

Psychological Legacy and Identity Crisis in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and *Juneteenth*

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Abstract:

There has been an increased interest in the study of both identity and psychology in literary studies especially in the second half of the twentieth century to the present day. This paper deals with the crisis of identity and the accompanying psychological conditions in Ralph Ellison's novels *Invisible Man* and *Juneteenth*. The study will highlight how the main characters in these works face difficult choices in facing the reality of life in a society that is affected by cultural and racial prejudice. Ellison himself belonging to the race, tries to depict the agonies of African Americans who despite of being contributors to the foundation of the nation yet, they have been denied the status of visibility. Through sharing the traumatic experiences of his protagonists, Ellison is trying to uncover some real issues that many people thought they have been bypassed in the so-called developed country as The United States.

Key words: Identity, African American, Psychology, Culture, Trauma, and Ralph Ellison.

الملخص:

هناك اهتمام متزايد على موضوع الهوية و علم النفس من قبل الباحثين في مجال الدراسات الأدبية خصوصا في النصف الثاني من القرن العشرين و الى يومنا هذا. هذا البحث يتعامل مع ازمة الهوية و الحالات النفسية المتلازمة لها في روايتين لرافل إللين و هما (*Juneteenth*) و (*Invisible Man*). يسلط البحث الضوء على كيفية مواجهة القرارات الصعبة من قبل الشخصيات في الروايتين في التعامل مع حقيقة الحياة في مجتمع متاثر بالحىازية الثقافية و العرقية. إللين الذي في ذاته ينتمي الى هذا العرق، يحاول تصوير معانات الأميركيين من أصول أفريقية الذين بالرغم من مساهمتهم في بناء الأمة ولكنهم محرومون حتى من حق الظهور. من خلال مشاركة التجارب الصادمة لأبطال الروايات، يحاول إللين كشف النقاب على امور حقيقة يظن بعض الناس بأنه قد تم تجاوزهم فيما يسمى ببلد متقدم كولايات المتحدة الأمريكية.

پوخته:

گرنگیهکی زورتر دهدریت به لیکدانههی هریمک له بابههکانی شوناس و دوروونزانی له بواری خویندنی ئەدەبیاتدا بەتایبەتی له نیوهی سەدەی سەدەی بیستەمەوە تا ئەم سەردەمە ئىستاشى لمگەلدا بىت. بابهتى ئەم توپىزىنەمە بىرىتىه له قەيرانى شوناس و حالتە دەرروونىيە پەيپەندار مەكان له هەردوو رۆمانى راپت ئىلیسەن (*Juneteenth*) و (*Invisible Man*). لەم توپىزىنەمەدا تىشك دەخريتە سەر ئەمە سەر ئەمە کە چۈن كار مكتەرە سەرمەكىھان رووبەر ووی ھەلۋىزاردە سەخت دەبىنەوە لەزىاندا لەكۆمەلگەمەكدا كە لەزىر كارىگەر لايەنخوازى كەلتۈرۈ و رەگەزىدایە. ئىلیسەن، كەخۇيىشى سەر بەر و رەگەزىدە، ھەولەدەت و ئىنلى ئەمەنەتىانە بىكەت كە ئەمەر يكىيە بەر مچەلەك ئەفرىقىيەكەن دەيچىزىن كە سەر مەرائى ئەمە بەشدار بۇون لە بىنیاتنان دامەزراىدىنى نەتەمەكەميان كەچى مافى بىنزاوبۇنىشىيان لى زموت دەكريت. لەرىي نىشاندى ئەزىزونە تراوما يەكەنلى پالموانى رۆمانەكەنلى، ئىلیسەن دەھىيەت پەر دەلسىر ھەندىزىك بابهتى راستەقىنە لابدات لە وەللاتىكى بەناو گەشەكەر دەرى وەك وىلايەتە يەكگەر تۇرەكەنلى ئەمەر يكى كە زۇر كەس و اياندەزانى ئەم بابهتانە تىپەر يىنداون.

1. Introduction

Ralph Ellison is first black writer to win the prestigious National Book Award for fiction in 1953 for his novel *Invisible Man*. This widely welcomed and admired novel has made Ellison get an outstanding recognition in literary circles for the publication of a single book. According to Gerald Early (2010), in 1965, Ellison's only life-time published novel "is named Best American Novel of the post-World War II era in a poll of leading American literary critics" (p. 40). Steven Tracy (2004), describing Ellison's novel and his exceptional style of writing, says that "it was a story that had been told before, in language that had been used before, with a cultural context that had been portrayed before. But Ellison made the story his own, taking the tradition but modifying it with his individual talent". According to Tracy, Ellison is so cognizant of the works and skills of the prominent writers of his time that he is able to make use of them in "his own particular focus and style, making the African American an undeniable part of the national identity. (pp. 5-6)

Accordingly, it is not only the personal identity of the narrator that Ellison is highlighting but also the American identity as a collective representation of American individuals to share with the rest of the world. Ellison is presenting a case of the human condition in a specific place which is the USA in the post-World War II era but it could be a representation of the experience of innumerable other human beings in different parts of the world.

Ellison's second novel, *Juneteenth*, is no less valuable than *Invisible Man* in its focus on how the African American identity has been formulated and affected the general composition of American identity. *Juneteenth* is a compilation and a re-arrangement of piles of writings (some would say around 2000 pages of papers) that was posthumously been printed and published by John F. Callahan, the executor of Ellison's literary estate. According to the testimony of many critics (Charles Johnson, Toni Morrison, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.) the final outcome of the work proved to be the fruit of decades of hard work and countless revisions from an author who death did not allow him to see his work in print.

2. Seeking the Self

Ellison's *Invisible Man* is a good example of bildungsroman type of novels in which the unnamed hero takes his journey from innocence to experience, from naivety to sophistication, and from simplicity about the tricks of life to a learned and a knowledgeable person concerning the ups and downs of living in the post-World Wars America. John F. Callahan (2004) calls Ellison's *Invisible Man* a "great novel of identity" (p. 288) in the sense that the protagonist is running, or in fact been urged to run, throughout the novel's time span to find out who he is and to gain a sort of self-recognition. The opening sentence sets the notion of this struggle between the hero and the people surrounding him when he says "I am an invisible man". A special invisibility, as the narrator says, "simply because people refuse to see [him]" (Ellison, 1952, p. 3). In James Albrech's (2010) words, the works of Ralph Ellison "constitute one of American literature's most sophisticated explorations of the doubleness that W. E. B. Du Bois described as central to African American identity". Albrech is also confessing that Ellison's fictions depict the fact that African Americans are "longing" to control the prevalent psychological and sociological divisions in American society "to 'merge his double self into a better and truer self,'" (p. 65).

