The protagonist admits: “And now the blood was in my face and I could move, getting to my knees as someone out of the crowd was helping me to stand” (Ellison 289). Bloom declares that the protagonist realizes that the Brotherhood is behind the race riots. The Brotherhood manipulates Ras to participate in the race riots in Harlem (33). The narrator loses his briefcase in the middle of a building fire. Despite the dangerous flames he enters to retrieve his briefcase to use his Rinehart Disguise. However, he finds that the sunglasses are broken. When the protagonist escapes the chaos, he encounters Ras the Destroyer who orders his followers to catch him. Afterwards, the narrator escapes Ras and he encounters two police officers who ask him about the contents of his briefcase. While he tries to escape them he falls into a hole underground. The narrator burns the contents of his briefcase for the light.

The narrator’s briefcase symbolizes the agony and suffering that the protagonist goes through. The briefcase contains all the disappointments that the narrator was exposed to from the white people. The decision to burn its contents as his high school diploma, Clifton’s paper doll and the paper written by Brother Jack that has his new name symbolizes his freedom. He finally throws “a burden of stereotypes and prejudices” off his shoulder. In addition, the narrator recognizes that the items in his briefcase do not define his identity. As a result, the protagonist took a decision to stay underground to discover his real identity. The state of hibernation helped him figure out the next move in his journey to self-definition. He decides to reject living according to everyone’s way and begin to follow his own way (“Sparknotes” 69). The protagonist admits: “And my problem was that I always tried to go in everyone’s way but my own. I have also been called one thing and then another while no one really

wished to hear what I called myself. So after years of trying to adopt the opinions of others I finally rebelled. I am an invisible man” (Ellison 309).

In “Problems of Identity and Social Integration in Ralph Ellison’s *The Invisible Man*”, Abdullahi S. Abubakar claims that the protagonist’s hibernation is the first phase of claiming transformation. In addition, falling into a hole could be a symbol of rebirth and a beginning of a new fruitful life. The narrator confesses: “I hibernated. I got away from it all. But that wasn't enough. I couldn't be still even in hibernation” (Ellison 309). Abubakar argues that staying underground does not reflect only escaping the real world and hiding, it rather shows the positive side in the narrator’s future. Abubakar suggests that illuminating the hole with the light connect him with the outside world and symbolizes his bright future (6-7).

Harold Bloom states that the protagonist finally takes a decision to end his hibernation. The protagonist is ready to face the world and live under his own way. The narrator confesses: “And, as I said before, a decision has been made. I'm shaking off the old skin and I'll leave it here in the hole” (Ellison 313). The narrator is ready to face the outside world with its ups and downs. Despite his invisibility the narrator believes that he is a part of that world and he should play his role. The narrator admits: “I've overstayed my hibernation, since there's a possibility that even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play” (Ellison 313). The protagonist concludes his story with ending his hibernation, accepting his invisibility and living his life according to his beliefs.

In “The Motifs of Blindness and Invisibility within the Influence of Postwar Existentialism as Reflected in *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison”, Yildiray Cevik believes that Ellison’s novel examines the meaning of individual existence. Cevik states that the themes of invisibility and blindness are used to examine the effect of racism on the individual’s existence. Cevik introduces the theory of Existentialism⁴ that calls for the individual’s possible existence in the world’s absurdity. The freedom of the invisible man begins when he

realizes the absurdity of the world by writing his story, as well as ending his invisibility. Cevik argues that Ellison uses Existentialism as a tool to stress African Americans' individuality within the American society. Ellison refers to Existentialism in his novel because African Americans face alienation in America. Cevik emphasizes Ellison's use of the experiences of African Americans upon a central character. Ellison focuses on the protagonist's details from the beginning, from ignorance to realization of the absurdity of the world. The protagonist's confession of living underground shows the difficulty to coexist in the American society and at the same time it helped him to quit hibernation (6).

The search for identity is the theme that Maria Helena V. P. Noronha in her thesis "The Problem of Identity as it Relates to the American Blacks ' Vision of Africa". Noronha describes seeking self-definition as a necessity for blacks in America "as the vital needs of our body" (85). The efforts of African Americans to struggle in order to define themselves are devalued. The same thing happens with *Invisible Man's* protagonist who seeks self-definition and integration to the whites' world. His skin color always interferes in accomplishing his objective to find his identity. The hero participates in a multiple number of experiences in order to define himself. The protagonist's invisibility is a psychological one; but he links his irresponsibility to his invisibility as if people cannot really see him physically. He feels free to do whatever he wants whenever he wants, he admits: "Irresponsibility is part of my invisibility . . . But to whom can I be responsible, and why should I be, when you refuse to see me? . . . Responsibility rests upon recognition, and recognition is a form of agreement" (11).

At the beginning of the story the reader feels that the protagonist decides to stay in hibernation. It appears as a permanent situation, however in the epilogue the state of hibernation appears as a necessity. Staying underground and deciding at the end to end his hibernation appears like a new life and a rebirth for the invisible man. Noronha believes that

invisible man's confession to end his hibernation was a moment of reconciliation and shows that the protagonist is conscious about his situation. He is finally ready to accept his invisibility and live his life, in the epilogue he confesses: "I've overstayed my hibernation, since there's a possibility that even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play." (313)

Hibernation is a solution because it can be considered as a kind of disguise. "The Second Personality: the Use of the Mask in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*" is an article By Wasan H. Ibrahim where he argues that people use self-masking as a defense mechanism to protect themselves from a person or a thing. Underground hibernation is a kind of self-masking where the invisible man resides for a period of time. The underground hole is the last destiny in the invisible man's journey to self-discovery (64-5). For the first time, the protagonist manages to control his life and decisions by taking advantage of his invisibility. Ibrahim confirms that he lives underground unnoticed in a white neighborhood, rent-free and he illuminates his hole with exactly 1369 lights. The invisible man steals electricity from Monopolated Light & Power and he is able to deceive the company and act according to his own will. The invisible man feels free and able to control the place as his own.

