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The Invisibility of Black People in Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man

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تهميش السود في رواية رالف إليسون الرجل الغير مرئي

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وزارة التربية الكلية التربوية المفتوحة قسم اللغة الانكليزية

الملخص

يبحث هذا البحث رواية رالف والدو إليسون الرجل الغير مرئي من خلال تحليل المواضيع المتشابكة للهوية والعنصرية والعزلة الاجتماعية ضمن تجربة الأمريكيين من اصل افريقي. يستخدم البحث مفهوم دبل يو اي بي بويز عن الوعي المزدوج ونظرية الهوية العرقية لاستكشاف كيف يكافح الراوي لتكوين ذاته الحقيقية المستقرة في مجتمع يتسم بالاضطهاد العنصري. تتبنى الدراسة منهجا تحليليا وصفيا يعتمد على قراءة نصية دقيقة للرواية بالاضافة الى المصادر الاكاديمية ذات الصلة. تسلط الدراسة الضوء على كيفية عمل الاختفاء كحالة رمزية وحرفية تعكس الوضع الاجتماعي والنفسي للهوية السوداء في المجتمع الأمريكي. علاوة على ذلك، يؤكد البحث على استخدام إليسون للتقنيات السردية واللغة العامية والرمزية والعناصر الثقافية مثل موسيقى البلوز والجاز للتعبير عن تعقيد وضع السود. تشير النتائج الى ان رواية إليسون ليست مجرد نقد للعنصرية الاجتماعية و المؤسسية، بل هي ايضا استكشاف لبناء الهوية في ظل التمييز المؤسسي، وهو ما يجعل الرواية سردا تأسيسيا في الادب الأمريكي الافريقي. الكلمات المفتاحية: الوعي المزدوج، الهوية، العنصرية، التهميش، الاختفاء.

Abstract

The research investigates Ralph Waldo Ellison's Invisible Man by analyzing the interwoven themes of identity, racism, and social segregation within African American experience. It utilizes W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness and racial identity theory to explore how the unnamed narrator struggles to form his true self that is stable in a society marked by racial oppression. The study adopts a qualitative, descriptive - analytical approach relying on close textual reading of the novel in addition to relevant scholarly sources. It spotlights how invisibility works as a symbolic and literal condition reflecting the social and psychological status of Black identity in American society. Moreover, the research underscores Ellison's use of narrative techniques, vernacular language, symbolism and cultural elements like blues and jazz to articulate the complexity of Black condition. The findings suggest that Ellison's novel is not only a criticism of social and institutional racism but also an exploration of identity construction under institutionalized discrimination, a matter making the novel as a foundational narrative in Afro-American literature.

Key Words: double consciousness, identity, racism, marginalization, invisible

Section One: Theoretical Context

1.1 Previous Studies

Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man has been examined by scholars from different perspectives, specifically in terms of racism, identity, and social marginalization. Ouali (2011) deals with the theme of identity, arguing that the invisibility of Ellison's protagonist is a symbolic one that hides behind it a cultural and social marginalization of African Americans. The study, thus, emphasized the fact that the struggle of the protagonist has its root in the conflict that lies between the identity imposed on the narrator and his search for the true self. Warren (2016) deals with Ellison's Invisible Man within the lenses of American democracy, saying that the novel is a criticism of the exclusion policy that is embedded within the ideals of democracy. Warren, thus, emphasizes that invisibility mirrors the status of African Americans of being invisible within the domain of social and national identity.

Edward (2017) has examined the novel in terms of Afro-American modernism and centralized Ellison as a main figure in redefining the literary expression of Blacks. Therefore, the study spotlights how the novel transcends traditional protest in literature by portraying a complex investigation of individuality and identity. Hobson (2018) deals with representation and racism in Afro-American Literature, showing how the invisibility acts as a pivotal metaphor for social elimination. The study suggests that Ellison's novel remains vital in comprehending contemporary racial dynamics. Tracy (2020) deals with Invisible Man in terms of music, i.e., the role of African American music, especially blues and jazz. So, this study focuses on music and how its forms function as strategies of narration that articulate issues of identity, cultural memory, and resilience.