Identity is one of the subjects that has been researched by an increased number of academics in recent years (Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx, 2011; Woodward, 2002; Elliott, 2011). However; our human concern with the study of identity is not new. The term 'identity' might have been used interchangeably with the term 'self' which has been the concern of much study from antiquity especially from the religious perspective. In Mark R. Leary and June Price Tangney's (2012) words, "writers analyzed the evils of egotism, pride, and selfishness, and pondered ways to help people escape the self-centeredness that the writers believed interferes with spiritual insight and leads to immoral behavior" (p. 2). What Stephen Frosh (1991) presents as a description of the self is worthwhile standing upon. According to him, "self can be thought of as a psychological structure that contains within it the various processes of mental life". He further adds "that selfhood comprises a core element of each individual's personality and subjective existence. (p. 2)

At this point, we are left with the problem of how to find our own self or as some would rather prefer to use, our true self. Would it be possible to define and describe ourselves the way we would like us to be or we should see ourselves the way people would reflect upon us even though we know ourselves better than anybody else? In answering a question like that, Frosh says that the position of self is not very much clear since one can judge and evaluate his or her surrounding from his or her point of view while at the same time one need to know about himself or herself from the reflection of other people around him or her. In other words, in order to fully know yourself you have to see how people assess you and then you will be able to learn better about yourself. "That is why" adds Frosh, "I need the psychoanalytic dialogue, in which I see myself from the vantage point of the other". So surprisingly and paradoxically, other people know us better than our knowledge about ourselves (1991, pp. 2-3).

In Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the narrator who calls himself the invisible man is not seen by the people surrounding him including those of his own race. This is why, despite his real existence, he refers to himself and admits that he is invisible. The hero of the novel excludes any biological defects in relation to his invisibility but refers to the fact that it "occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality" (Ellison, 1952, p. 3).

The protagonist of the novel is so naïve at the beginning that he is ready to accept from other people imposed ideas and viewpoints. This naivety indicates lack of identity or misperception of one's own identity. Michael Hill and Lena Hill (2008) state that "much of Ellison's attention to white psychology seems calculated to expose the narrator's failure to understand his identity and to distinguish the accuracy of labels society freely applies" (p. 95). As a young adult who has only recently graduated from high school, as per his own narration, the protagonist has not encountered life on a broader perspective and as a result of this he starts to comply with whatever people will imply on him. When the narrator encounters a group of veterans in the local inn called Golden Day, describes out of experience since the vet has seen much in life and has been tested by the cruelty of the time. Ellison very skillfully includes the case of the veterans in the novel. The old warriors have spent their power and strength serving their country when they ability by age or being handicapped they are neglected and even forgotten. This group of vets have one more reason for this mistreatment which is their colour. Unlike the young narrator, they have got a lot of life experience. This is why according to Hill and Hill (2008), "when the vet meets the narrator on the bus, he tries to further

dismantle his naïve understanding of society, exhorting 'look beneath the surface' and 'learn how you operate'" (p. 96).

The Vet represents a man who has been through the difficulties of life including the injustice of wars and the bad treatment of enemies and friends in the most crucial and life-threatening conditions. He offers to share this experience with the narrator and advises him to help him find his way ahead. Having not been exposed too much to the difficulties of life, the narrator depends on the people in his environment for guidance and insight but it takes him too long until he finds out and learns that whatever comes from other people is not always in his interest. Sometimes, he is misguided and led astray or even is told to lie and behave against his own ethics. This is very apparent when Bledsoe reproaches the narrator for what happened to Mr. Norton on the route and in Golden Day when he says, "my God, boy! You're black and living in the South—did you forget how to lie?" Mr. Bledsoe, in a fit of anger, discloses a false impression that stereotypes the black people to be liars. He further degenerates the condition by stating that the kind of education that is offered in the south to the black students is motivating them to be opportunistic and deceitful. "Here you are a junior in college!" Bledsoe tells the narrator, "why, the dumbest black bastard in the cotton patch knows that the only way to please a white man is to tell him a lie! What kind of education are you getting around here? (Ellison, 1952, p. 139).

Shortly after this conversation, Bledsoe begins to bombard the narrator with words that are meant to belittle his positions and shocks him in order to wake him up from the illusion of self-esteem that so far the young boy has gained. This decisive attack destroys the narrator from within when he states that "you're nobody, son. You don't exist – can't you see that?" (Ellison, 1952, p. 143). Even after that harsh verbal attack, the narrator still believes in Bledsoe and his false promise of accepting him back in the college after working for some time in New York.

Even though Dr. Bledsoe is not sending the narrator to New York out of goodwill, what the narrator gained in terms of self-recognition and the vastly different life experiences were of a great importance. There is a big difference between life in the south compared to the one in the north. The narrator has been astonished to see girls standing behind the counters in market places. He is even shocked by seeing black policemen standing at street intersections "directing traffic—and there were white drivers in the traffic who obeyed his signals as though it was the most natural thing in the world" (Ellison, 1952, p. 159).

After reaching Harlem and seeing what he had not expected, the narrator agrees that this is the city of dreams and starts to dream about his future through changing his southern ways to acquire something new more suitable and agreeable with the new place. This indicates the instability of the self and identity from the part of the narrator when he says, "here in the North I would slough off my southern ways of speech. Indeed, I would have one way of speaking in the North and another in the South" (Ellison, 1952, p. 164).

Living in this new and exciting place, New York, and being exposed to other people on a wider scale help the narrator to learn new possibilities and build his own identity better. This is apparent when he "saw a man pushing a cart piled high with rolls of blue paper". The man seems to be burdened with the difficulties of life because he was singing the Blues. After he asks the man about the papers, the other replies that "I guess somebody done changed their plans". In an answer to the narrator's question on why they change their plans, the man says "Folks is always making plans and changing 'em". Talking from his lack of experience point of view, the narrator says, "but that's a mistake. You

have to stick to the plan". The answer from the man gives a shake to the narrator when he says "You kinda young, daddy-o," (Ellison, 1952, p. 175). The cart man, like the veteran, has a good experience about life and speaks the reality that is still early for the young narrator to comprehend easily. This incident is effective in preparing the young narrator to the possibilities of change. It gives an insight to him that if one's current plan is not applicable or useful, it is not the end of the world but it requires the person to think and brings about a new plan.

After the narrator delivers most of Bledsoe's letters to the trustees in New York and without getting a positive and immediate answer from any of them, he insists to see, in person, Mr. Emerson, the last of whom Bledsoe's letters are addressed to. The narrator eagerly pleads to meet the man in person even if it is for a short time. As if he feels something wrong, the narrator tries his best to convince the secretary to see Mr. Emerson saying "I'm sure I can convince him that I'm worthy of a job", he adds, "I'll prove my identity". The shocking reply the narrator gets from the secretary is enough to wake him up from his dream but it was too early for the narrator to decode and understand the message. The secretary who turns out to be Mr. Emerson's son and seems to have seen many similar cases in the past, comments by saying, "Identity! My God! Who has any identity any more anyway? It isn't so perfectly simple" (Ellison, 1952, p. 187).

The young Emerson has, probably out of sympathy, discloses the content of the letter to the narrator and it is only then that the narrator has learned the dirty trick Bledsoe has played upon him. The letter reads, as per the narrator's rephrasing, "My dear Mr. Emerson, ...The Robin bearing this letter is a former student. Please hope him to death, and keep him running. Your most humble and obedient servant, A. H. Bledsoe" (Ellison, 1952, p. 194). This is a turning point for the young narrator in seeking the self and trying to find out his own identity because he has learned that not everybody around him is indeed his friend.