Invisible man is able to bury the old self imposed on him and invent a new identity. The protagonist is conscious that his inner strength has helped him in overcoming his sorrowful situation. At the end of the novel, the protagonist is a new man; he is able to curb his violence. He wants to face the world and impose his own identity. He accepts his blackness and ceases to see it a mark of inferiority.

Conclusion

Feeling inferior to whites shapes lives of blacks in a negative way. African Americans feel restricted and unable to behave naturally. Violence denotes African Americans' oppression and inferiority. Throughout the novel, Ellison tries to give the reader the real conditions of blacks in America. Ellison unnamed his narrator in order to reflect the experiences of every individual who lives under racial prejudice. Violence gains a considerable interest in modern literary works. The theme of violence is traced from a cultural and psychological perspective. The postcolonial and psychoanalytic approach succeeds to trace the reasons behind black men's violence. Violence appears that it holds African Americans from succeeding. Whites' violence leads directly blacks to be violent; they react to the injustice they faced. The effects of racism are uncountable, but violence takes the priority to be studied.

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is considered as an outstanding work that depicts the state of blacks' invisibility. Blacks are no seen by whites; metaphorically speaking they refuse to see them because of their blindness. Invisibility means that the person is not appreciated and his efforts are unvalued. Self-definition is the goal that the protagonist seeks to accomplish. Despite the difficulties and disappointments the invisible man succeeds to gain an identity.

The first chapter of the thesis traces the reasons behind the violence of blacks. Slavery and racism will be concluded as the primary factors for violence. The chapter provides an

overview of African American literature that struggles to appear as an independent literature among the other literatures. Furthermore, it provides the biography of Ralph Ellison as a way to stress the similarity in Ellison's life and that of his protagonist. Ellison's novel is considered as semi-autobiography of his life.

The second chapter depicts violence in the novel *Invisible Man*. It analyses the characters' actions according to the theme of violence. The chapter emphasizes the mutual violence between whites and blacks. It shows how it affects only African Americans in a negative way. Whites tend to practice violence only on blacks; however blacks behave violently toward whites and toward themselves. The chapter reveals how each side affects the other, whether positively or negatively.

The third chapter provides the journey the invisible man goes through from hibernation to self-definition. Alienation is introduced to highlight its relationship with invisibility thus its relation to racial prejudice. It examines his decision to stay underground and to write his memoirs. The chapter also provides the invisible man's violence from the beginning of the novel until the end. The reconciliation that the protagonist fulfills declares that his hibernation is over which means that his invisibility has come to an end. The protagonist decides to live his life as a normal person and realizes that the world is full of good and bad moments. He needs to live everything to feel that he is having a life. At the end he confesses: "I've overstayed my hibernation, since there's a possibility that even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play" (Ellison 313).

Obedience of whites' orders does not help blacks to be appreciated. Violence only harms them psychologically. The protagonist realizes that accepting the stereotypes reinforce whites' racial prejudice. Seeking self-definition symbolizes the end of the protagonist's story; he is aware and conscious about his invisibility. Accepting the fact he is invisible is a step

toward self-definition. Ellison's end shows that the African American man is able to overstep the stereotypes and live his life and construct his identity. The African American man is able to take advantage of the oppression he endures.

Notes

¹ In order to gain a clear understanding of the term “binary opposition” it is of primary importance to acknowledge its origins in Saussurean structuralist theory. According to Ferdinand de Saussure, the binary opposition is the “means by which the units of language have value or meaning; each unit is defined against what it is not”. Essentially, the concept of the binary opposition is engendered by the Western propensity to organize everything into a hierarchical structure; terms and concepts are related to positives or negatives, with no apparent latitude for deviation: i.e. Man/Woman, Black/White, Life/Death, Inside/Outside, Presence/Absence, and so on.

<<https://www.litencyc.com/php/stopics.php?rec=true&UID=122>>

² In general terms, the ‘other’ is anyone who is separate from one’s self. The existence of others is crucial in defining what is ‘normal’ and in locating one’s own place in the world. The colonized subject is characterized as ‘other’ through discourses such as **primitivism** and **cannibalism**, as a means of establishing the **binary** separation of the colonizer and colonized and asserting the naturalness and primacy of the colonizing culture and world view. For further information see *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies* by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin page 169-170

³ White Supremacy is a historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege. (Reflections on the History 2)

⁴ Existentialism is defined as a ‘*philosophy that makes human life possible in a meaningless and absurd world*’ (Panza and Gale, 2008: qtd in Mart, 2012). As Mart (2012) states in his article: ‘*It is the search of the condition of man and the state of being free*’. It is also a philosophical thought that deals with the conditions of existence of the individuals’ emotions, responsibilities, and thoughts (Mart, 2012). (Cevic 6)

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