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**The Search For Identity Under Oppression in *Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man (1952)*
and *Ben Okri's The Famished Road (1991)***

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Dedication

To my beloved parents,

My brothers and sisters,

My family member,

My friends and colleagues, and to you readers

Radia

To my parents, whose love shaped my path,

To my brothers, for their constant support,

To my aunt for her generous help,

To my friends and colleagues, who stood by me, and to every reader who
journeys through these

Zineb

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Abstract

This dissertation explores how identity forms and resistance emerges in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991). Using Frantz Fanon's postcolonial theory to show how race, power, and selfhood intersect in a postcolonial Nigeria and a racially divided America. The study compares how the main characters face systemic exclusion, using storytelling, myths, and symbols to challenge colonial and racial identities. Drawing on Fanon's ideas about alienation, reclaiming culture, and liberating consciousness, the dissertation looks at both personal and collective ways people respond to oppression. Through close reading and theoretical insight, it reveals how both novels resist dominant power structures and offer new ways to see agency and identity. This work adds to postcolonial and African American literary studies by affirming the power of narrative in reshaping identity amid histories of oppression.

Key words: Identity, Resistance, Postcolonialism, Fanon, Race, Alienation, Narrative, Liberation, Myth.

I. General Introduction

This research examines the theme of the search for identity under oppression in *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison (1952) and *The Famished Road* by Ben Okri (1991). Both books, though rooted in different cultural and historical contexts, confront a common struggle: how individuals navigate social, political, and psychological systems that refuse their visibility, agency, and sense of self. This study draws on Frantz Fanon's postcolonial theory to explore how identity is broken down, silenced, and later reclaimed under systems of oppression. Instead of seeing identity as something fixed or inherited, the novels show that it is challenged, shaped by struggle, and rebuilt through acts of resistance. In African and African American literary traditions, the idea of selfhood is not abstract; it arises from real historical conditions such as colonialism, racism, and violence. Literature becomes an important space where these conditions are recorded, criticized, and challenged. African American literature, evolving from a legacy of enslavement and segregation, has grown into a rich cultural field that expresses Black identity in the face of centuries of silencing. This literature examines issues of power, invisibility, survival, and transformation. Throughout its history, storytelling has been used as a way to resist erasure, assert personhood, and imagine new ways of being.

African postcolonial literature on the other hand operates under different, yet parallel pressures. As Biodun Jeyifo explains, African literature after independence deals not only with the damage left by colonial rule but also with the violence of the new governments that came after. Writers in this kind of literature are not just watching history from far away; they are part of it. Their work often faces censorship, political pressure, and even punishment. From these hard situations comes a very political and experimental kind of literature. This literature shows the continuing fight for freedom, respect, and voice in countries after colonialism. (Jeyifo, 1992, pp. 353–354).

Okri's work in African literature is deeply rooted in oral storytelling, rituals, myths, and songs. At the same time, he uses the colonial language in a new way as a form of resistance. What Jeyifo calls a "sophisticated testamentary tradition" (Jeyifo, 1992, p. 354) is this process of turning real-life pain and trauma into art that bears witness, challenges, and offers new ways of seeing. Similar to this, the need to oppose a system that aims to make Black people invisible often draws on African American literature. With its roots in African American cultural history, it has developed from spiritual autobiographies and slave narratives to intricate, genre-defying works that balance the conflict between self-making and suffering. In this tradition, the search for identity is a lived necessity rather than merely a theme. Writing itself became a declaration of existence in the context of African Americans' ongoing denial of full humanity.

Reading African and African American literatures together reveals a common urgency to reclaim identity from imposed definitions through the use of powerful symbols, inventive storytelling techniques, and linguistic shifts to assert presence and resist erasure. Both types of writing do not want to be called only "literature of protest." They show themselves, literature of presence stories that stay, voices that refuse to be silenced. This dissertation fills a gap by comparing these two novels through Fanon's theory, revealing how colonialism and racism function as similar systems fragmenting and contesting black identity. Ellison's work stands within this tradition, offering a profound exploration of invisibility as both a social condition and a psychological crisis. Placed next to Okri's postcolonial ideas, this research shows how colonialism and racism work in similar ways to break black identity, but also how they can help bring it back together again.

a) Review of the literature

Both Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991) have been widely studied by many scholars from different perspectives.

To begin with, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) has significant attention for its impact on society. The literary critic Edith Schor In her book *Visible Ellison: A Study of Ralph Ellison's Fiction* (1993) explores how the narrator's journey moves from ignorance to self awareness. As Schor notes: "Invisible Man is a novel that seeks to explore the complexities of the American experience and to illuminate the ways in which racial identity is constructed and performed" (Schor, 1993, p. 12). She argues that this journey represents personal growth and societal change, especially concerning African Americans' fight for identity and recognition.

On the other hand, Barbara Foley, in her book *Wrestling with the Left : The Making of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man* (2010) examines the novel's portrayal of Brotherhood, a communist group, which the narrator joins. Foley asserts that "the Brotherhood's failure to achieve meaningful social change serves as a powerful critique of the Left's inability to adequately address issues of racial inequality" (Foley, 2010, p. 145). She claims that the Brotherhood represents a failed attempt at achieving social change, and the novel ultimately supports the preservation of the current social structure.

Moreover, the *Meaning of Freedom in Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man*" (1975) is a thesis conducted by Dolores Beth Powers in which she states that Invisible Man's protagonist search for the utmost freedom to get away from the oppressed society he lives in Racial segregation was another reason for him to chase his own freedom. As Powers notes:

"The protagonist's search for freedom is a quest for authenticity, for the freedom to be himself to make his own choices and to create his own identity." (Powers, 1975, p. 12). Powers asserts

that existentialism and freedom are interrelated especially when the protagonist tries to make some actions as his own personal decisions.

While, Rogers Asempasah in "*Re-thinking Beginning: Okri's The Famished Road and the Crisis of the Postcolonial Nation*" (2010), Okri shows that history repeats itself rather than advances. Asempasah writes that Okri "rejects linear historical progress and instead portrays history as an unending cycle of crisis and renewal" (Asempasah, 2010, p. 4).

He also uses Frantz Fanon's ideas to analyze the postcolonial nations, which Nigeria belongs to, and determine why such countries have become stagnant. He likens Azaro's traversing between spirit and human worlds to Nigeria's inability to free itself from the fetters of colonialism. He further argues that dreams and visions in the novel emphasize the connection of past, present, and future making any real change extremely difficult.

Furthermore, John C. Hawley examines the special uniqueness of Okri's narration in his 1998 article "Ben Okri's Spirit Child: Abiku Migration and Post modernity." Hawley describes the novel as "a fluid composition, where meanings are not fixed but shift and repeat in rhythmic variations" (Hawley, 1998, p. 35). He argues that the novel mirrors Azaro's shifting of identity rather than following a historical development with a sequential beginning, middle, and end, the flow of the narrative echoes through musical repetition and re-interpretation. This mirrors an awful ambivalence concerning the national identity of Nigeria, which is left between its past and future.

The political messages of the novel are the focus of an examination by Oko Eze Ernest in "Postcolonial Realities in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and *Songs of Enchantment*" (2020).

Citing: "Our Country is an Abiku Country. Like the spirit child it keeps coming and going" (Okri, 1991, p.351), he argues that Nigeria is locked in an unending cycle of failed leadership. He discusses Madame Koto's rise to riches and power to compound the already

observed corruption. He continues: "Madame Koto's transformation represents the post-independence elite, who rather than liberating the people, exploit them even further" (Ernest, 2020, p. 5). He cites Okri's assertion that "suffering is one of the great characters of the book" (Ernest, 2020, p. 5) to show that pain and hardship are not just background elements in the story but also they shape everything that happens.

b) Issue and Working Hypotheses

Even though Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991) have been analyzed separately by many literary scholars and theorists, especially in terms of identity, black oppression, and sociopolitical struggle, a meaningful comparative reading of these two texts through the framework of Frantz Fanon's postcolonial theory are conspicuously absent.

This dissertation aims to address this gap by analyzing how the protagonists confront their fragmented sense of self in a world shaped by colonial and racial violence. Okri's novel occurs in the post-independence of Nigeria and Ellison's novel sets in racially segregated America. Both depict protagonists, Azaro and the unnamed narrator, in systems of oppression that deny their humanity. Drawing on Fanon's insights on alienation, double consciousness, mimicry, and trauma, this dissertation discusses the similarities of the characters' experiences of displacement, invisibility, and existential rupture. Their journeys reveal a wider set of postcolonial and racial conditions that shape identity, not only through an internal struggle but also through violent imposed external forces.