Based on the advice and recommendation from the young Emerson, the narrator has found a work in Liberty Paint Factory. His job was to put ten drops of a liquid that is in the narrator's description, "dead black", into bucket contained white paint and to stir it well until it is mixed together. This act of mixing black and white is of a symbolic use. It means that the white and black identity is never complete or is never good enough until it is mixed. None of the two colours, or may be the two people, can evolve to the desired position without the other. Although this mixture is done in private and far from the public yet, it is a *de facto* thing without which the substance is incomplete. The narrator Hard and in a short period of time he learns the basics of the work, a fact that makes his direct supervisor, who is also black, to feel jealous of him. The supervisor has intentionally exposed the narrator to a boiler explosion that leaves him unconscious and ends up in the factory hospital. Even in the hospital, the young narrator is about to be used in an experiment like a laboratory mouse. The narrator, deep in his mind, is now sure that he has to think his own way and leave behind what others may think or say about him. This is why after leaving the hospital he starts to look for his freedom and the first step in this direction is to look after himself and nobody else. His ultimate concern is going to be finding his own identity which is, in turn, his freedom. He says, "I could no more escape than I could think of my identity. Perhaps, I thought, the two things are involved with each other. When I discover who I am, I'll be free" (Ellison, 1952, p. 243).

From this point forward, the narrator changes his attitude starts to on his own self and interest. He has gained and self-esteem. He is more powerful, at least spiritually because he has learned that he should depend on himself and never get afraid of anybody. "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" (Ellison, 1952, p. 249). He starts to do things his own ways and not to worry about what others may be pleased with or think about him. "I no longer had to worry about who saw me or about what was proper. To hell with all that ... to hell with being ashamed of what you liked. No more of that for me. I am what I am!" (Ellison, 1952, pp. 264, 266). He starts to feel sorry for his past life in which he falsely tried to please other people even if it was against his own interest. He states, "what and how much had I lost by trying to do only what was expected of me instead of what I myself had wished to do? What a waste, what a senseless waste!" (Ellison, 1952, p. 266). This nostalgic feeling provides the narrator with energy and will to look and focus on his future and be himself. His confidence in his skills and abilities makes him not to look after his own interests only but to pay attention to the other needy people in his surroundings, too. This is clearly depicted when he urges people to defend the old black couple who are about to get evicted by the white landlord and becomes very successful in achieving the goal.

After the narrator is asked to join the Brotherhood as a speaker of Harlem district and is offered a tempting salary he accepts the challenge but deep inside he decides to be himself and not to fall under the influence of anybody. The narrator's confirmation of his own identity in this stage is clear when he says, "I would do the work but I would be no one except myself—whatever I was, I would pattern my life on that of the Founder. They might think I was acting like Booker T. Washington; let them. But what I thought of myself I would keep to myself" (Ellison, 1952, p. 311).

After having seen much and experienced different situations in Harlem, the narrator has learned about the reality of life both for himself and the people in his surroundings. This stance is pretty much being confirmed and, by now, he has found his own way of dealing with situations. This new position is apparent when Ras the Exhorter, a tough opponent of the Brotherhood, and his men start to chase the narrator and want to kill him for his ideas. The narrator says,

knowing now who I was and where I was and knowing too that I had no longer to run for or from the Jacks and the Emersons and the Bledsoes and Nortons, but only from their confusion, impatience, and refusal to recognize the beautiful absurdity of their American identity and mine. (Ellison, 1952, p. 559)

The narrator has finally recognized his invisibility and he also accepts it but he decides to deal with it in a different way in order for others to feel it and also, for himself, to make use of it. After much contemplation and evaluation, he decides to write his story to be read and this way people who could not see him with their physical eyes may feel his presence with their mental inward eyes. The narrator is now thinking more human and believes that the ultimate aim of knowledge is to serve humanity otherwise all the information and experiences one gets are useless. So he takes the right step "to make his discovery visible through the power of his pen" (Hill & Hill, 2008, p. 111). This is an indication that his identity is more alleviated as he now thinks on a broader sense outside the restrictions laid by racial ideologies. This path is what Ellison himself tries to use to achieve his ethical obligations as a

good citizen towards his nation and the world. After all, this is exactly the message of literature and arts, to share what has been seen or felt with others to give them insights into their own life.

Why should I be the one to dream this nightmare? Why should I be dedicated and set aside—yes, if not to at least tell a few people about it? There seems to be no escape. Here I've set out to throw my anger into the world's face, but now that I've tried to put it all down the old fascination with playing a role returns, and I'm drawn upward again. (Ellison, 1952, p. 579)

The narrator making his last confession, out of the experience, states that it is difficult, or even impossible, for humans to live in total seclusion from the society. Humans must accept the reality of their existence and face the challenges of life. This is why he confirms that "a decision has been made. I'm shaking off the old skin and I'll leave it here in the hole. I'm coming out, no less invisible without it, but coming out nevertheless" (Ellison, 1952, p. 581).

Juneteenth, which is the outcome of Ellison's decades long of hard work, is the continuation as well as the accomplishment of the writer's contribution to the identity formation in America specifically and beyond this land on a wider scale. The novel has been edited and published posthumously by John F. Callahan in 1999 from over 2000 pages of written work and notes that were kept and sometimes modified during four decades of the writer's life span. *Juneteenth* was a long-awaited and precious work on which Ellison has worked and kept on modifying and adapting for many years. The work successfully depicts how American identity is incomplete and paralyzed without the true recognition of the role of, what the writer favored to refer to as, the "Negros".

Juneteenth's title refers to the African American Juneteenth holiday, originally celebrated in Texas and later in other southern and southwestern states through the early twentieth century, and revived in recent decades. The holiday commemorates the landing of Union troops in Galveston, June 19, 1865—two and a half year after the Emancipation Proclamation. It is the story of a white young man, Senator Sunraider, who has been raised as a child, Bliss, by a black preacher, Reverend A.Z. Hickman. The story is set as a flashback of memories unfolding how Bliss has transformed from an orphan child preacher to a movie-maker and later to a race-baited Senator to be shot finally by a black man while giving a speech full of racist expressions.

Through Hickman, Ellison depicts the ground reality of American society at that time which bears a long history of slavery, racial discrimination and segregation. The blacks, nowadays are favourably referred to as people of colour, used to be treated inhumanly to a point they were deprived from their roots and having no chance to speak their agonies because, as Hickman says,

They cut our tongues...

..... They left us speechless...

..... Lord, they left us without words...

..... Amen! They scattered our tongues in this land like seed...

.... And left us without language...

..... They took away our talking drums.... (Ellison, 1999, p. 122).

Reverend Hickman raised Bliss hoping that "properly raised and trained the child's color and features, his inner substances and his appearance would make it possible for him to enter into the wider affairs of the nation and work towards the betterment of his people" (Ellison, 1999, p. 355). He was Hickman's hope at the start but later he became the hope of all black congregation of the church in which Hickman was preaching. They saw a glimpse of light of a brighter future through the genius and cleverness of this white child. Hickman points out that it was not possible for the black people to penetrate the system of white supremacy and work to improve their conditions from inside. He acknowledges that the only acceptable mask it that of being white and this is why the ruling system cannot understand the blacks needs and demands. He admits his disappointment when says "but oh! what a foolish miscalculation" (Ellison, 1999, p. 271).