1.2 Research Gap and Significance of the Study

Previous studies on Ellison's Invisible Man have investigated themes of identity, racism, and invisibility separately. However, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that bring these concepts together a unified analytical framework to explore and analyze their interrelated effects on the protagonist social and psychological condition. The significance of the study lies in the providence of an integrated analysis of Blacks in terms of invisibility, racism, and identity. While many previous studies have examined those separately, this research combines them together within a unified framework to illustrate the interconnectedness between them. Moreover, the research adds to the existing body of knowledge by combining social, psychological, and cultural perspectives in analyzing Ellison's Invisible Man. It shows how invisibility has racial and psychological functions that play a crucial role in shaping the narrator's perception of himself. Additionally, the study underscores the vital relevance of Ellison's novel to modern discourse of identity and race. By offering a synthesized and comprehensive analysis, the research adds depth to literary criticism and enriches the academic understanding of African American literature.

1.3 Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research approach to explain Invisible Man. It adopts a close textual analysis as the primary method for analyzing themes such as racism, identity, and invisibility. The research follows a descriptive-analytical method that involves investigating selected passages from the novel to explore how the novelist shapes the protagonist's social and psychological experience. Also, the research has a literary critical approach through dealing with theoretical concepts such as racial identity and double consciousness. These frameworks facilitate a deeper understanding of the meanings embedded in the novel. No statistical data or qualitative framework is used, as the study is purely textual and literature-based. Thus, the analysis is restricted to the novel itself and relevant scholarly analysis.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The research adopts W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness," theories of racial identity, and selected aspects of Critical Race Theory (CRT) to investigate Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison. Du Bois (1903) defines double consciousness as "a sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (pp. 2-3), which mirrors the psychological struggle experienced by colored individuals in America who are forced to oscillate between self-perception and racial identities imposed on them socially. Moreover, racial identity theory views identity as a process that is constructed socially and shaped by cultural and historical power relations rather than a static essence. From this angle, identity is in a state of continuous formation through its interaction with social milieu and its structures. Additionally, Critical Race Theory illustrates that racism functions as an institutional and systematic force embedded in institutions of society, producing marginalization, inequality, and racial oppression in Ellison's Invisible Man. Accordingly, the following analysis applies those theoretical concepts to investigate the narrator's experiences of social exclusion, identity conflict, and invisibility.

Section Two: Author's Background and Historical Context

2.1 Short Biography

In Oklahoma City, on 1 March 1913, Ralph Waldo Ellison was born to a laborer father from South Carolina, Lewis Ellison, and Ida Millsap Ellison from Georgia. Lewis Ellison named his son after the American author Ralph Waldo Emerson with the hope that the name would grant him the same love and talent for literature. The Ellison's' life in Oklahoma was difficult, since it became a region for black people, so it was subject to racial restrictions. Moreover, his father died when he was three years old. So, Ralph Ellison's childhood was marked by poverty, which forced his mother to relocate frequently to raise him and his sister. Ellison attended Oklahoma City's Frederick Douglass School for the elementary and high levels. He became a student of music. After his graduation in 1932, Ellison joined Tuskegee Institute to continue his formal study of music (Jimoh, 2002, p. 1). In 1936, Ellison traveled to New York City in an attempt to earn money to continue his education and to study

sculpture with Augusta Savage, an American sculptor. In New York, and through his friend Alain Locke, Ellison met Langston Hughes, an American poet, novelist, and a leader of the Harlem Renaissance. Ellison was attracted to New York by the cultural legacy of the Harlem Renaissance. Through Langston Hughes, Ellison met individuals who formed a transitional stage in his life. For example, Hughes introduced Ellison to an author named Richard Wright who helped Ellison adapt to life in New York. As a result, he made his decision to stay in Harlem instead of returning to Tuskegee (Jimoh, 2002, p. 3). In October 1947, Ellison wrote his masterpiece *Invisible Man*. The first part of the novel was published in *Horizon*. The rest of the novel was completed in 1952. He won significant rewards for this novel like the National Book Award Gold Medal, the National Newspaper Publishers' Russwurm Award, and a Certificate of Award from the *Chicago Defender* in 1953. As a prominent writer and critic, he began writing his short stories, reviews, and articles that started to appear in *The Antioch Review*, *The New Republic*, *Common Ground*, and other important magazines. His 1945 essays "Richard Wright's Blues" and "Beating That Boy" were instrumental in positioning him as one of New York's intellectuals and literary figures (Graham, 2004, p. 9). In 1965, one chapter from Ellison's novel in progress entitled "Juneteenth" was published in *The Quarterly Review of Literature*. In 1999, this title was used for Ralph Ellison's posthumously second published novel. Ellison's other important writings are his short stories which are collected in volumes entitled *Flying Home and Other Stories* (1996) and *Trading Twelves* (2000). Concerning his essays, Ellison collected them in two volumes, *Shadow and Act* (1964) and *Going to the Territory* (1986). In *Shadow and Act*, Ellison brings together selected essays published between 1942 and 1964, and in *Going to the Territory* he collects sixteen pieces that he wrote between 1957 and 1985. Ralph Ellison engraved his name as a prominent novelist and a man of letters in the English-speaking world. In addition to the previously mentioned awards, Ellison received the American Medal of Freedom, The National Medal of Arts, and the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, conferred on him by André Malraux. Ellison died in 1994 (Jimoh, 2002, p. 12).