This comparative study demonstrates how both books, *The Famished Road* and *Invisible Man*, try to build the idea of self as a way to fight against being erased by the system. By looking at both novels together, the research shows the similar ideas they share, but also their different

cultural and historical backgrounds. It helps to understand how identity is shaped and lived under strong political, social, and psychological pressure.

c) Methodological Outline

This dissertation follows the IMRAD structure: Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion. The Introduction presents the central theme: the search for identity under oppression in *Invisible Man* (1952) and *The Famished Road* (1991). It situates the study within African American and postcolonial literary traditions and explains why Frantz Fanon's theories are used as the main comparative framework.

Literature Review brings together existing studies on both novels, focusing on how scholars have discussed identity, oppression, and resistance. It shows that although each novel has been widely analyzed on its own, a comparative study using Fanon's ideas is still missing. This gap demonstrates the importance of the present research.

The Methods section describes Fanon's key concepts: zone of non-being, double consciousness, mimicry, and resistance from *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). The section also lists the materials used, including brief biographies of Ralph Ellison and Ben Okri, and summaries of both novels to place them in their historical and cultural contexts. The Results section outlines the main findings of the analysis. It identifies shared themes in the two novels.

The Discussion is divided into two chapters. Chapter One analyzes how each novel separately portrays the construction, disruption, and reconstruction of identity, focusing on symbols, psychological experiences, and structures of power. Chapter Two compares the novels directly, exploring their similarities and differences in depictions of oppression, alienation, myth, memory, and resistance.

The Conclusion summarizes the contribution of the study, arguing that both novels present identity as an ongoing struggle shaped by oppressive systems, and that Fanon's theories offer a strong, unifying lens for understanding this struggle across different cultural settings.

Methods and Materials

a) Methods

This study adopts a postcolonial framework based on the theoretical writings of Frantz Fanon, specifically *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).

This research investigates identity formation, fragmentation, and recovery in the protagonists of Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* amid colonial and racial forces. Fanon's theories illuminate the mental and existential scars from oppressive systems and resulting alienation in marginalized people. It applies four key concepts: zone of non-being, double consciousness, mimicry, and liberatory resistance to compare the novels and interpret key scenes showing trauma, erasure, and defiance.

1) Zone of Non-Being

Fanon asserts that the zone of non-being is a social and symbolic space made by powerful systems that refuse to see the colonized or Black person as fully human or with power. It is a condition in which the dominant system treats a person as inferior and expendable, making them feel as though they do not exist. This concept helps in analyzing the ways in which Azaro in *The Famished Road* and the unnamed narrator in *Invisible Man* both experience erasure. Azaro is caught between social marginalization and spiritual exile, and the narrator between racial invisibility and physical visibility.

The colonized or racialized subject must struggle just to be acknowledged as fully human. This analysis will use this lens to demonstrate how both protagonists contend with worlds that disregard their existence or mischaracterize it.

2) Double Consciousness and Identity Fracture

Drawing on Fanon's adaptation of W.E.B. Du Bois' concept, the dissertation investigates the way both characters experience a divided identity, a painful duality between who they are and how they are seen. As Fanon writes, "the colonized is over determined from without". (Fanon, 1952, p. 116), which means that a subject's identity is shaped by the stereotypes and social rejection imposed externally. In *Invisible Man*, the narrator experiences a continuous crisis of self definition as he moves through various institutions that ask him to adopt racialized roles, while simultaneously erasing his true inner identity. Similar to this, Azaro's transitions between the spirit and physical worlds in *The Famished Road* show a broken person torn between the harsh realities of his surroundings and his ancestral realm. Fanon refers to this fragmented experience as the "epidermalization of inferiority" (Fanon, 1952, p. 116), in which the colonized person internalizes and starts to believe the unfavorable stereotypes that have been placed upon them

3) Mimicry and Psychological Alienation

Fanon's critique of mimicry parallels later thinkers, such as Bhabha, in his discussion of the aim of the colonized to adopt the colonizer's culture, language, and behavior for the sake of survival. Such mimicry does not lead to greater empowerment, but rather it merges into a more profound alienation. The colonized man "wants to be white... he therefore becomes unrecognizable to himself" (Fanon, 1967 p. 9).

This analysis will apply to characters such as Dr. Bledsoe and Madame Koto, whose successes in colonial or neocolonial spaces depend on their performances and betrayals.

Their complicity reflects the psychological price of wearing a "white mask" in order to gain power and, eventually, to self-betrayal and moral collapse.

4) Resistance, Violence, and New Selfhood

Fanon asserts that decolonization is not peaceful or slow. It needs a strong break from the colonial system. He claims that people must resist in many ways with their bodies, minds, and symbols to be truly free. This idea will help guiding this dissertation..

“At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction”
(Fanon, 1961, p. 94).

Azaro’s refusal to return to the spirit world and the *Invisible Man*’s retreat underground both serve as powerful acts of resistance against imposed identities and erasure. These are not simple escapes but crucial moments in which each character begins to reclaim and rebuild a sense of self on their own terms. By pushing back against the roles forced upon them, they assert their individuality and demonstrate resilience and agency within oppressive systems.

b)Materials

1-Biographies of the two authors :

A-Ralph Ellison :

Ralph Ellison, born on March 1, 1914, in Oklahoma City. His father, Lewis Alfred Ellison, tragically passed away when he was just three years old, leaving his mother, Ida Millsap, to raise him and his younger brother alone. From a young age, he displayed an interest in music, learning to play the trumpet and cornet. His musical talents earned him a scholarship to the prestigious Tuskegee Institute in Alabama in 1933. In 1936, he left Tuskegee without graduating and moved to New York City, where he was introduced to the African American literary and cultural scene. There, he met Richard Wright, who became a mentor and friend. Wright encouraged him to pursue writing seriously, leading to the publication of book reviews, short stories, and essays in various magazines.

His breakthrough came with the publication of his first novel, “ *Invisible Man*” in 1952. It received critical acclaim and won the National Book Award for Fiction in 1953. It is considered

one of the most significant works of 20th-century American literature. Despite the success of “*Invisible Man*” he struggled to complete another novel. He spent years working on a second book, but it remained unfinished at his death. He also wrote numerous essays, which were collected in volumes such as *Shadow and Act* (1964) and *Going to the Territory* (1986). His literary contributions earned him numerous accolades, including the National Medal of Arts in 1985. On a personal note, he married Fanny McConnell in 1946, and they remained together until his death on April 16, 1994, in New York City. His work continues to inspire and challenge readers, making him a towering figure in American literature.

B- Ben Okri

Ben Okri is a poet, novelist, and short-story writer. He was born in 1959 in Mina, in northern Nigeria, to an Urhobo father and an Igbo mother. His first school was the Children’s Home School in Sapele. Shortly after he was born, his father won a scholarship to study law in England, and he took his family with him. Ben Okri’s earliest years were spent in Peckham in south London, where he attended John Donne Primary School. In London, he developed a liking for comic books. After his father completed his education, Okri returned to Nigeria.

By the age of 14, Ben Okri had finished his secondary education. He spent about five years writing short stories for women, journals and newspapers. He also started working on his first novel, *Flowers and Shadows*. In 1978, Ben Okri won a scholarship and moved back to England, where he studied English and philosophy at the University of Essex. His second stay in England was full of challenges, and he experienced financial hardship. He soon found employment with the BBC’s African service and as poetry editor for the weekly magazine *West Africa*. In 1986, he published *Incidents at the Shrine*, which won several awards, including the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Africa. Two years later, he published *Stars of the New Curfew*, which was well received by the public. In 1991, he published *The Famished Road*, which established his unique style and won him the prestigious Booker Prize. Since then, he has published other

novels, including *Songs of Enchantment*(1993), *Astonishing the Gods*(1995), and *Infinite Riches*(1998).

2-Summaries of The Two Novels

A-Invisible Man (1952)

Invisible Man is a powerful novel by Ralph Ellison about an unnamed young Black man who describes himself as “invisible” not because he’s literally unseen, but because white society refuses to truly see him as a person. The narrator starts out as a bright, ambitious high school student in the South. After delivering an impressive graduation speech, he’s rewarded with a college scholarship but only after being forced to take part in a humiliating “battle royal,” where he and other Black boys are blindfolded and made to fight each other for the entertainment of wealthy white men.