In a later recollection, Hickman states that "we dreamed a dream and worked for it but the world was simply too big for us and the dream got out of hand" (Ellison, 1999, p. 270). This means that their wish has not come true and Bliss does not do what the "black" people expects him to do for them. Bliss has a good appreciation for Hickman and is referring to him as "daddy" despite the difference in color. He has never thought of his mother until one day while he is role-playing the resurrection scene in the church under the auspices of Reverend Hickman, he hears a white woman screaming "he is mine, MINE! That is Cudworth, my child. My baby. You gypsy niggers stole him, my baby. You robbed him of his birthright!" (Ellison, 1999, p. 155). It is the first time somebody claims to be his mother and call him by this name. The lady is very serious in her claim and wants to take him out to a different place when she says, " I'm taking him home to his heritage, ... He is mine, you understand? I'm his mother!" (p. 156). Later Bliss is told by the congregation that the white lady is crazy. Bliss has hardly come into contact with white people as he spends most of the time in the church with Hickman and the black congregation. When he encounters the incident of the white woman's claim he is traumatized and is drawn to see life on a wider perspective. This incident ignites a flash in his mind to question about his origin. Consequently, he shifts his interest to movie-making after he is taken by Hickman to see movies and some acrobatic scenes in a circus. Shortly after this, Bliss disappears and runs away from the black community that nurtured him. This running away event,

consequently, allocating for him an identity different from how he had hitherto perceived himself. And gaining easy access to the movie theater brought him to an awareness of the possibility that he could be different from Hickman and the others. This awareness is only secondary, because actually what he goes in search of in the movies is his mother. (Jua, 2005)

Bliss is now moving away from the path that Hickman has set him on early at his childhood. Bliss is now seeking worldly pleasure rather than celestial approval and has now become "Mister Movie-man" (Ellison, 1999, p. 69), as the girl whom he enjoys a love tryst in the countryside calls him. He mentions how his soul has been divided when he started to follow a beautiful woman by writing "Bliss loves Laly" but "me the preacher wiped it out. Then I wrote, Bliss loves you know who, and the preacher me wiped that away. So only Bliss and loves remained in the sand" (Ellison, 1999, p. 66). At that time, Bliss was divided between two selves: one is still Bliss and the other is a new entity that does not resemble Bliss by any means. He is having a crisis of identity because he is torn between past and present, between what is true and what he wants to be true. He confirms that he is having a double, somebody who is living within him but is totally different from him. Although there are only him and the lady on the spot but he thinks that there are three persons. He is so perplexed that he turns

around to look for the third person but he cannot see anybody because the third person is present in his psyche (Ellison, 1999, p. 69).

There is very little information in the novel about Bliss's life as a movie-maker apart from what he mentions as his encounter with the black woman. It seems that he has shifted quickly from movie-making to politics since according to him there is much similarity between movies and politics. According to a note that Callahan has included at the end of the novel, "the more Bliss plays with camera as a means of forgetting then of denying, and then of distorting, burlesquing, the more he is forced to forget the old identity" (Ellison, 1999, p. 359). Bliss wants to create an identity for himself and make people believe in him since he has confidence that nobody will be asking about his ancestral root if he managed to become famous and successful in life. This position is very much similar to the identity of American nation which managed to prove itself in the world affairs after the World War II although it is a country of few centuries of age. "He realizes that he doesn't have to know who his parents were" Ellison states, "and that he can create a political identity out of racial prejudice, and that this will not be questioned because it is centered not in biology and class, but in social power (Ellison, 1999, p. 359).

According to Ellison, politicians can play against ordinary people the same way as the movie-makers can make a collage of various scenes and decide which scene to keep and what to exclude from the audience. Bliss is overwhelmed that "the secret of film lies in the fact that most of the action which gives a movie movement lies between the frames in the dark. Thus the viewer is manipulated in the dark" (Ellison, 1999, p. 360). Bliss thinks that "politics is an art of maneuvering" through which one can affect people and control them easily but one has to master the game properly and in order "to move them you have to change the home base" (Ellison, 1999, p. 28). This is exactly what he has done. Not only has he changed the home base but he has also changed his name to Adam Sunraider.

The newly adopted name itself is significant in the sense that it may relate to the first human being who falls from Aden and is tasked to start afresh life on the earth. His new name, Adam, which strongly suggests a connection with Western mythology, seems to reflect a shift away from his connection to the Afro-American community in favor of rising in the social ranks.

Senator Sunraider betrays Hickman and the people who brought him up and worked hard to educate him and teach him how to be a good preacher in the church. Hickman's disappointment is exacerbated when he finds him attacking the way black people behave during his speech on a Senate floor. The verbal attack is so harsh that drives a black young man to shoot him with several bullets. The act of shooting is a result of insults by the Senator when he refers to some black people driving a Cadillac car in the streets of New York city. He suggests that legislation to be made to change the name of the Cadillac to "Coon Cage Eight" not because of its highly performative eight cylinders "but because it has now become such a common sight to see eight or more of our darker brethren crowded together enjoying its power, its beauty, its neo-pagan comfort, while weaving recklessly through the streets of our great cities and along our superhighways. (Ellison, 1999, p. 23).

Throughout his journey from childhood to a prestigious and important senate position, Bliss/Sunraider, has not been able to find his true identity until he receives a blow that has shaken him from his indifference and bewilderment to the reality of life. This is clear when after being shot with several bullets he cries in an African American vernacular "LAWD, WHY HAST THOU ..." but the Senator recognizes Hickman's voice responding from above him saying, " For Thou hast forsaken ... me" (Ellison, 1999, p. 27). Bliss/Sunraider has suffered the consequences of his

evasiveness since he seeks to be a complete person but he has run away from the constituent parts that provided his completion. By choosing to detach himself from the black people and show off as only white "he poisons his spirit. Bliss the Senator, remains incomplete, Hickman and the others are the missing part. He seeks power but he has detached himself from his true source of power" (Ellison, 1999, p. 361).

Neither Bliss nor the Sunraider, as Ellison tries to tell his readers, can survive and lead a healthy life alone. The envisioned solution is by mixing up efforts together from of the black and white people, the same way the desired white paint been produced in *Invisible Man*, by mixing drops of black substance to the white paint. The desired aim, here, is to have a complete and improvised American identity which is a combination of the different constituents of the American people. The desired status is also linked to the completion of the identity of the author, too. Since the author is also a brick in the big building which is America.

Both *Juneteenth* and *Invisible Man* contain some biographical aspects of their author. The development of the plots in these novel mirrors some important destination in Ellison's life. In *Juneteenth*, the hero of the novel, Bliss, as well as the other main character, Hickman, are both orphans, like Ellison himself, who are forced to find their routes in a cruel world without any paternal support. Hickman starts as a jazz player but finally turns into a preacher while Ellison also starts with music before ending up as a writer. According to Roselyne Jua (2005), "these changes are themselves reminiscent of those that punctuated Ellison's life, first as musician, then critic, photographer, and ultimately writer" (p. 317).

Autobiographical hints are even more visible in *Invisible Man* than in *Juneteenth*. The narrator is black like Ellison who has been awarded a scholarship to a nearby black college that resembles Tuskegee institute for Ellison. Both, the narrator of the novel and the author, moved to New York and settled in Harlem quarter. Moreover, working with words as the occupation and a means through which to express themselves is an achievement they both excelled in. To this end, Saul Bellow who shared a house for some time with Ellison, was drawing our attention by saying that, "Ralph was much better at history than I could ever be, but it gradually became apparent that he was not merely talking about history but telling the story of his life, and tying it into American history" (Bellow, 1998). What is remained to be stated is that, Ellison, through tackling the issues of identity in his novels, was not only expressing the story of his identity seeking but he was rather expressing the importance of identity on the individual level as well as on the level of the communities and nations.