2.2 A Brief Introduction to Racism in America

The history of racism in America traces back to the discovery of the New Continent by Columbus. The slave trade began and black men were captured and sailed to America as laborers. They lived in hard conditions and endured extreme hardship. They were hungry, thirsty, and ill. Their social status was low; privileges and rights were granted for White Americans only. The blacks had no rights and they were expected to work all day regardless of their physical ability or their health status. They remained so until the outbreak of the Civil War, which extended from 1861 to 1865, between the South and the North. The North finally emerged victorious. Only then black slavery ended in America. Despite the fact that slavery was abolished in the 1860s, its legacy continued. The blacks were still unable to assimilate themselves into American Culture, especially in the South. American racism established its way in every aspect of life like education, voting rights, citizenship, immigration, and so on. One of the most segregated institution was that of education. The White and the Black were separately taught whether in private or in public schools. Employment also was subject to American racism. The majority of the blacks were miners, carpenters, soldiers, or enrolled in industrial works like being laborers in factories, doing tiring and unskillful jobs. In addition, their living standard was low. But in 1968, The Civil Rights Act declared that the blacks had the same opportunity as the whites to choose their living conditions. Generally speaking, Afro-Americans continue to experience racism social discrimination (Jing, 2018, p. 133).

2.3 An Introduction to African American Literature

The eighteenth century witnessed the birth of African American literature. The arrival of the Africans as slaves to America announced the emergence of African American literature. Due to the harsh living of the blacks and their marginal status, they started writing down their suffering. In writing, they found an outlet and relief from the pressure of the life they led as laborers in cotton fields. In *The Origins of African American Literature*, Dickson D. Bruce Jr. describes the harsh status of the Africans saying that "at various times and in various places, Africans in North America faced systems of slavery and freedom that were both oppressive and permeable, often at the same time. They were encouraged to think of themselves as part of a larger American colonial society but as people expected to remain at that society's margins" (2001, p. 1). This literature had undergone different stages. The first one is known as Slave Narrative, which narrates their stories as slaves during their fugitive period. The Slave narrative was just the beginning that paved the way for the emergence of the Abolitionist Movement and the Post-Slavery Era. The African Americans struggled to end slavery by unifying their efforts under "The Abolitionist Movement." They succeeded in ending slavery in the 1860s. As a result, the second wave of literature appeared and came to be known as Post-Slavery literature. This literature concerned itself with non-fiction works. Important works started seeing the light like those of W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T.

Washington. However, after the victory of the North, African American writers shifted their writings towards a new aim which was rebuilding their cultural heritage and questioning their identity in the North of America. The Africans started their great migration from the rural South to the urban North. In New York, they took Harlem as a home for them. Harlem was full of black intellectuals in different fields, particularly music, art, and literature. Those intellectuals began reviving African-American literature in this city, so it came to be known as the "Harlem Renaissance." Therefore, the writers gathered and unified their voice to celebrate their race and restore their heritage. The best-known figures of that era were Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, and Jean Toomer (Steven, 2008, p. 18). Harlem Renaissance can be referred to as the Golden Age of black art. Race, gender inequality, and the search for identity were the writers' main concerns. Also, the female writers took the responsibility of presenting women's gender crisis in patriarchal societies. Women were given a chance to express their experiences and to articulate their suffering. They were double oppressed, first as black and second as female. The Harlem Renaissance came to an end because of the Great Depression era of the 1930s.