At the all Black college, things seem hopeful until one day he is assigned to drive a white trustee, Mr. Norton . A wrong turn leads them to the shack of Jim Trueblood, a sharecropper who committed a terrible act with his daughter, and then to a chaotic bar filled with veterans. The scandal gets the narrator expelled by the college president, Dr. Bledsoe, who secretly sabotages him with fake recommendation letters. Arriving in Harlem with nothing, the narrator eventually lands a job as a speaker for the Brotherhood, a political organization that claims to fight for equality. For a while, he believes in their cause and becomes a rising star. But he slowly discovers that the Brotherhood is manipulating him and the Black community for their own purposes, not genuine justice.

Everything changes when his friend Tod Clifton leaves the Brotherhood and is later is tragically shot by a police officer while selling paper Sambo dolls on the street. Clifton’s death triggers a violent riot in Harlem. During the chaos, the narrator is hunted by Ras the Destroyer,

a fierce Black nationalist who now sees him as a traitor. Trying to escape, he falls through an open manhole and ends up underground where the story began.

B-The Famished Road (1991)

The Famished Road is a magical realist masterpiece by Nigerian-born writer Ben Okri, which won the Booker Prize in 1991. It is the first novel in a trilogy (*followed by Songs of Enchantment and Infinite Riches*), but it stands powerfully on its own.

It tells the story of Azaro, a spirit-child (abiku) who exists between two worlds; the mystical realm of spirits, where he is meant to return, and the human world, where he decides to stay despite the hardships he faces. His decision to remain with his parents brings both happiness and unhappiness, as he is constantly fighting spirits who try to make him go back.

Azaro's existence is shaped by the people who are around him, especially his parents. His mother represents love and strength, selflessly laboring to provide for the family, while his father, a fighter and dreamer, struggles against corruption and oppression. Madame Koto, a bar owner who gains supernatural strength through political affiliations, represents the struggle between morality and ambition. The story moves fluidly between reality and the spirit world, Okri uses rich imagery, symbolism, and lyrical language to create a world where spirits and humans live together.

III. Results :

This section presents our findings from an analysis of the theme of identity in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991). Through this process, we have utilized Frantz Fanon's postcolonial theory, specifically his concepts of “zone of

nonbeing”, “double consciousness”, “mimicry” and “liberation” as explored in *Black Skin, White Masks (1952)* and *The Wretched of the Earth (1961)*. This has allowed us to explore the ways in which Ellison and Okri use narrative form, character development, perspectives and the distinct contexts of racially segregated America and postcolonial Nigeria.

In Invisible Man, the "battle royal" scene vividly illustrates systemic racism by forcing the narrator and other Black youths into a humiliating, blindfolded fight for white entertainment, reducing them to objects devoid of individuality. This spectacle underscores social invisibility, where Black lives are seen only as sources of amusement or profit, denying the narrator any recognition as a full human being.

On the other hand *The Famished Road* oppression is depicted through neocolonial structures and symbolism to illustrate how identities can be fragmented among characters who are caught in the liminal space of being visible and erased in oppressive social environments.

Our research on the issue under study has led to interesting findings. A major result is that both novels explore the theme of postcolonial and racial oppression. This theme is addressed through various symbols, such as politicians distributing poisoned milk, which represents the betrayal of postcolonial promises. Both narratives also reflect Fanon's concept of the "zone of non-being," where racialized or colonized subjects are denied humanity and agency

The second major finding that resulted from our research is the act of resistance. In *The Famished Road*, Azaro's liminal existence as an abiku represents a metaphysical resistance through his choice to remain in the human world despite its hardships. While In *Invisible Man* the narrator's retreat underground signifies a psychological and physical resistance, a space for reflection and storytelling to reclaim agency. Azaro's resistance is spiritual and communal, the

narrator's resistance is individual and political ,yet both embody Fanon's call for liberation through self-definition.

The reshaping of identity is also one of our main results. Indeed, both *Invisible Man* and *The Famished Road* explore how external forces shape identity, but in dissimilar ways. In *Invisible Man*, the narrator's shifting roles: student, worker and orator require suppression of his authentic self-reflecting Fanon's "epidermalization of inferiority" (Fanon, 1952, p. 116). In

In The Famished Road, Azaro's identity is shaped by his dual existence between spirit and human worlds, navigating postcolonial Nigeria's tensions. Characters like Dr. Bledsoe and Madame Koto exemplify mimicry, adopting oppressive systems' behaviors for power, leading to alienation.

Another important point is that the idea of the “Other” appears in both novels but takes different forms. In *The Famished Road*, the “Other” or the “stranger” (Okri,1991, p28) represents the marginalized poor, dehumanized by neocolonial elites such as Madame Koto, who use their power and wealth for personal and political advantage. Azaro, as an abiku, experiences a deeper form of otherness. He is rejected not only by society but also by the spirit world, which makes him a permanent outsider. His choice to remain in the human world represents an act of resistance, refusing to disappear or be defined by another realm . In *Invisible Man*, the narrator is "Othered" by a society projecting stereotypes, denying his humanity (Ellison, 1952, p. 3). Both reflect Fanon's notion of the colonized as an object in the oppressor's gaze.

Our final finding concerns postcolonial identities. Both novels explore postcolonial identities shaped by the tension between tradition and imposed modernity. In *The Famished Road*, Azaro's identity is rooted in Yoruba mythology, with his journey symbolizing Nigeria's

cyclical struggle. In *Invisible Man*, the narrator's identity is shaped by historical and political memory, using jazz and storytelling to reclaim selfhood.

IV. Discussion

Chapter One: Identity and the Struggle for Selfhood in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991) and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952)

This chapter explores how the characters in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991) search for identity in the face of political, social, and psychological pressures. Their individual journeys are examined through the lens of Frantz Fanon's postcolonial theory.

a) Political Resistance and the Burden of the Real in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*

1. Between Spirit and Reality: Azaro's Struggle for Identity

Azaro, the abiku or spirit-child, embodies a complex and fractured identity similar to that of the postcolonial subject. From the start, his birth is marked by uncertainty and displacement, described as "coming into the world... weighed down with strange gifts of the soul, with enigmas, and an inextinguishable sense of exile" (Okri, 1991, p. 3). His life unfolds in a state of liminality, caught between the spirit and the human worlds. This dual existence prevents him from achieving a stable sense of self. He belongs fully to neither world, which creates constant tension and uncertainty. The spirits tempt him with freedom from pain, while love and responsibility tie him to his parents' struggles. This conflict leaves him perpetually divided, suspended between two realms and two identities.

His character, as a fearful child caught between worlds, illustrates an identity shaped by displacement. This reflects Frantz Fanon's depiction of the colonized subject as "overdetermined from without" (Fanon, 1967, p. 116), meaning his identity is never fixed but

constantly shaped by external political, cultural, and spiritual forces, alongside his own inner conflicts.

The protagonist's liminal existence between the spirit world and real life, and this shows the postcolonial search for who the self is in a world with many different realities. This being in-between is not just fantasy, but a strong picture of the struggle that people feel when they try to build identity after colonialism. The emotions of the spirits as they call him: "You have deserted us... If you don't come back we will make your life unbearable" (Okri, 1991, p. 4).

This quote symbolize the heavy burden of cultural memory and past trauma.

Their demands are not only personal but represent the bigger social and historical powers that try to force identity through tradition and shared memory. This puts pressure on how Azaro sees himself. He is always trying to balance different realities. This is similar to how a nation feels after colonialism caught between its past and the hard work of building a new identity.

One of the most vivid illustrations of his conflicted existence occurs when he follows a dog from Madame Koto's bar and gets lost in a different part of the city. The narrator describes the "gigantic houses" and "golden air" that create an atmosphere of both wonder and terror. This grounds the connection infinitely closer to Fanon's the "colonial subject's divided self;" the psychological effects of living within the indigenous self and the identity of the imposed colonizer.

The abiku's refusal to return to the spirit world is an act of resistance and self-assertion. By choosing to remain in the physical world despite its hardships, Azaro claims agency over his identity and existence. This parallels Fanon's assertion that "as soon as I desire, I am asking to be considered" (Fanon, 1952, p. 222), emphasizing the crucial role of desire and will in forming identity. Azaro's expressed wish "to make happy the bruised face of the woman who would become my mother" (Okri, 1991, p. 3) transforms mystical experience into a human

commitment, reflecting relational identity and belonging as social forms of selfhood. The novel's magical realist elements vividly illustrate social and political realities, for instance, when Okri describes politicians as monstrous figures, symbolizing corruption and betrayal.