3. Cultural Trauma

It has been understood that trauma is "a blow to the tissues of the body—or more frequently now, to the tissues of the mind—that results in injury or some other disturbance" (Erikson, 1995, p. 183). It is such a powerful blow that human defense mechanisms fail to normally cope with without undergoing certain considerable, and in many cases negative, changes. But, trauma does not only affects individuals alone, it can also create damaging effects on communities and groups. This is what professionals call collective trauma and is best explained by Erikson (1995) when states:

By collective trauma ..., I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communalism. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with 'trauma'. (p. 187)

It will take a good period of time until a traumatic event will result in a collective trauma. This is also true, according to Cathy Caruth (1996), for individual trauma too, since it is the recollection of the event in the memory of the person that creates trauma. So, trauma is the effect and the outcome rather than the source and the cause. Yet, the life of those who are affected by it will undergo drastic changes especially in terms of identity. Talking about collective memory in relation to trauma, Jeffrey Alexander (2004), under the title of *Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma*, states that trauma is very much like a sociological process in the sense that it will affect the society or certain groups in society and cause them mental injuries. According to Alexander, "the collective identity will become significantly revised" as a result of this kind of trauma. He further explains that "identity revision means that there will be a searching re-remembering of the collective past.... Identities are continuously constructed and secured not only by facing the present and future but also by reconstructing the collectivity's earlier life" (p. 22).

Sometimes trauma does not affect the whole community collectively instead it affects a specific group or clan within a community and in this case it is called a cultural trauma. According to Ron Eyerman (2004), "cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion" (p. 61). In their book, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Alexander et al. refer to several examples of cultural trauma including, but not restricted to, The Holocaust during the second World War, the African Americans, the 9/11 2001 in the US, The case of the Armenians in 1915, the Hutu massacre of Tutsis in Rwanda, and many others. What is the point of interest for us, in this study, is the case of the African Americans and how their cultural trauma is depicted by Ralph Ellison in both *Invisible Man* and *Juneteenth*.

Any study of traumatic experiences in relation to African Americans will not be considered comprehensive without reference to the memory of long times of slavery and racial discrimination. Although slavery was abolished through the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 in the Confederate state and in all the US territories after the civil war, it remained an inseparable part of the African American's memory. This is the case partly because of the unfulfilled promises of freedom and equity and partly because of the overwhelming effects of the act not only on the life of the survivors but on

the future of their offspring as well. Slavery is, in Eyreman's (2004) description, a "collective memory, a form of remembrance that grounded the identity-formation of a people" (p. 60). It has been transcending from generation to generation to symbolize the harsh struggle of the forefathers to survive. Zora Neale Hurston's description, quoted in Eyreman (2004), is a good example indicating how the offspring of slaves feel and reflect upon slavery when she states that she cannot help thinking about being a descendant of slaves. After the passage of a long time on slavery, at least officially, it is no longer possible for the younger generation of the former slaves to lay behind and weep for their ancestral past. They have to lead their life as any other normal person even though they will be feeling the pain in their hearts. Hurston acknowledges that " Slavery is the price I paid for civilization, and the choice was not with me. It is a bully adventure and worth all that I paid through my ancestors for it" (p. 91).

Representation of traumatic events in the literature of the African Americans is not something new. It has been well presented through the slave narratives of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. However; the representation of Ellison through his two novels is outstanding. John F. Callahan, in the introduction to *Juneteenth*, writes, "from beginning to end- *Juneteenth*, like *Invisible Man*, tests Ellison's conviction that time's burden – its blessing and curse- is 'a matter of the past being active in the present". Most of the characters in these novels are under the impact of some past events which forcefully affect their present lives. (*Juneteenth* p. xxiv).

The narrator of *Invisible Man* starts his story by saying, "I am not ashamed of my grandparents for having been slaves" (Ellison, 1952, p. 15). So, slavery is the starting point for the story through which the narrator relates his present condition to his ancestors. The memory of slavery comes down to him from his grandparents like a burden which even though he states he "is not ashamed of" but still it occupies his mindset. The narrator goes back through memory to tell about his grandfather's advice to his father while lying on the death bed by insisting that his son should continue "the good fight". The grandfather considers himself to be a traitor, "a spy in the enemy's country", since he believed in Reconstruction and is been deceived by false promises. His last will for his son is a strange recommendation when says "live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open" (Ellison, 1952, p. 16). The old man's speech is full of hatred and enmity but who knows how much he had suffered in his life by that "enemy".

This is the old man's recommendation to his son and down through to his grandchildren as before he takes his final breath he asks that this will to be taught "to the younguns". In this case, the life of all his clan (the blacks/Negros) is thought to be a war against a known enemy (the white). The grandfather is speaking for the whole group of the former slaves who fought for their rights but later they gave up in hopes that Reconstruction would provide them with equality and human dignity. Since their hope did not come true, he thinks that he is a traitor but he wants his offspring to continue this fight. This is a traumatic condition not only for one person but for the whole group. This incident is so powerful that it resonates in the mind of the narrator for the rest of his life and wherever he goes. The narrator has once again encounters his grandfather when after been awarded a briefcase containing "a scholarship to the state college for Negroes" he dreams of his grandfather being "at a circus with him" but the man "refused to laugh at the clowns no matter what they did". Then, the man tells his grandson to open the case in which there are envelopes enfolded one in the other until he

finally comes to the last one. There is a short message engraved on a document that states "to Whom It May Concern, ... Keep This Nigger-Boy Running" (Ellison, 1952, p. 33).

What can be deducted from this encounter is the fact that the offspring of the grandfather are expected to run all their life behind hopes of obtaining recognition and rights but they will be misled and disappointed. The grandfather's furiousness and rage against those whom he refers to as "enemy" is best understood when we inspect the battle royal scene.

The 'battle royal' in chapter two could be considered as one of the most artistic representations of cultural trauma in *Invisible Man*. After the narrator has impressed the super intendant of his high school with his graduation speech, he is asked to "give the speech at a gathering of the town's leading white citizens". Not aware of what is going on there the narrator is very much happy for that, thinking it to be "a triumph for our whole community". To his disappointment the narrator finds it to be "the occasion of a smoker, and [he] was told that since [he] was to be there anyway [he] might as well take part in the battle royal to be fought by some of [his] schoolmates as part of the entertainment" (Ellison, 1952, p. 17). But before the fighting starts there is yet another act of humiliation to the black students. An act of making the boys looking collectively at a naked young blonde woman who was part of the amusement for the white. The audience are not only enjoying looking at the naked woman but they are entertaining themselves by looking at how the young black boys react to the scene. Anthony Abbott (1985) thinks that both the narrator and the other black boys on the scene are attracted by the blond white woman but at the same time they pity her because she is also helpless like the boys. The beautiful lady is a symbol of everything desired in life and was available in the American society at that time yet, the black people cannot ever grasp. Abbot describes the white onlookers by saying that "the whites are both sadistic and hypocritical. They obviously enjoy watching the black boys suffer and seem to feel no guilt over their own behavior" (p. 53 & 54).

This is a scene of a psychological suffering. The boys are made to reflect upon themselves as been worthless, degraded, and almost like a "cattle". This is considered as a mental torture that will leave its impact on a long-range lifespan of the boys. It is a slavery of another sort and what exacerbates the impact even further is that it has been perpetrated after the Reconstruction promises. The scene was so disgraceful that not only the boys felt ashamed of but as the narrator says, "I saw the terror and disgust in her eyes, almost like my own terror and that which I saw in some of the other boys" (Ellison, 1952, p. 20). The situation escalates when the white audience "began reaching out to touch her" and "it was mad" but before it is out of control the woman was taken out by some people.