2.4 African American Music (Blues and Jazz)

African American music is an important part of African culture and history. It conveys their tradition, history, and consequently their culture. It is not newly invented; rather, it originated in Africa. When the blacks were enslaved by the whites, they brought it with them, practiced, and participated with it in the American culture. It is not just music in the common sense; rather, it is a language through which they express and convey their feeling of segregation and hence sing for freedom. In addition, it is their medium through which they pass their culture, tradition, and wisdom to the coming generations. In the 19th century, a newly invented music emerged in the South known as Blues Music. This music comes as a reaction against the segregation laws of Jim Crow. Due to their inability to express their injustice nor fight it back, they use this music to be their tongue that articulates their suffering and frustration (Ouali, 2011, p. 15). In this regard, Ralph Ellison says: The Blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by consolation of philosophy, but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically (as cited in Wright, 2001, p. 129). The African American musician W.C. Handy is considered the father of this type of music and helped to make it widely spread in America, of course with the aid of technology that progressed rapidly by the beginning of the 20th century. In the 20th century, Jazz music was considered as a genre sprung from the African American communities of New Orleans. It is a mixture of blue music and the black music of New Orleans. By 1918, it came to be the music of multi-races and immigrants as well. During the 1920s and 1930s, it took a new form where the bands focused more on the context. It started to be played in hotels and ballrooms. It was of two groups: the first was "hot" which was meant to be pure jazz, while the other was called "sweet" because it was concerned with the sentimental parts of songs. The father and the most famous figure of jazz was Louis Armstrong. He was the first one to be liked by both the blacks and the whites (Ouali, 2011, pp. 15-16).

Section Three: Analysis and Conclusion

3.1 Critical Analysis of Ellison's Invisible Man

Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man deals with the dilemma of a man who is in search of his identity under the condition of racism. So, the novel highlights the narrator's physical and psychological journey in American society. The novel opens with a prologue which in its turn presents invisibility as a concept along with its causes. The unknown narrator is a black man who suffers from invisibility physically as well as psychologically. Actually, his invisibility is rooted in racial factors rather than mysterious, biochemical, or supernatural elements, i.e., not a magical one. So, the reader is introduced to a society that denies the existence of Black individual simply because of his skin color and his race. This racial invisibility affects him psychologically so that he doubts his existence. As a result, he chooses to remain invisible and withhold his name and identity. I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids -- and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows... Nor is my invisibility exactly a matter of a bio-chemical accident to my epidermis... you often doubt if you really exist. You wonder whether you aren't simply a phantom in other people's minds (Ellison, 1952, p. 4). The invisible man suspected his physical existence; hence, he tries all the time to be in light, simply because he thinks himself shapeless and invisible without light. For this purpose, he provides his underground room with 1,369 lights by stealing the electrical power from Monopolated Light and

Power: "I am invisible... [l]ight confirms my reality, gives birth to my form... without light I am not only invisible, but formless as well" (Ellison, 1952, p. 6). The invisible man seems to be right since he is literally invisible, a matter illuminated in his accident with a white man at night when he hits the man mistakenly. As a reaction, the white man insulted the narrator, who in his turn was about to kill the white man, but he retreated upon realizing the fact that he was really invisible to that man: "it occurred to me that the man had not seen me, actually" (Ellison, 1952, p. 4). Figuratively, this man is unseen because of his race. Another incident of being invisible happened in Harlem while the invisible man was walking to church wearing sunglasses and a hat; the people mistakenly thought him Rinehart, a preacher. Consequently, the community failed to recognize him even in daylight. In church, the invisible man read a paper in which the preacher wrote that one's invisibility is a result of having multiple identities (Ouali, 2011, p. 38). So the invisibility of the Black man is linked to dual identity composed of African and American elements. As a result, he suffered from an identity crisis that caused him to fall into double-consciousness. Double-consciousness is defined by Du Bois as a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness" (1903, pp. 2-3). The unnamed narrator is forced to see himself from the perspective of others and from his own as well, a matter that arouses his agony: About eighty-five years ago they were told that they were free, united with others of our country in everything pertaining to the common good, and, in everything social, separate like the fingers of the hand. And they believed it. They exulted in it. They stayed in their place, worked hard, and brought up my father to do the same (Ellison, 1952, p. 8). The invisible man's conflict is internal; the narrator is torn between what he is expected to be according to the standards of the whites and what is his placement as a black man in a white society. Such struggle affects his ability to comprehend his true-self and to reconcile the two sides of his identity: "He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face" (Du Bois, 1903, pp. 2-3). Consequently, he is forced to experience "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Du Bois, 1903, p. 11). In the Liberty Paint's hospital when asked about his name and identity, the nameless narrator remained puzzled: "what's your name?...who are you?" (Ellison, 1952, p. 240). Here he remained speechless, thinking seriously and asking repeatedly who he is: "maybe [he] was just this blackness and bewilderment and pain" (Ellison, 1952, p. 241).