These images symbolize the dehumanizing effects of colonization, poverty, and postcolonial power structures. The destruction of the forest and the transformation of the cityscape further shows how environmental and social upheaval disrupt both individual and collective identity. Azaro's relationship with family members further explores identity as socially constructed and politically mediated. The mother's daily struggle to provide and father's dreams of justice and transformation, are not secondary details, but conditions relative to his understanding of self. The text refers to the father's withdrawal as they were undergoing severe hardships:

“He slept like a giant through the new season. He missed the big trucks of the political parties driving round the city, making proclamations out of their loudspeakers. He missed the violent encounters, the explosions, when they encountered each other on the same street. He missed the beggars that kept on our road, begging alms round the broken vehicle.” (Okri, 1991, p. 358).

The mother's prayers for "food... for dad to get well... for more life and for suffering to bear lovely fruits..." (Okri, 1991, p. 360) illustrate how identity is not formed alone but formed in relation to kin in a socio-political context. Friendships also provide a different identity trajectory. Azaro's relationship with Ade, who is also a spiritchild, shows differing ways to respond to the limits of existence. Ade's rejection of mortal existence:

"Ade did not want to stay anymore, he did not like the weight of the world, the terror of the earth's time. Love and the anguish of parents touched him just a bit, for beyond their staring, their threatening, their beatings, he made no mistake, he would always remember his parents share of him was temporary. He always had a bigger home" (Okri, 1991, p. 357).

This contrast Azaro's distinct engagement with human limitations. His desire for the liberty of limitations suggests that true freedom may come through accepting rather than

escaping, one's circumstances. Okri expands the personal struggle to a collective level when Azaro reflects that:

"There are many who are of this condition and do not know it. There are many nations, civilizations, ideas, halfdiscoveries, revolutions, loves, artforms, experiments, and events in history that are in this condition and do not know it... They all have strange industry in their souls. They are all part-time occupants of their own secret moonlight. They all desire to make of themselves a beautiful sacrifice, a dearly anguished sacrifice, to inspire change, and to die, lamenting on the last bleed of this life, preparing the material for their true emergence to scream into existence, with the noise of the strange ecstatic will rising to say yes to destiny and illumination."(Okri, 1991, pp. 357).

This part of the novel makes the abiku problem more than just personal. It connects the crisis of identity to big cultural and historical changes. The line, "It is terrible to forever remain in between." (Okri, 1991, p. 3) reflects what Fanon describes as the painful gap between how a person is seen on the outside and who they really are inside. It shows the pain of being stuck between the old colonial world and an unsure future, between old traditions that are fading and the new world that cannot be avoided. This in-between space where Azaro lives is very close to what Fanon calls the "zone of nonbeing." Fanon says that colonized and oppressed people often feel like they are not seen, not accepted by society, and not even fully at home in their own culture. Living in this zone means your real self is not respected and you must fight just to be seen as human. Azaro's life shows this clearly. But Fanon also says that this painful space can sometimes give a new chance a way to imagine a different self and a new kind of life. Azaro's way of viewing the world changes as the story goes on, at first, he seems more as an observer, watching the pain and struggles of those around him, but as he faces multiple problems and sees his parent's struggles, he begins experiencing a deeper connection with the people around him. He starts to feel more connected to the people in his world. He learns to care about their pain and tries to help in small ways. This shows that his identity is not just about being in-between worlds but about learning to take part in the life of his community and to accept the difficulties that come with it. In Fanon's conception, Azaro's movement through

the zone of nonbeing towards the creation of a new sense of self that is not imposed by others, but created through his choices and relationships.

While the protagonist's special status as an abiku is not only a problem, but also an opportunity. By being both in the spirit world and the real world, he is able to understand things that others cannot, this helps him to better sense the issues of his society to imagine new ways of living. His identity is built on being open to different experiences and on the courage to live with uncertainty. His story speaks not only to his own struggle, but about the hope that people can find meaning even when life is hard and confusing. Fanon's theory supports this idea, showing that even those who are marginalized or in between can transform their position into a source of strength, creativity, and hope for themselves and their communities.

2. The Father: The Struggle for a Grounded Identity

Azaro's father is a central figure in the novel's portrayal of existential struggle in postcolonial Nigeria. The father is portrayed as someone who must deal with the breakdown of traditional values and the uncertainty of a new, unstable country. He cannot depend on old traditions or strong social systems, which makes it hard for him to take care of his family, protect his dignity, or find meaning in a world that feels harsh and unfair. His sense of self and his daily struggles are shaped by the feeling that he has been pushed into a life he did not ask for, where he has very little power to choose his path. At first, he seeks to reclaim respect and self-worth through physical endurance in the boxing ring known as "Black Tyger", he transforms pain and struggle into moments of victories. The boxing ring is not only a place to make money. For the father, it becomes a space where he can try to prove himself and be seen, to build some kind of identity.

When he wins, even for a short time, he feels proud and strong. But these good feelings do not last. Outside the ring, life stays hard, and the same problems come back again.

This shows a conflict between short moments of strength and the long reality of suffering, reflecting Frantz Fanon's concept of the colonized subject as "over determined, from without" (Fanon, 1952, p. 116), caught between internal desires and external forces, beyond control.

Over time, his ambitions evolve beyond survival and respect. He begins to imagine a large role as a leader in his community, shifting from boxer to political activist. This transition marks a larger step in the formation of his identity, from fighting for himself, to fighting for justice collectively. His first attempts to speak publicly are at first energetic, but blended with feelings of nervousness, and hope, as he tries to inspire his neighbors with promises of changes as he engages with everyone from curious listeners, to the skeptical, and local political agents who continually obstructs his efforts. The world around him shows how hard it is to build or perform an identity in a society full of corruption and control.

Politics is just as hard as boxing for him. Every failed speech and argument makes him more angry, but he keeps fighting. His struggle is not only personal now, but also something bigger, moving from just trying to survive ,trying to lead from being unseen to being noticed. He feels many emotions at once especially anger when his child disappear or when his hopes fall apart. Trying to keep respect in his family shows a bigger problem: the fight to hold on to his identity in a society that often does not value Black people or their work. Fanon's theory helps to understand this situation better. The father tries hard to control his life, protect his family, and plan something better for the future. But things around him keep changing. He thinks political action can help him build identity and give meaning to his life, but many problems stop him. Corrupt leaders and violent police stop people from coming together.

There are also betrayals and no real change. Every time he fails in public, he feels more lost. This shows what Fanon says about how colonialism and deep oppression even after independence can make a person feel mentally and emotionally displaced.

So when the father turns into drinking, it is neither purely a personal failing, but rather an attempt to ease pain or cope with an undesirable reality, it also isolates and makes him more vulnerable. His love for his family was powerful. At times of honesty he expressed a hope for continuing connection and the desire to leave an imprint on the legacy of this family.

When he tells his son, “we are poor. We have little to give you, but our love... Do you know our misery? Do you know how you make even that bearable?” (Okri, 1991, p.251), he expressed the heart of his struggle. His journey shows a constant movement between hope and hopelessness. Even when he shows strength or looks like he can handle everything, it does not mean he is strong forever. It means he is slowly getting tired from the pressure of past colonial violence and the never-ending threat of social injustice. His life shows the bigger postcolonial reality, where a father tries many ways working hard, joining politics, or staying close to family to keep control. But always, there is some outside power that he cannot avoid, that keeps pushing against him.

All the while, his understanding of masculinity and authority is put to the test. His sense of pride as a provider and protector is matched by vulnerability. Knowing that he has failed to protect his family from hunger, or violence feels like a personal failure even as those failures are a demonstration of systemic inequality. Advising his son, "drunkenness is sometimes necessary in this difficult life" (Okri, 1991, p. 23), He gives to others a hard lesson that comes from his own life experience, a kind of acceptance of how harsh the world can be, where it's hard to keep your dignity. The things he teaches are not just about how to survive; they are about how to live in a world where respect does not last long and can disappear very fast. His change from worker to boxer, from hopeful activist to tired survivor, and from angry father to weak husband shows how identity keep changing when life is hard. The good moments, like when he wins in the ring, don't last long before struggle comes back. His path is not straight it go in circles, and each time he must learn again and adjust who he is. The father's ongoing

efforts to remain strong, care for his family, and find meaning in suffering are a form of “everyday heroism.” By refusing to give in to despair, he becomes a symbol of the resilience and hope needed to survive in a world marked by loss, change, and the constant hunger for a better life.

b) Corruption and Truth in Postcolonial Identity

1. The Photographer as a Witness of Postcolonial Injustice

Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* shows how seeing and recording can become a kind of resistance. This idea is shown through the character of the photographer. Unlike others in the story who use violence or politics to fight, he holds a camera, not a weapon. His way of resisting is with his eyes and the pictures he takes, which point out the corruption and unfairness around him.

In a society where leaders often hide or change the truth, the photographer's work is not just about taking photos. He becomes a kind of witness someone who sees and does not forget. His camera shows the pain of poor people, the violence, and the oppression that many want to ignore. These images speak out against the official lies, and in doing so, they make it harder for people to look away.