The boys were terrified and "some were still crying and in hysteria" but this was not the end. This was the beginning to be followed by the more degradation act of forcing the boys to fight each other collectively. Without having any choice, the boys "were stopped and ordered to get into the ring" and were "blindfolded with broad bands of white cloth". The narrator describes the situation as finding oneself in a complete darkness. Besides, the boys are all young and they might not have been used to darkness this is why they are all terrified. The bands of white piece of cloth that are used to blindfold the boys are very symbolic and indicates that the white people are preventing the sight from the blacks. It also tells that the "whites" are responsible of all the misfortunes faced by the "blacks". The picture is so vicious, especially when some people from the audience outrageously says "let me at those black sonsabitches!", that the narrator as well as the other black boys are expecting the unknown

to happen to them. In some places of the world humans entertain themselves by watching animals fighting each other and this is strongly being opposed by animal rights activists. Ellison, by bringing this scene in the novel, wants to say that the black people are treated like animals by the sadist whites. What makes the situation worse is that the audience are comprised of the elite including the superintendent as well as other important government figures which indicates that this kind of scenes are the norm and not occasional. The narrator's description is self-representative when he says, "I stood against the ropes trembling. For in those days I was what they called ginger-colored, and he sounded as though he might crunch me between his teeth like a crisp ginger cookie" (Ellison, 1952, p. 21 & 22).

All the ten boys including the narrator are made to fight each other blindfolded. There is no rule how to hit or where to hit. It was free like a fight among herds of animals and "everyone fought hysterically. It was complete anarchy. Everybody fought everybody else" (Ellison, 1952, p. 23). They cause each other a lot of pain and the narrator says, "I bled from both nose and mouth, the blood spattering upon my chest". The narrator is left with another bigger boy in a dual fight for the final winner. He intentionally loses the fight because his thought is preoccupied by his speech. When this section of the smoker party is finished it is time for the prize collection which in turn is another act of entertainment for the white but humiliation for the boys. The boys are guided to collect some coins and notes on an electrified rug. "I saw the rug covered with coins of all dimensions and a few crumpled bills", the narrator explains. In addition to all the pain the boys feel, their reward is more terror and further pain when they get electrified as soon as they touch the coins on the wet rug. The animal image is what comes to the narrator's mind as he and the other boys are rising up and down from the shock of the electricity current passing through their tired bodies. He describes the case by saying "a hot, violent force tore through my body, shaking me like a wet rat" (Ellison, 1952, p. 27).

When the show is over all the boys are given five dollars except the final winner who is given ten. Just before all the boys leave the place, the narrator is stopped and is told to go back to deliver his speech. Nobody pays any attention to the words in his speech until he mistakenly uses "social equality" instead of "social responsibility" which casts everybody into a dreadful silence. He is asked to repeat the phrase and this time the narrator says it correctly, "social responsibility". A man from the first row asked, "You sure that about 'equality' was a mistake?". The reply comes quickly "Oh, yes, sir," from the narrator. "Well, you had better speak more slowly so we can understand. We mean to do right by you, but you've got to know your place at all times" is the comment from the agitated man. After all this humiliation and degradation the narrator is given "a gleaming calfskin brief case" that contained "a scholarship to the state college for Negroes" (Ellison, 1952, p. 33). The whole scene of the battle royal inflicts a deep feeling of sorrow and degradation that causes pity for those who have witnessed it and those who will remember this and the similar scenes in the future. The boys, as well as the whole group through them, will carry this pain to the posterity and will be culturally traumatized for such events.

The story of the veterans in Golden Day and what happens to them in the presence of the white trustee, Mr. Norton, is another depiction of cultural trauma. The veterans, as the narrator describes them, are "a little shellshocked" (Ellison, 1952, p. 73). The Golden Day is a brothel to which the mentally ill black veterans are taken once a week in order to, "raise a little hell" (Ellison, 1952, p. 80), as one of the vets says. The narrator has to take Mr. Norton who looks in a dire health condition to Golden Day in order to buy him some whisky as per the trustee's request because it is the nearest

place that the narrator can get the order from. Not being allowed to take the drink outside the place, the narrator is obliged to take the white trustee inside while there are riot and disorder by the furious vets who manage to knock down their attendant, named Supercargo.

Those people used to occupy high ranks in the social fabric of the society before war tears them apart and turns them into psychopaths. The group includes politicians, educators, doctors, lawyers, and event artists. The narrator did not feel at ease any time he encounters them although the social position they occupied prior to their current situation were envied by the like of the narrator. They are having a strange condition which makes it difficult for the narrator to understand as they tried to amuse themselves and play games of laughter with the school boys "whose rules and subtleties [the narrator] could never grasp" (Ellison, 1952, p. 74).

One of the vets who used to be a doctor takes care of Mr. Norton while the latter is astonished by the former's diagnostic skills, saying "your diagnosis is exactly that of my specialist," (Ellison, 1952, p. 90). The skills of this former doctor, and now patient, creates a feeling of curiosity for Mr. Norton who surprisingly questions the vet by saying, "I went to several fine physicians before one could diagnose it. How did you know?". The answer from the vet is "I too was a specialist". This unexpected answer pushes Mr. Norton to find out the reason why he had ended up as a patient. To the white trustee's much surprise, the vet explains that he has been saving lives but some people felt unhappy about that. Ten of those people attacks him one night and drive him out of the city because he has saved a black man's life. The vet continues by saying, "I was forced to the utmost degradation because I possessed skilled hands and the belief that my knowledge could bring me dignity -- not wealth, only dignity -- and other men health" (Ellison, 1952, p. 93). This accident is so inhuman that makes the black specialist to get a psychological breakdown and consequently finds himself with the other patients in the hospital for the vets.

From this explanation we understand that the vet was prevented to practice his work in which he had excelled because he was black and did not belong to the powerful white race. He was not allowed to carry out his work which was saving human lives. This is not only a one-case incident because he states that this kind of unjust behavior is known by "most peasants and folk peoples [who] almost always know through experience, though seldom through conscious thought" (Ellison, 1952, p. 91). The vet wants the narrator to hear this conversation in order to know about real life experience from other people no to fall into the same ditch people fell into before him. The vet, then, bravely tells Mr. Norton that his existence in the pub is not safe because he might get attacked at any moment. He warns the trustee that the furious vets who have knocked down their attendant may have different views about him since, "to some, [he is] the great white father, to others the lynch of souls, but for all, [he is] confusion come even into the Golden Day" (Ellison, 1952, p. 93).

The vet is hinting at the trustee to be thought of as a lynch by the black furious patients downstairs the house. He reminds Mr. Norton of the widespread killing and lynching perpetrated by the white supremacy against the blacks at the beginning of the twentieth century. The message of the vet is to explain that the reason of their collective suffering and misfortunes is the harsh treatment of the white people that consequently affects the whole community negatively. The result of all this injustice is a cultural trauma felt especially by the intelligent people of the race. Yet, what is more important for this superficially patient but logically very sound vet is that the narrator to learn the

lesson and comprehend the case which unfortunately at that moment seems impossible. The vet regrets that the narrator cannot grasp the meaning of this wisdom told to him because for him the narrator is "a walking zombie! Already he's learned to repress not only his emotions but his humanity. He's invisible, a walking personification of the Negative, the most perfect achievement of your [white man's] dreams, sir! The mechanical man" (Ellison, 1952, p. 94).