Racism is another important issue that Ellison highlighted in this novel. From the beginning, the narrator was a subject for social discrimination. In his accident with the white man, the invisible man was accused of "mugging" the white man: "The next day I saw his picture in the Daily News, beneath a caption stating that he had been 'mugged.' Poor fool, poor blind fool, I thought with sincere compassion, mugged by an invisible man!" (Ellison, 1952, p. 4). So, this accident shows the social discrimination of a black man within his own society. Under the umbrella of racism, the concept of being part and apart is introduced. The whites deny the African identity, yet heavily depend on their efforts. In the novel, the protagonist questions such state: "weren't we part of them as well as apart from them?" (Ellison, 1952, p. 575). It can be concluded that African Americans are included in society when they serve its interests and excluded when issues of equality and rights arise. Earlier in the novel, when the narrator was invited to deliver a graduation speech before white men, he was shocked that he had to enter a fight blindfolded with other black men in a boxing match called Battle Royal for the sake of amusing white folk. In this case, the blacks were regarded as part since they serve the whites' interest. But when the narrator made a mistake, while delivering his speech, by saying "social equality" instead of "social responsibility," the whites agitated, refused such a mistake, and thus regarded blacks as apart, not part, since the matter came across equality. The unnamed narrator attempts to escape racism by moving to the north with the hope of forming his individual identity away from the racial south. But even there the unknown narrator found himself a subject of invisibility and consequently racism; for example, the head of the Negro university Dr. Bledsoe described the black narrator as nothing and invisible: "you're nobody son. You don't exist ---- can't you see that?" (Ellison, 1952, p. 120). In addition to their unadmitted identity, the blacks suffered also from being voiceless. In his quest for identity, the protagonist discovered that he is muted, figuratively speaking. Despite being a good speaker who delivers notable speeches, yet the nameless narrator's personal voice is quelled. The protagonist tried to defend himself before Dr. Bledsoe, head of the Negro university, but the head suppressed his voice and reproached him for taking Mr. Norton to an unworthy place: "your poor judgment has caused this school uncalculated damage. Instead of uplifting the race, you've torn it down...boy, I'm getting rid of you!" (Ellison, 1952, pp. 117-118). Another incident was that of the Brotherhood, but this time with an opposite