When he first appears, the photographer presents a blend of humor and calling himself “an International Photographer”. This playful introduction hides a strong sense of seriousness: he is determined to expose what others refuse to acknowledge. His humble home becomes like a public archive, decorated with photos of poisoned milk, battered women, hungry children, and protests. These pictures are beyond records they tell stories. As the protagonist notes: “He was our first local newspaper,” and people come together to look at his work, seeing his images as both proof and a way to remember their community. This makes him an important link between personal experiences and the shared identity of the community.

Fanon gives a radical way to look at what it means to witness. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, he explains how the colonial subject is “over determined from without.” That means they are forced to see themselves through the eyes of the colonizer, shaped by racism and power. The photographer in the novel is not just showing poor or forgotten lives; he is taking back the power to define what is seen and who matters. He does not look away or make up fake stories. Instead, he stays with the pain, and that is a brave thing. It is his way of fighting back against the violence and the way truth is often erased.

This kind of truth-telling takes a lot of courage, but it also brings danger. Because the photographer wants to show what is really going on, he becomes a target for those in power who want to keep things hidden. The first example is when he documents police violence at a political protest; he is assaulted: “The thug punched the photographer whose nose started to bleed” (Okri, 1991, p. 117). These incidents illustrate how severely threatening the camera can be—not just for the individual offenders, but to an entire corrupted system.

Despite being attacked repeatedly, it seems impossible to break the photographer's commitment. He is injured and frightened, but still turns up looking badly battered, his face swollen and his spirit battered. Yet even in this moment of vulnerability, he insists that “one way or another, we will continue to fight for truth and justice. And we will win” (Okri, 1991, p. 142). This kind of quiet persistence is not loud and not armed, but still very subversive. It shows how resistance can keep going, even when someone is facing ruin, both in their life and in the world around them. The photographer keeps doing his work even with nothing left, proving that resistance does not always need power or weapons just commitment.

What is particularly relevant here are Fanon's considerations of the role of the intellectual in colonial and post-colonial societies. He argues that the duty of the intellectual is not merely to blend in with people but to “shake the people,” to make them see and understand their reality:

““Everything can be explained to the people, on the single condition that you really want them to understand.” (Fanon, 1961, p. 188)

The photographer's images perform this function precisely. His documentation of women pouring out poisoned milk captures not only an act of defiance, but also a refusal of passivity, a refusal to be remembered as victims. His portrait of suffering extends well beyond documentary practice and has transformed into something sacred, an object that members of the community return to, again and again, treating him as prayers or promises . When official truth becomes distorted and manipulated, it is the witness who protects true memory and therefore authentic identity.

The photographer's confrontation with authority gets worse when he is arrested, beaten, and put in prison with no clear reason. Still, even while locked up, he keeps believing in telling the truth. One ironic moment happens when the same government that hurt him uses one of his photographs picture and turns it into a national image, printed all over the newspapers. This moment shows how dangerous it is when power takes over symbols of resistance. Fanon warns about this too, saying that postcolonial elites often use the images and words of revolution just to make themselves look legit, while actually ignoring or betraying what the people fought for.

Moreover, the photographer shows a kind of symbolic duality. He is both someone who uses modern technology and also someone who keeps the community's memory alive, creating a link between tradition and change. His camera is a modern tool that shows the harsh truths of postcolonial life, but his photos also turn into sacred objects for the people, helping hold together their identity and resistance. This ambivalence shows how complex the role of a witness is in postcolonial places: at once modern and traditional, weak and strong, pushed to the side but still essential.

2. Madame Koto: The Corrupting Influence of Power

The journey of Madame Koto is one of the most striking and symbolically rich aspects of Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*. Her transition from a well respected bar-owner and caretaker of the community to a figure of excess and moral decay is an eye-opening example of how power redefines identity in the postcolonial landscape. She is first seen as generous and congenial. Her bar is always open to the poor, she provides free food and work to families who otherwise do not have any, and she is described as a source of comfort and stability in an often harsh and unforgiving existence. Her generosity to the protagonist and his family is genuine, and her bar is a place full of laughter, music and solidarity.

As Madame Koto's connections with local politicians and wealthy men grow, her role within the community shifts dramatically. Her identity and experience as a community member change rapidly. The bar expands into a larger, more luxurious space, featuring mirrors, chandeliers, perfumes, and a constant presence of thugs and political figures. This transformation is not just physical but deeply symbolic. The bar evolves from a refuge for the poor into a center of coordination and manipulation. Madame Koto's pursuit of status and power echoes the colonial authorities who maintained control through spectacle, violence, and commerce. Okri critiques this cycle of mimicry, showing how postcolonial elites often replicate the oppressive tactics of their former colonizers, perpetuating systems of domination rather than dismantling them.

Her physical transformation symbolizes her moral and social decline. Madame Koto becomes larger, her features coarsen, and she is described as "her stomach bigger than ever, her right foot bandaged." (Okri, 1991, p.256). This physical growth reflects her internal corruption, manifesting through excess in her pursuit of autonomy and power. Fanon explains in *The Wretched of the Earth* that colonized elites imitate colonial traditions and modernity by adopting a mask of prestige and authority (Fanon, 1952, p. 36). Madame Koto's transformation

embodies this mimicry, illustrating how postcolonial elites replicate colonial modes of domination.

As she gains more wealth, her actions become harsher, and her appearance and lifestyle reflect a shift toward power and materialism. As the story continues, her power takes deeper almost supernatural quality. The protagonist sees spiritual possessions, blood sacrifices and masked dances in her bar; these rituals suggest that her authority includes both material wealth and political influence, becoming dangerous and mysterious. Fanon warns that postcolonial leaders would use ancestral practices to disempower and confuse their people, masking a lack of genuine national vision:

"The national middle class which takes overpower at the end of the colonial regime is an underdeveloped middle class. It has practically no economic power ...In its narcissism the national middle class is easily convinced that it can advantageously replace the middle class of the mother country." (Fanon, 1961, p. 96).

Her use of ritual then shows how this is done; she protects her power while delegitimizing the community she once cared for. Madame Koto's relationship with the protagonist becomes more controlling. She gives gifts, protection and opportunities, but there are always strings attached. At a particular moment, she reminds him:

" I want you to come back. Your mother agrees. Since you stopped coming the bar has been empty."(Okri, 1993, p. 153).

Her attempts to bind the protagonist to her world are not merely acts of provision but efforts to possess his identity and demand unwavering loyalty. *Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks* illuminates such a dynamic when he writes about how all colonial and postcolonial systems often seek to strip individual's self definition with force, tradition, and psychological pressure to maintain control.

By the end of the novel, Madame Koto is almost unrecognizable from the generous community figure she once was. Her body has become deformed, her wealth immense, and her

energy unstable. She transforms into a symbol of dangerous hunger for power. However, Okri does not cast her solely as a villain; instead, she emerges as a tragic figure who has sacrificed the values that once connected her to the world in pursuit of acceptance and belonging, embodying the moral and social decay intrinsic to postcolonial corruption.

a) The Struggle for Identity and Power in Invisible Man

1. The Narrator: Invisibility and the Collapse of Identity

The *Invisible Man* is an anonymous character, which makes his story feel more universal. His experience shows how Black people are often unseen in a white society that refuses to recognize them as fully human. The opening pages of the Prologue continue with the theme of invisibility; the narrator confesses his identity on the very first page of the prologue:

"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 invisible; understand simply because people refuse to see me. ... When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination indeed, everything and anything except me."(Ellison, 1952, p.3).

This invisibility reflects not a physical absence but a social and psychological condition in which the Black subject is seen, but not as a full human being. Instead, others project their own assumptions and stereotypes onto the Black subject, reducing them to an object. This idea connects with Frantz Fanon's analysis in *Black Skin, White Masks*, where he writes:

"I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects" (Fanon, 1952, p. 109).

Fanon's quote shows how a Black person, in trying to understand himself, is often seen only through the eyes of other and reduced to an object. This means they are not recognized as full human beings but instead are forced into roles and stereotypes created by society. In the

same way, the narrator in *Invisible Man* is “invisible” because people only see him through their own prejudices. Both Fanon and Ellison reveal how Black identity is often erased and replaced with false images, leading to a sense of invisibility and loss of self.