This is a true explanation for the relationship between the black and the white from an experienced person who life has taught him so much but at a very high price. He further comments on their condition by saying that they both fail to understand what is happening to them. The vet thinks that both, the narrator and Mr. Norton, are "poor stumblers" who cannot see the reality of their positions. He tells the trustee that "to you he is a mark on the score-card of [his] achievement, a thing and not a man; a child, or even less -- a black amorphous thing. And you, for all your power, are not a man to him, but a God" (Ellison, 1952, p. 95). There is a big difference between the experienced vet and the young narrator who in his naivety cannot comprehend the lesson at all since he, in Morris Dickstein's (2004) description, is "an unshakable innocent, immature, eager to get ahead, trained in the habits of deference and humility through which blacks in America had traditionally gotten by" (p. 135). Outraged with the blindness of the narrator, the vet finally says,

He believes in you as he believes in the beat of his heart. He believes in that great false wisdom taught slaves and pragmatists alike, that white is right. I can tell you his destiny. He'll do your bidding, and for that his blindness is his chief asset. He's your man, friend. Your man and your destiny. (Ellison, 1952, p. 95)

The vet is a representation of the slave's descendants who have been deceived by the whites for a long time through a false wisdom which is to believe that what the white people says is the truth! Coming to this point, the vet has provided a reasonable answer to Mr. Norton's question when he asked, "With your ability . . . , what on earth are you doing here in this . . . ?". The least offensive word Mr. Norton can use in the last blank space is 'Madhouse'. The vets including the former doctor are not traumatized only by war but they are traumatized much more because they belong to a culture that is belittled and thought to be inferior by the white supremacy.

Another aspect of cultural trauma is the reference to the tools and dolls in the novel as a representation of the "black" people. The first of these tools is the iron link of brother Tarp which is, for the narrator when first sees it, "a thick, dark, oily piece of filed steel that had been twisted open and forced partly back into place, on which [he] saw marks that might have been made by the blade of a hatchet" (Ellison, 1952, p. 389). Although for the narrator it may looks like only a piece of iron but for brother Tarp, "it's got a heap of signifying wrapped up in it and it might help [him] remember what [they're] really fighting against". As Tarp says, "I don't think of it in terms of but two words, yes and no; but it signifies a heap more . . ." (Ellison, 1952, p. 388). The link represents nineteen years of imprisonment for a member of a cult only because he "said no to a man who wanted to take something from [him]; . . . and even now the debt ain't fully paid and will never be paid in their terms" (Ellison, 1952, p. 387). Tarp says that he has kept the iron so as not to forget the nineteen years of slavery and all the accompanying torture and humiliation he had undergone only for voicing a negation in front of his white masters. Something similar to the grandfather's advice, Tarp wants to give this valuable tool to the narrator because, in Tarp's words, "you're the talker, not me". He wants

the narrator to "look at it once in a while" so that he can get spiritual strength in fighting for the rights of his people. After much contemplation, the narrator realizes the importance of this tool and says that he is compelled to respect its significance. For the narrator, it looks like someone who wants to give his father's watch to his son not because of the old-fashioned watch's price but because of "the paternal gesture" that links the son to his ancestors, gives meaning to his present, and provides insights for his future which may be full of struggle (Ellison, 1952, pp. 389, 390).

Another tool that has been used in the novel to indicate the cultural trauma is the sambo doll sold by Tod Clifton, a member of the Brotherhood in Harlem. The narrator has never expected Clifton to do such a degrading act. This is why he starts to ask himself questions like, "what had happened to Clifton? It was all so wrong, so unexpected. How on earth could he drop from Brotherhood to this?" (Ellison, 1952, p. 434). The doll itself is simply a composition of cardboard and some cheap tissue papers that with some mechanical cleverness is made to move up and down making "infuriatingly sensuous motion, a dance that was completely detached from the black, mask-like face" (Ellison, 1952, p. 431). What makes the doll look more symbolic is its black face which is understood as a hint at the black African American people especially by the white.

The word sambo, by implication, has a negative meaning and this is why in the battle royal one of the white men from the audience shouts at the narrator and saying, "That's right, Sambo," (p. 26). This is why the narrator, upon seen Clifton selling sambo dolls on the street, had "struggled between the desire to join in the laughter and to leap upon it with both feet" (Ellison, 1952, p. 432). What has made the narrator even more outraged at the situation is the position of the bystanders who were laughing and entertaining themselves by the scene to an extent that "a short pot-bellied man look down, then up at [the narrator] with amazement and explode with laughter, pointing from [him] to the doll, rocking" (Ellison, 1952, p. 433). The narrator is surprised to see Clifton doing such an act but before he manages to get any justification from him, Clifton was shot by a white policeman for disobeying his orders to stop. For the narrator, Clifton's death was unjustifiable because it is true for the narrator that Clifton has caused humiliation for his people but he is not the maker of the dolls. He was simply a salesman who sells them for some profit. The narrator accuses white people and holds them responsible for Clifton's death twice because "they had the power to use a paper doll, first to destroy his integrity and then as an excuse for killing him" (Ellison, 1952, p. 449).

Accordingly, Clifton is first degraded by selling the black dolls because they are culturally linked to the "black" people and later he was shot for a very trivial offence of selling dolls on the street. The narrator keeps both this doll and the link of brother Tarp as tokens that remind him about the vast cultural trauma his people undergo in their struggle for a decent life in an unjust world.

Juneteenth is also a representation of cultural trauma in many aspects. According to Charles Johnson who wrote the preface to the novel, "Juneteenth spirals downward ever deeper through layers of memory, history, philosophical reflection, and culture" (Ellison, 1999, p. xvi). The first of these depictions is the title which is a reference to June 19, 1865 when the US troops reached Texas and declared the Emancipation of the last remaining enslaved African Americans in the Confederacy. It is a commemoration of the abolishment of slavery celebrated by the former slaves and their offspring throughout the US territories.

Towards the end of chapter six in the novel, Hickman is trying to remind the wounded Senator about the importance and the value of Juneteenth celebration by asking him if he remembers something about it. The Senator states that it is a revival but for Hickman it is "celebrating Emancipation and thanking God" that lasts for "seven days". The Senator remembers the name and says "Juneteenth ... I had forgotten the word". A very meaningful and firm reply follows immediately by Hickman saying, "You've forgotten lots of important things from those days, Bliss" (Ellison, 1999, p. 114).

The celebration is one of the important events for Hickman and his congregation because it carries a lot of cultural significance related to a fateful chance for emancipation. It is regarded highly by the "black" people because they "haven't forgot what it means. Even if sometimes folks try to make [them] believe it never happened or that it was a mistake that it ever did ..." (Ellison, 1999, p. 114). The occasion is meant to remind them about the shared past which, for Hickman, resembles their "slipping off the chains". The event was used to educate people through preaching about their condition and their rights. Bliss is asking Hickman in the ceremony of Juneteenth to tell the younger generation how and why they ended up in that land because "the younger generation are still ignorant about these things. So please, sir, tell us just how we came to be here in our present condition and in this land...." (Ellison, 1999, p. 118). The story is that, according to Hickman,

they brought us here in chains....

In chains, son; in iron chains ...