situation. Because the narrator used his personal voice instead of the institution's speech in preaching to people, he is driven out. Whether he used his voice or remained silent, in both cases he is unrecognizable (Lane, 1973, p. 12). Society, along with its racial structures and segregation laws, denies the existence of an educated man who despite his invisibility is great. The invisible man describes himself as: "Though invisible, I am in the great American tradition of tinkers. That makes me kin to Ford, Edison and Franklin. Call me, since I have a theory and a concept, a 'thinker-tinker'" (Ellison, 1952, p. 6). Later on and upon falling into a hole to escape from the policemen who mockingly close the hole instead of arresting him, the invisible man decided to stay underground. The underground space appears preferable to the outside world. It is warm and bright, a place where no one could take advantage of him: "My hole is warm and full of light. Yes, full of light. I doubt if there is a brighter spot in all New York than this hole of mine, and I do not exclude Broadway. Or the Empire State Building on a photographer's dream night. But that is taking advantage of you. Those two spots are among the darkest of our whole civilization -- pardon me, our whole culture (an important distinction, I've heard) (Ellison, 1952, p. 6). Ironically enough, the hole turned out to be an Empire for him, but at the same time he remained invisible and maybe worse than that because he is neither dead nor alive but in a state of hibernation: "because I'm invisible and live in a hole, I am dead. I am neither dead nor in a state of suspended animation. Call me Jack-the-Bear, for I am in a state of hibernation" (Ellison, 1952, p. 6). Despite all the negative aspects of invisibility, it turns out to have an advantage, which is being free and unbound: "I am not complaining, nor am I protesting either. It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen, although it is most often rather wearing on the nerves....you often doubt if you really exist. You wonder whether you aren't simply a phantom in other people's minds" (Ellison, 1952, p. 3). It is also a place that gives him a chance to be himself, not a man bound by laws and caught by duality. He is simply himself with an invisible identity: "That I am nobody but myself. But first I had to discover that I am an invisible man!" (Ellison, 1952, p. 15). It is better for him to stay away from a society that caused him to be "emasculated and left rootless by people who either paid no attention to his inner existence or visualized him only as a symbol, as abstraction" (Lane, 1973, p. 15). The hole gave the invisible man privacy to reconsider himself, to be himself, and to accept himself: "after years trying to adopt the opinions of others I finally rebelled" (Ellison, 1952, p. 7). Invisibility offers a chance of creativity. In the novel, Ellison related the narrator's invisibility to the music of Armstrong, to which the narrator announced: "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" (Ellison, 1952, p. 8). Consequently, the musician's invisibility contributes to the production of such artistic expression, and it is this invisibility that enables the unknown narrator to apprehend Armstrong's music (Steven, 2008, p. 33). By the end of the novel, the invisible man announced the end of his hibernation to start a new adventure by accepting and wearing his identity. The end of the novel declares a new beginning, away from any old identities imposed on him by society. So it is an end of duality and invisibility. It is an end and beginning at the same time: "The hibernation is over. I must shake off the old skin and come up for breath" (Ellison, 1952, p. 580). His quest has to be continued because according to Prudchenko, "Our identities continue to evolve throughout our lives and the people we are at old age are probably not the people we are as children. Nevertheless, even if that identity remains the same time it had been challenged over and over by different aspects of life so that the identity that remains is the true one" (Prudchenko, 2019). Identity as an issue in the novel is highly important, a fact that Ellison declared by saying: "identity is the American theme. The nature of our society is such that we are prevented from knowing who we are. It is still a young society, and this an integral part of its development" (Ellison, 1964, p. 87). In addition to the issue of identity, Ellison also spoke about the title saying that he chose Invisible Man as a title for his novel despite its similarity with the other novel The Invisible Man by H.G. Wells: "Once the book was done, it was suggested that the title would be confused with H.G. Wells's old novel, 'The Invisible Man,' but I fought to keep my title because that's what the book was about" (Ellison, 1964, p. 89). By choosing this title and presenting a nameless narrator as a protagonist, Ellison intended to represent every African American man whose experience is similar to that of the protagonist.

3.2 Techniques

The novel deals, as mentioned above, with the struggle of a man who searches for shaping his individual identity, so Ellison employs several narrative techniques to convey his message. The first is his use of the first-person point of view. This technique helps the reader see through his eyes. Through this narration along with the utilized imagery, the reader is invited to engage with the narrator's emotions. For example, the novelist depicted the invisible man feeling distracted and scattered as if he is surrounded by mirrors of hard: "it is as though I have