Ralph Ellison can be seen as an attempt to shed light on the invisible phenomena related to the social difficulties faced by blacks. At the center of this attempt is the issue of invisibility and blindness. Ellison portrays the barbaric behavior suffered by Blacks through allegories, thus showing these different physical and mental states on different levels. The title of the novel itself is very enlightening and conveys the symbolic meaning of the protagonist's life. Invisibility is a metaphor for black America. The emptiness and the indifferent world around the protagonist deny his existence, making him almost a non-entity. His deep understanding of the state of existence keeps him awake and alive. It has no name in the world.

First, a person's name gives him a sense of identity. Since the protagonist of the *Invisible Man* does not have a name, this reaffirms the fact that he has no identity. The protagonist sits in a hole in the basement of an old building, he isolates himself, feeling like a ghost trapped in a nightmare. He is haunted by memories of his past, experiencing a persistent, haunting pain that is both emotional and psychological much like the lingering sensation of walking in a dream. Cut off from the outside world, he retreats into a dormant state, disconnected from reality. Yet, despite his isolation, his invisibility floods the hole with light, symbolizing his heightened awareness of his own condition and his desperate desire to be seen and understood.

The theme of invisibility is central to Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and Alyssa Sellers explores it in her work, "Destruction as a Necessity for Creation in Ellison's *Invisible Man*" (2012). In the novel, Ellison creates a protagonist known as the Invisible Man to show how the character is ignored by those around him and by society. As Sellers explains:

"Through his nameless narrator, Ellison reveals that the only way to liberate oneself from a certain role is by becoming invisible; in other

words, one must annihilate the socially constructed self to allow room for the true complex self to be created"(sellers,2012,p.58).

Sellers argues that invisibility is the only way for the narrator to free himself from the discrimination and segregation he faces. She adds that Ellison speaks for all people and challenges those who try to impose racial ideologies and limit others' freedom. Through Ellison's powerful narrative, he explores the universal struggle of being invisible unable to be seen for who one truly is, but only for how one fits into societal roles and stereotypes.

In an interview Ellison had in Paris in 1954, he was asked about identity in American society, and he responded: "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 is an integral part of its development."(Ellison,1954)

This reflects Fanon's observation in *The Wretched of the Earth* that colonial societies create systemic structures to deny colonized people their sense of self:

"Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts it, disfigures it, and destroys it".(Fanon, 1961, p. 210).

Both Ellison and Fanon thus critique how racialized societies construct visibility and invisibility, not just physically but psychologically, shaping how oppressed groups perceive themselves and are perceived by others.

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

Invisibility, however, may also have positive possibilities, a certain power and a certain freedom in being invisible. In Ellison's words

"I am not complaining, nor am I protesting either. It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen, although it is most often rather wearing on the nerves....you often doubt if you really exist. You wonder whether you aren't simply a phantom in other people's minds" (Ellison,1954, p.3)

Moreover, the narrator struggles with a dual existence, between the role society expects him to play and his understanding of his true self. This tension stems from his inability to reconcile his "Black" identity with his "American" identity. Throughout the novel, Ellison explores the theme of invisibility in various ways. At one point, the narrator connects his invisibility to electrical power, using it to light up the space he describes as "warm and safe" with exactly 1,369 lights, stolen from the Manipulated Light and Power Company. Though the company is aware of its losses but cannot locate their source. In this respect, the narrator proclaims,

"And full of light. Yes, full of light. I doubt if, there is a brighter spot in all New York than this hole of mine... Perhaps you'll think it strange that an invisible man should need light, desire light, love light. But maybe it is exactly because I am invisible. Light confirms my reality, gives birth to my form". (Elliso,1952, p.6).

Light confirms the Invisible Man's reality and gives him his form: "without light I am not only invisible, but formless as well", of living in his hole, the narrator fights the abyss of formlessness by embracing the light that renders him invisible. Throughout the prologue, Ellison also ties the central character's invisibility to music. The narrator was passionate about Louis Armstrong's music in which he declares:

"Perhaps I like Louis Armstrong because he's made poetry out of being invisible. I think it must be because he's unaware that he is invisible.

And my own grasp of invisibility aids me to understand his music."(Ellison,1952,p.8)

Accordingly, the protagonist explains that Armstrong's invisibility enabled him to produce his art in the same time the narrator's invisibility allows him to comprehend Armstrong's music. In the opening of the first chapter, the nameless narrator came to realize that he had been obedient to the way society thinks he should be because of his race, but here he discovers the existence of his invisible identity. "... That I am nobody but myself . But first I had to discover that I am an invisible man!" (Ellison,1952,p.15)

According to James B. Lane in his article entitled "Underground to Manhood" "the invisible man was emasculated and left rootless by people who either paid no attention to his inner existence or visualized him only as a symbol, as abstraction" (Lane,1971, p.123). Maybe the most remarkable example is the scene of the Battle Royal. The Invisible Man has been invited to give his graduation speech to a group of prominent white men. At the event, however, the protagonist is shocked to know that he had to fight a group of other young black students while blind folded for the amusement of white spectators. . The protagonist realizes for the first time that he is viewed by white people only as a tool for shaping their own visions of the world .After finishing the battle, the narrator tries to deliver his speech while bleeding, having difficulty to speak the narrator makes a slip, saying "social equality" instead of "social responsibility" to illustrate the limitations a White, wealthy power-structure place on the Black individual.

The speech of Invisible Man delivers grants him a scholarship to a black college, "He makes a good speech and some day he'll lead his people down the proper paths... This is a good, smart boy so to encourage him in the right direction."(Ellison,1952,p.32) In this case, the "proper path" and "right direction" for white people is a deflection for finding identity. Here Ellison indicates the limitations imposed on Black identity as a result of racism, but he is also

invoking important and varying traditions in Black political thought which also give shape to the narrator's identity. Ellison attempts to depict the characteristics of the American racism during the twentieth century under the concept of invisibility.

In chapter six Dr. Bledsoe, the head of university, addressed the protagonist by saying "you're nobody, son. You don't exist can't you see that?" Hence revealing the social invisibility the Black people were suffering from in American society. Furthermore, the protagonist struggles to identify himself in the American society. Once again he came to realize his invisibility when he was asked by the lawyer in the Liberty Paints' hospital: "What is your name... who are you?" The invisible man is unable to answer, he kept asking himself the same question and he thought: "Maybe I was just this blackness and bewilderment and pain"(Ellison,1952,p.240) .

In the chapter twenty three, the theme of invisibility appears again when the protagonist was wondering in the streets of Harlem, he is seen as another character called Rinehart when he wears a hat and sunglasses. The invisible man goes to the church; he came across a pamphlet written by Rinehart which was about invisibility. After reading it, the unnamed narrator concludes that having multiple identities reveals someone's invisibility and despite the fact that invisibility may provide safety, decisions made in secrecy cannot have any significant impact.

By the end of the epilogue, the narrator understands that society has defined his entire life by his race. He has been seen only as a Black man, never as himself. He reveals that living underground was not just hiding, it was a way for him to come to terms with this imposed invisibility .I finally rebelled. I am an invisible man"(Ellison,1952,p.573) and to face the society who stood in his face during his journey of self-recognition.

2.Ras the Exhorter: Black Nationalism as Rejection and Resistance

In Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) Ras the Exhorter represents a powerful figure of Black resistance and embodies the real strength of political and cultural struggles for Black identity in America that was making its way into the depths of racism. Through his determined fight against assimilation and impassioned calls for self-determination, Ras speaks to the collective struggle against systemic and metaphorical forms of racism.

His character, inspired by Marcus Garvey's idea of Black Nationalism, challenges the narrator to engage with the complexities of identity in a society that tries to make him invisible. Ras's ideology draws from Marcus Garvey, an early twentieth-century leader in the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), who prioritized Black self-determination, economic independence, and pride in African heritage, rejecting integration with white society. Garvey's slogan, "Africa for Africans," called for global Black unity and a return to African heritage, urging Black communities to build their own institutions (Garvey, 1986, p. 52). He argued, "We are organized for the absolute purpose of bettering our condition, industrially, commercially, socially, religiously, and politically" (Garvey, 1986, p. 47), emphasizing self sufficiency. Garvey also stated:

"The time has come for the Negro to forget and cast behind him his hero worship and adoration of other races, and to start out immediately to create and emulate heroes of his own, and to set in motion that great lever for racial uplift the propaganda among our people everywhere, in all parts of the world, to let them know that we are one people, and we have one aim, one destiny, and that is freedom and liberty, and independence."(Garvey, 1986, p. 56).