From half a world away, they brought us ...

In chains and in boats that the history tells us weren't fit for pigs—because pigs cost too much money to be allowed to waste and die as we did. (p. 120)

Hickman goes into much details about history of his people and the sufferings they undergo for many years. He was addressing around five thousand persons who were commemorating the event through an effective speech to keep this memory alive in their hearts. He reminds the people to continue their fight against their enemy who "took the white fleece of the cotton and the sweetness of the sugarcane and made them bitter and bloody with our toil". The enemy who Hickman talks about has treated Hickman's people like animals "without any face ... Without personality, without names". His people are denied recognition, will of choice and in Hickman's words "without the right to do or not to do, to be or not to be, (Ellison, 1999, p. 121).

cultural trauma is also clearly depicted in the novel through the dedication sentence. Ellison dedicates *Juneteenth* to "That Vanished Tribe into Which [he] Was Born: The American Negroes". This tribe is further explained by Hickman when being asked by the Senator's secretary if they are from the constituent of the Senator. Hickman states that they are " from down where we're among the counted but not among the heard" (Ellison, 1999, p. 4). According to Hickman, the problem of the "American Negroes" is that they are never heard. People are not ready to listen neither to their sufferings nor to their contribution to build the society. They are always humiliated in the same way the mere secretary of the Senator did by telling them, "I've heard Senator Sunraider state that the only colored he knows is the boy who shines shoes at his golf club" (Ellison, 1999, p. 6). This is an act of degradation which is enough to create cultural trauma in Hickman and his accompanied congregation as well as the other people they represent "The American Negroes". The negligence suffered by the people are so effective that, as Hickman states, they are

... Left eyeless, earless, noseless, throatless, teethless, tongueless, handless, feetless, armless, wrongless, rightless, harmless, drumless, danceless, songless, hornless, soundless, sightless, wrongless, rightless, motherless, fatherless, sisterless, brotherless, plowless, muleless, foodless, mindless—and Godless. (Ellison, 1999, p. 125)

This condition is not something inborne because Hickman says prior to their enslavement many of them were sons and daughters of important people in their own lands in their original place of birth which is Africa. Their forefathers are brave people, Hickman indicates, "some were the sons and daughters of warriors ..." (Ellison, 1999, p. 119). According to Hickman, his people were simple but proud of their African roots before they are forced to enslavement. He refers to their condition under the brutal system of slavery by saying, "We were chained, young brothers, in steel. We were chained, young sisters, in ignorance. We were schoolless, toolless, cabinless—owned, (Ellison, 1999, p. 128). The traumatic condition Hickman describes is one made by other human beings whom themselves were like the "Black" Africans being enslaved in the past. He praises America and describes it as being "dedicated to the principles of Almighty God". He reminds the audience about the Mayflower boat which was "a Christian ship—amen!". The same people who ran away from the tyranny of the European rulers and settled down in the newly discovered lands of America have turned against the wish of God and started to enslave the African people. According to Hickman, the new settlers have become "traitor to the God who set them free from Europe's tyrant kings. Because, God have mercy on them, no sooner than they got free enough to breathe themselves, they set out to bow us down" (Ellison, 1999, p. 120).

The pain and trauma for the "Negroes" are many folded since it has been caused by fellow human beings who had undergone the same sufferings before they manage to inflict slavery on those imported from Africa. Despite all this harsh historical recounting, Hickman believes that it is his job to tell people about them so that they can remember their roots and distract strength from this bitter history to build a better future for themselves and their offspring. He says, "the preacher's job, his main job, Bliss, is to help folks find themselves and to keep reminding them to remember who they are" (Ellison, 1999, p. 223).

Another depiction of cultural trauma in *Juneteenth* is the reference to the blues which is a sort of a sad song culturally linked to the African Americans. According to Elijah Wald (2010), "many people consider the blues tradition to be primarily a matter of ethnicity and culture, the musical heritage of the African American South, which can rarely if ever be fully understood by northern, or foreign, or white artists" (p. 6). In an essay titled Richard Wright's Blues, Ellison highlights the content of the blues to be painful and bitter episodes of life experiences living in one's memory flowing to be shared with others. "As a form", for Ellison, "the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically (1999, p. 264).

In an encounter with Hickman on a deathbed, after a long period of separation, the Senator describes how Hickman was on the Juneteenth celebration by saying, "he was not so heavy then, but big with the quick energy of a fighting bull" (Ellison, 1999, p. 116). What is more important is daddy Hickman's zest to use folk music and songs to create impact on his people to remind them of their past. This indicates why he is referred to as "God's trombone", since he mixes words and music to pass his message. The Senator describes Hickman's zest for music and blues by saying that he always has kept the trombone close when he was preaching to "stand blowing tones that sounded like his own voice amplified; persuading, denouncing, rejoicing—moving beyond words back to the undifferentiated cry. (Ellison, 1999, p. 117).

The blues is an indicator of the vast cultural trauma Ellison's "vanished tribe" suffers from. This is what Hickman wants to say by contemplating the act of "Lord" when he says that humans "could sing through the blues and even speak through the dirty dozen" whatever they want to pass out "if only the players were rich-spirited and resourceful enough" (Ellison, 1999, pp. 267-268).

4. Conclusion

Identity plays a very crucial role in human life as individuals and on the level of communities as well. This is what Ralph Ellison has clearly depicted in his award-winning novel *Invisible Man*. The young ambitious protagonist of the novel undergoes a considerable change throughout a long journey of self-recognition and real life discoveries about the world and the human relationships. The unnamed inexperienced black boy who refers to himself as invisible man at the very beginning of the novel tells the reader about how he ended up in a hole underground because of lack of recognition not only from the people of different races but even from his own people. He acknowledges harsh realities of prejudice and inequality about his nation in the mid-twentieth century that might be shocking for many people. Ellison wants to remind everybody that despite the fact that slavery has ended officially centuries before but the anticipated dream of living in social peace, coexistence and harmony among the heterogeneous constituents of the American society is far from been achieved on the real ground.

Ellison further explains the point in his posthumously published novel *Juneteenth* by trying to press the black and white races together to indicate that diversity is the source of their power while hatred and discrimination only hinders their progress. The protagonist of *Juneteenth*, Bliss, who later when grows up renames himself as Sunraider uses his political position to abuse the black community until he is shot by a black man while delivering a scathing speech in which he refers to the black people as 'coon'. This shot awakens him from his mistaken belief about race but the price of gaining this knowledge is his own life. He admits his wrong assumptions on the death bed to Hickman, a black church man who took care about the senator's childhood life, in a long and agonized manner to teach every one the fact that through collaboration and mutual recognition they can build the nation and further provide peace and prosperity to their population. The path to this recognition is mostly full of traumatizing events that are causing a lot of pain to the commuters like Sunraider.

Ellison's two novels are very good examples of the importance of maintaining one's own identity in life. They also indicate the futility of trying to wipe out the identity of other people by subjugating and denying them proper recognition. Humanity has struggled for a long time to come to terms with this reality but it seems that there is a need for doing more to comprehend the lesson fully. What the world has seen on May 25th, 2020 in Minneapolis, Minnesota and the mass demonstrations and confrontations with the police following the death of George Floyd in different parts of the United States has further proved the validity of Ellison's point of view. These events would necessitate more decisive actions to be taken so as to further eradicate the roots of prejudice and inequality in the United States and all over the world to protect the human dignity.

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