been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glasses” (Ellison, 1952, p. 11) Ellison also used vernacular language. The novel is rich with proverbs, colloquial expressions, and excerpts from songs and stories rooted in African and African American culture. An example of that is when the narrator cries: “I yam what I am!” (Ellison, 1952, p. 266) when buying yams from a street vendor. Another example is the slogan of the Liberty Paint Factory: “If It’s Optic White, It’s the Right White” (Ellison, 1952, p. 217), which was given by the black Lucius Brockway; the narrator recalls a similar southern saying, “If you are white, you are right” (as cited in Ellison, 1964, p. 201). The common thing between these expressions and many others is the folk wisdom that Ellison sought to use in order to insist on his inherited African American cultural background. In his book *Change the Joke, Slip the Yoke*, Ellison explains the reason behind using folklore, like Blues and Jazz, in his works: “I use folklore in my work not because I am Negro, but because writers like Eliot and Joyce made me conscious of the literary value of my folk inheritance. My cultural background, like that of most Americans, is dual (my middle name, sadly enough, is Waldo)” (1964, pp. 111-112). Another important technique is the use of symbols. For example, the briefcase is a symbol of the invisible man's quest for identity and a key to his future. As the novel progresses, we notice the briefcase is still with the invisible man and what it carries inside represents different things. For example, it carries his high school degree, a symbol of his academic success. Also, the Sambo doll of his friend Clifton serves as a reminder of how he was an instrument and puppet in the hands of the Brotherhood to achieve White interests. It contains letters from the Brotherhood to be an alarm for him to be himself, not someone else. Moreover, it contains the paper with its fake name that was given to him by Brother Jack; this paper shows the false ideals and brotherhood of the Brotherhood. So the case with all its contained items is considered part of his quest for identity. Another significant reference of the briefcase is identity. The burning of the briefcase along with its papers and getting rid of all its items means a new beginning, a new identity that is going to be established by him, not by others. This actually happens when the invisible man burns his briefcase to light the hole he fell into while running away from the police. Here he is obliged to burn the briefcase saying: “if I was to make a torch, I’d have to open my briefcase. In it were the only papers I had” (Ellison, 1952, p. 440).

Ellison used the Liberty Plant “Optic White” to show the racism of America that pretends to be democratic and offers liberty and freedom to its citizens. By examining the Liberty Plant with its trademark “Optic White” that is supposedly covering any stain, Ellison actually shows the racism of America and the segregation of the blacks. The whites try to bury the blacks' identity under the whites' culture. They want to show that blacks represent everything black and evil just like the stain that they, whites, try to cover and hide under their purity, “Optic White.” It is an image of social discrimination that indicates the primacy of the white, but how? The optic white can’t be obtained without the addition of the black drops to it. In this chemical mixture, the black drops disappear completely while the white becomes optic which means that the white color, symbolizing the whites, has primacy over the black drops, symbolizing the blacks. It goes further to show the black segregation in the white society in general and in the factory in particular. In the factory the blacks are the soldiers behind the curtains, they do the basic work and produce the products, while the whites are on stage trading and getting high salaries. So Ellison shows and criticizes the racism of America which tries all the time to demolish the black identity in building America while maintaining them off stage to serve it. This is evident in the slogan of the factory which states “If it’s Optic White, It’s the Right White” (Ellison, 1952, p. 117; Ouali, n.d., p. 42). The slogan of the electric sign of the factory says “Keep America Pure with Liberty Paint” (Ellison, 1952, p. 160). The use of “liberty” in the slogan shows its contradiction to the reality inside the factory. The invisible man is dismissed because he failed to mix the colors from the first attempt, a matter that shows the segregation of the blacks and the racism of the whites in treating black people inside the factory. In his article “Imagery of Imprisonment in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*,” Winter views white color as a symbol of imprisonment: In addition, in the factory hospital scene color symbolism reinforces the imagery of imprisonment; in fact “whiteness” becomes almost synonymous with “imprisonment” when the protagonist, completely at the mercy of his white captors, fails to understand what the doctors say to him (Winter, n.d., p. 116). In the hospital and out of fear from the whiteness that surrounded him, the invisible man could not understand the doctor’s speech: “But still their meanings were lost in the vast whiteness in which I myself was lost” (Ellison, 1952, p. 181). The idea of imprisonment is linked to white color that is emphasized in the walls of hospital, doctor’s uniform, and in the scene of releasing him from the machine: “She handed me clean underclothing and a pair of white overalls...[walking] down a long white corridor” (Ellison, 1952, p. 244).

The use of color symbols is also important since it helps conveying and supporting the novel’s main themes of identity, racism and invisibility. The novel is pregnant and rich with many colors and different references.