Ras embodies this in his challenging speech, as seen when he challenges the narrator: "What are you doing among these white folk? Don't you know you are black? You my brother, mahn. We the same color. You African, African!"(Ellison, 1952, p. 373). Ras's refusal to collaborate with white institutions, like the communist-inspired Brotherhood that exploits the narrator, underscores his commitment to Black self-determination, viewing compromise as betrayal. Ras's radical vision aligns with Frantz Fanon's theories on decolonization and

psychological liberation. His rejection of the Brotherhood's false equality is consistent with Fanon's critique of systems that reduced the oppressed to "minor functionaries" and background actors in colonial society. Fanon writes,

"The colonized man is an envious man. And this the settler knows very well; when their glances meet he ascertains bitterly, always on the defensive: 'They want to take our place.' It is true for there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place." (Fanon, 1961, p. 39)

During the Harlem riot, Ras transforms into a symbol of rebellion, riding a black horse, wearing a cape and crown, and wielding a spear, rallying the crowd with calls for "fire, blood, and destruction" (Ellison, 1952, p. 553). This aligns with Fanon's view that decolonization is a "violent phenomenon." Fanon writes, "Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder... Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men.

This change does not come from any supernatural power. Instead, it happens through the struggle for freedom. As Fanon says, the 'thing' colonized becomes a man during the same process by which it frees itself" (Fanon, 1961, p. 36), showing how liberation helps the colonized person overcome an "inferiority complex" and despair (Fanon, 1961, p. 94).

However, Ellison describes the riot disorder, burning buildings and scattered communities showing the consequences of uncontrolled rebellion. Fanon warns that violence alone cannot restore humanity; it requires "a new society on new foundations." Fanon states:

"Violence alone, violence committed by the people, violence organized and educated by its leaders, makes it possible for the masses to understand social truths and give the key to them." (Fanon, 1961, p.147).

A vision Ras lacks Despite his inspirational defiance, his dogmatic ideology limits his impact. Demanding absolute loyalty, he denounces dissenters, like the narrator, as traitors. Ras shouts: "You my brother, mahn. But you are betraying the people. You are black, yet you fight

with the white devils. You are worse than they are!" (Ellison, 1952, p. 373) and his followers fragment during the riot: "I saw Ras rearing and shouting orders, but the crowd was scattering now, pushing and running, while police sirens sounded close by" (Ellison, 1952, p. 553). Fanon notes that revolutionary movements stagnate without constructive goals:

"If we want humanity to advance a step further, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent and we must make discoveries. If we wish to live up to our peoples' expectations, we must seek the response elsewhere than in Europe... For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity... we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts and try to set afoot a new man"(Fanon, 1961, p. 315).

Ras's focus on destruction over creation falls short of Fanon's "new humanism". His confrontations shape the narrator's quest for identity, exposing the compromises of conforming to the Brotherhood's script. During the riot, Ras's call for revolt forces the narrator to choose between rebellion and reflection, leading him to reject Ras's path and retreat underground to write his story. The narrator reflects: "When I discover who I am, I'll be free" (Ellison, 1952, p. 243). This act of storytelling becomes resistance, echoing Fanon's call for a cultural consciousness to "justify and praise the action through which they have created themselves, Fanon states: "Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it." (Fanon, 1961, p. 206). His voice, though necessary, remains incomplete, pushing the narrator toward an identity that embraces complexity over dogmatic ideology.

b) Corrupt Power and the Illusion of Progress

1. Dr. Bledsoe: Power Through Betrayal and White Complicity

Dr. Bledsoe, the president of the Black college in *Invisible Man*, is a respected yet complex figure. Known as "the king of the campus," (Ellison, 1952, p. 142) his approval can determine a student's future. However, his influence depends on pleasing the white donors who fund the college, showing that he lacks true independence. His story reveals how racist systems can harm even those who appear successful.

He strives to present the college as flawless to white visitors like Mr. Norton, hiding any signs of poverty or hardship. When the narrator unintentionally exposes the harsher realities of Black life, Bledsoe reacts angrily by expelling him. This demonstrates that maintaining white approval is Bledsoe's top priority. He tells the narrator, "You're nobody, son. You don't exist can't you see? The white folk tell everybody what to think except men like me" (Ellison, 1952, p. 143). He also admits, "I had to act the nigger! That's right! I had to act the nigger!" (Ellison, 1952, p. 141), indicating that he plays a role designed to protect his position, even if it means betraying his community. By imitating white elites, he survives but becomes insecure and dependent on their approval.

Although Bledsoe claims control: "I'm in charge here, not them! ... I had to do it" (Ellison, 1952, p. 141), his power ultimately relies on satisfying white interests. He controls the campus tightly to prevent anything that could damage the image he has created. He tells the narrator, "The only way to please a white man is to tell him a lie!" (Ellison, 1952, p. 137). This shows how he operates within and manipulates a racist system to maintain his authority.

Frantz Fanon's writing helps us understand Bledsoe's struggle. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon says, "The black man who wants to turn white is as miserable as the white man who seeks to turn black. The burden of the black man is to be neither one nor the other" (Fanon, 1967, p. 9). Bledsoe is stuck in this trap, forced to hide parts of himself and his community to keep his position. His role as a "colonized elite" is clear when he betrays the narrator. Instead of helping a good student, he expels him and gives him fake recommendation letters that undermine chances in the North. This shows that Bledsoe cares more about the college's image than supporting his own people. Fanon explains how colonial systems create people who are more eager to defend the colonizer's interests than those of their own people. Bledsoe does exactly this by putting white interests first.

Ellison does not make Bledsoe a simple bad guy. He is shaped by the racist world he lives in, doing what he thinks he must to survive. But his success costs him a lot. He is alone, not trusted, and cannot change the unfair system he is part of. His story warns us about the dangers of trying to look “respectable” in a society that is built on inequality. Bledsoe’s choices hurt others and himself, showing how oppressive systems can twist even the most powerful people. Although he is the president of the Black college and appears successful and respected, he maintains his power by pleasing white trustees rather than protecting his own students. He humiliates and expels the narrator after the incident with Mr. Norton and sends him away with fake recommendation letters that secretly block his opportunities in the North. Instead of supporting Black progress, Bledsoe chooses selfish survival and control. Through this character, Ellison shows that some Black leaders internalize the values of the racist system and become agents of oppression themselves, sacrificing their own community to keep their position and authority.

2) *Brother Jack: False Brotherhood and the White Gaze*

In Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, the Brotherhood, led by Brother Jack, seems to offer the narrator hope. It promises equality and a chance to speak for Harlem, giving him a sense of belonging. But soon, the narrator realizes the Brotherhood controls him, using its progressive ideas to limit his freedom. By looking at the narrator’s story with Frantz Fanon’s ideas from *The Wretched of the Earth*, we see how the Brotherhood keeps power while pretending to fight for justice.

At first, the Brotherhood welcomes the narrator because of his intelligence and speaking skills, making him a spokesman for Harlem. They speak about “the people” and “equality,”

giving him a new name and sense of purpose. However, this support soon changes. They edit his speeches, monitor his words, and control his actions. Brother Jack makes this clear, saying, “You were not hired to think. Had you forgotten that? If so, listen to me: you were not hired to think” (Ellison, 1952, p. 381). This shows the narrator that he is merely a tool, not an independent person with his own thoughts.

Fanon explains this type of control in *The Wretched of the Earth*. He argues that groups fighting for freedom can become like the oppressors they oppose: “The national middle class discovers its historical mission: that of intermediary. Seen through its eyes, the liberation struggle is reduced to a question of personnel changes at the top; the masses are not called upon to play an active part” (Fanon, 1961, p. 119). Similarly, the narrator is not allowed to lead; instead, he is a figurehead while the leaders maintain power.

The Brotherhood’s meetings are cold and rigid. Talks are planned in advance, decisions are kept secret, and dissent is discouraged. When the narrator tries to address Harlem’s problems, such as evictions or police violence, the leaders dismiss these issues as “not scientific” or “not the right time.” They prioritize their bold plans over the real needs of the community. This tension reaches a peak at a rally. The narrator speaks sincerely about Harlem’s struggles, and the crowd responds enthusiastically. Yet the leaders are angry, calling him “emotional” and “undisciplined.” They instruct him to “educate, not agitate,” reminding him of Brother Jack’s words: “I was not hired to think. Only to talk. Only to say what they wanted said, to teach what they wanted taught” (Ellison, 1952, p. 383). The Brotherhood’s control also reflects racial dynamics. They see the narrator as a symbol of progress but ignore his experience as a Black man, insisting he focus on “universal” issues rather than Harlem’s specific problems. Fanon calls this the “colonized intellectual”: “If the whole regime, even your nonviolent ideas, are conditioned by a thousand-year-old oppression, your passivity serves only

to place you in the ranks of the oppressors.” (Fanon, 1961, p 25). The narrator begins full of hope but eventually grows accustomed to feeling used.