Supporting the theme of racism Ellison used white and black color to reflect the white-black relationship. The white color refers to the dominance of the white and the inferiority of the black. From the very beginning, in the first chapter the white color appears in the cloth that is used to cover the invisible man's eyes to fight in Battle: "to be blindfolded with broad bands of white cloth" (Ellison, 1952, p. 21), the white declares the whites' control over the blacks. As a reference to the whites' power, the scene of the hospital is a good example. It depicted the invisible man confused and afraid of the white environment: "In the vast whiteness in which I myself was lost" (Ellison, 1952, p. 238). Clifton's Sambo doll is a straightforward example of the controlling power the whites have over the blacks to the extent of manipulating them just like dolls. Another use of black and white symbolism appeared in the mixture of the two colors where the invisible man had to add black drops to the paint to gain "optic" white. This shows the upper hand of the whites under which the blacks are hidden, which in its turn shows the segregation of the blacks whose existence is necessary yet denied (Bois, n.d., p. 16). Ellison, on the other hand, uses white and black symbolism within an African culture framework to show the power and wisdom the African Americans have. In African culture black refers to wisdom and age while white refers to death. The novelist uses this interpretation to support the blacks and contradicts the whites' philosophy of "white is right." Also, he described black color as something positive and great when he represented the character of Ras riding over a great black horse: "Ras the Destroyer upon a great horse" (Ellison, 1952, p. 556). On the other side, Ellison depicted white color as something negative that is associated with death, coldness, and rigidity. For example, in chapter eleven Ellison described a chair as cold and rigid: "cold, white rigid chair" (Ellison, 1952, p. 231). Another significant color is blue that came to explain the struggle of the invisible man and behind him the African American people. As mentioned above, blue refers to the blues music used as a medium to express the struggle, feeling of black people and convey their tradition and history. In the novel, Ellison used Armstrong's song "What Did I Do to Be So Black and Blue" and "My only sin is my skin" (Ellison, 1952, p. 8) to depict the harsh condition of the Africans. By using blue as a symbol of struggle symbolized by the blues music, Ellison makes it clear that their heritage and culture are always present and come to be heard not only by the blacks but also by the whites through the songs of Armstrong. He used the songs of Armstrong as a symbol of success, and Armstrong as a symbol of a successful black man loved by both (Herbert, n.d., p. 65). The red color carries multiple symbolic meanings like lust, sin, and love. Red is used to refer to the affection of a narrator to a woman: "and when she reappeared in the rich red of a hostess gown she was so striking that I had to avert my somewhat startled eyes" (Ellison, 1952, p. 314). Blood is used to show the meaning of character's name and what does this name stand for. For example the character Trueblood whose name is supposed to refer to truth blood seems to be false. Half of this character's name is associated with blood that shows him as a sinful character who denies family blood by impregnating his daughter. He destroyed his family and tried to defend himself by claiming that he "dropped into dream" (Ellison, 1952, p. 41). Another character whose name is associated with blood is Dr. Bledsoe. His name is partially derived from the term blood (Ouali, n.d., p. 32). This character is morally corrupted and ready to sacrifice the people of his race to maintain his power and position: "Power doesn't have to show off. Power is confident, self-assuring, self-starting and self-stopping, self-warming and self-justifying. When you have it, you know it" (Ellison, 1952, p. 124). In addition, he declared: "I'll have every Negro in the country hanging on tree limbs by morning if it means staying where I am" (Ellison, 1952, p. 108).

3.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, Invisible Man mirrors the African American struggle for a stable identity in white dominated society. Through the unnamed narrator, along with his interior and exterior conflict, Ellison's shows how discrimination has double destructive functions psychologically and socially through institutional racial mechanisms that let Blacks invisible within White social milieu. Such struggle lets identity formation complex where double consciousness is unavoidable reality. The analysis illustrates how the act of invisibility and racial oppression imposed on Blacks have negative impacts upon Blacks perception of the self. A matter that makes them perceiving the self as fragmented. Thus, the novelist use of narrative voice, symbolism, cultural elements of blues and jazz gives thematic depth to Afro-American experience and enhances the critique of White society. Consequently, the novel shows that literature and history are interrelated, both influence each other. Thus, Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man was impacted and influenced by the historical realities and events that happened during the novel's period of time, where African Americans were suffering from racism and segregation. Ultimately, the study concludes that the novel goes beyond historical context to express the construction of identity under oppressive and racial conditions. It also asserts the crucial role of literature, as a critical medium, for voicing ordeals of Blacks calling for social justice. Therefore, literature is not just a mirror of reality but it can also be

used as a weapon that writers can use to deliver their messages and fight for their rights and the rights of the oppressed people.

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