The Brotherhood’s failure appears during the Harlem riots. When the community needs help, the leaders leave the narrator and Harlem alone, proving their promises were empty. The narrator sees his role was never real, it depended on following orders. Ellison shows how dangerous it is to include someone only if they stay quiet. The narrator realizes, “They wanted a machine, not a man. A loudspeaker, not a thinker” (Ellison, 1952, p. 385). He is invisible because the system wants him that way.

"The defensive attitudes created by this violent bringing together of the colonized man and the colonial system from themselves into a structure which then reveals the colonized personality." (Fanon, 1961, p. 250).

Leaving the Brotherhood hurts but frees the narrator. He learns freedom means more than a role; it means speaking, disagreeing, and being seen as a full person. The Brotherhood’s “inclusion” is just another way to exclude, hiding old power behind new promises. Ellison’s story of Brother Jack and the Brotherhood warn about fake progress. The narrator’s choice to find his own voice is a step toward being seen and true to himself.

Chapter Two: Comparing and Contrasting the Quest For Identity in Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man (1952) and Ben Okri’s The Famished Road (1991) .

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991) are shaped by two distinct historical moments post-independent Nigeria and racially segregated America, but both share a concern with how identity is fractured and contested in systems of social and

political condition. While Okri draws upon spiritual symbols and the chaos of postcolonial transformation, Ellison draws upon the lived experience of racial marginalization and ideological imposition. The narratives focus on protagonists who navigate a world that renders him invisible, voiceless, unreal, and reveal the deep psychological costs of oppression. Taking a postcolonial approach informed by Frantz Fanon, this chapter explores how both novels identify the fight for selfhood in contexts of imposed identity, socially denied, and internally fragmented. The comparison reveals not only similarities in thematic concern with alienation, mimicry, and resistance, but in their different imaginations of transformation and the reclamation of self in relation to cultural and political contexts.

c) Institutional Oppression and Political Power in The Famished Road and Invisible Man.

Both novels illustrate how oppressive systems affect not only public life but also the most private parts of the mind. In these works, colonialism and racism are not merely historical issues; they continue to impact families, communities, and individual identities. Drawing on Fanon's ideas, we see that these forces come not only from external sources but also become part of people's inner experiences, what he calls the "zone of non-being."

In Okri's novel, the story is set in a Nigeria still struggling with the aftermath of colonial rule. The hope for freedom soon gives way to disappointment as the country faces political, economic, and social problems. The novel's world does not present a single clear reality. Instead, it is filled with spirits and an uncertain future, showing how society is caught between old traditions and a new, unstable world. These spirits are not just a fantasy element but serve as a reminder of the burden of history: "the living and the dead are together, the spirits are always close" (Okri, 1991, p. 7). This closeness is not comforting; it reminds us that the wounds of the past still affect the present.

The American setting in Ellison's novel has a difficult history that shapes the story. The move from the segregated South to Harlem is not just a change of place; it represents a search for dignity that encounters new forms of exclusion. The world the narrator faces is full of both visible and invisible barriers. As the narrator explains, "I have been boomeranged across my head so much that I now can see the darkness of lightness" (Ellison, 1952, p. 7). Thus, the promise of freedom is always overshadowed by the reality of racial prejudice.

Similarly, in Okri's novel, daily humiliation and struggle are part of the family's everyday life. When political leaders distribute poisoned milk, it is not merely a cruel act but a message that the suffering of the poor does not matter. Okri writes, "They have poisoned us with milk!" (Okri, 1991, p.100), "we listened as they blamed the other party for the milk we listened as they maintained, with ferocious conviction..."(Okri, 1991, p116). This pain is ignored by those in power, and the community's struggles are treated as insignificant.

The father's hope for a better life is constantly frustrated. He works hard, but the world works against him. In a moment of despair, he confesses,

"I learnt afterwards that I had lingered between not dying and not living for two weeks " (Okri, 1991, p.4). This sense of only being "half here" is what Fanon describes when he writes the oppressed person "lives in a zone of non being, a world in which he is always at the risk of being reduced to nothing." (Fanon, 1952, p. 8).

On the other hand, In Ellison's novel, the sense of invisibility is more than a metaphor. The narrator explains that it is not only about being unseen but also about being misunderstood and having one's reality denied by others. The "battle royal" scene, where the protagonist is forced to fight for the entertainment of white people, clearly shows how Black people are treated as objects. Even the rewards, such as a scholarship, carry the message that dignity must be earned through submission.

Fanon writes, "The oppressed will always believe the worst about themselves" (Fanon,1952, p. 69). This self-doubt is visible in both novels as the characters struggle to

maintain hope in a world that constantly questions their value. To him mimicry is not just about imitation; it is about surviving a world that forces individuals to conform. The example of the bar owner in Okri's novel is striking. She always begins as a generous individual, and as she becomes involved with politicians, she adopts their ways. This change is not just about ambition; it is about the pressure to fit into a system that rewards those who play by its rules.

"The unpreparedness of the educated classes, the lack of practical links between them and the mass of the people, their laziness, and, let it be said, their cowardice at the decisive moment of the struggle will give rise to tragic mishaps."(Fanon,1961,p 146).

The photographer's fate shows what happens to those who refuse to conform by continually revealing the truth: they become a threat. His death serves as a warning about the cost of honesty. In Ellison's novel, the protagonist is forced to wear many masks. He is expected to be the ideal student, the best worker, and the perfect spokesperson. Each role is a performance, moving him further away from his true self. When the narrator is told, "You were not hired to think... You were hired to talk" (Ellison, 1952, p. 354), he understands that his worth depends on how well he fits into someone else's script. The paint factory scene, where the narrator loses his sense of self, is a powerful image of what happens when a person is forced to become "less of myself and more of what they wanted me to be" (Ellison, 1952, p. 203). Fanon warns, "The colonized is elevated above his jungle statue in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards" (Fanon, 1952, p. 9). However, this elevation always comes with a deeper feeling of loss and division. How others see us or refuse to see us shapes who we become

Whereas in Okri's novel, Azaro's visions make him feel separate from others. He can see what others cannot, but this isolates him even within his own home. The spirits' gaze is as powerful as the colonizer's, constantly pulling him toward a place where his presence and absence are never fully clear. Azaro reflects:

"I was ill afterwards and spent most of the time in the other world trying to reason with my spirit companions, trying to get them to leave me alone. What I didn't know was that the longer they kept me there, the more certain they were making my death. It was only much later, when I tried to get back into my body and couldn't, that I realised they had managed to shut me out of my life." (Okri, 1991, p. 4).

In Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the narrator's sense of self is shaped by others' refusal to recognize his humanity. He says, "When they approach me, they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination, everything and anything except me" (Ellison, 1952, p. 3). His retreat into a basement full of lights is both an act of defiance and a search for recognition: "Light confirms my reality, gives birth to my form" (Ellison, 1952, p. 6).

Fanon notes that, "The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man; he is an object, a thing to be manipulated" (Fanon, 1952, p. 109). Both protagonists face this objectification, their true selves is built by other people's expectations and fears. He believes that real freedom is based on resistance, even if that resistance is risky and or misunderstood. Resistance in both novels is not always dramatic, it can take the form of a simple act a refusal to give up, a choice to remember, a moment of honesty. The burning of the Party van in Okri's story is not a planned revolution but rather an act of defiance: "Only the driver was left in the van. The violence had stimulated the people that we set about punching the vehicle, kicking and denting its bodywork, hitting its tin and aluminium construct with metal rods and firewood..." (Okri, 1991, p.118). In Ellison's story, the riot in Harlem is painful and chaotic, but it also indicates that people will not accept invisibility forever: "The streets were full of fire... They were shouting and burning... and nobody knew who was leading" (Ellison, 1952, p. 540). The decision to go underground is not a surrender, but a chance to reflect and prepare for a new beginning. "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).

Fanon writes:

"The oppressed man, who is forever in hiding, must at last be made to emerge from his shell, to shake off the heavy darkness in which he has been cast, almost buried." (Fanon, 1952, p. 163).

Both novels critique how large-scale political movements, whether Communist or nationalistic, claim they represent the oppressed but do not consider their specific needs. For example, in *Invisible Man*, the protagonist observes how the Brotherhood's internationalism ignores the local Black struggle and treated as less important than class struggle. In *The Famished Road*, postcolonial leaders use grand speeches to promise national unity, but they ignore the real suffering of the poor people. Both novels show that liberation is not possible because the local people are controlled by big abstract ideas that don't reflect their daily life. Public performances are central to the operation of power in both novels. In *Invisible Man*, spectacles like "battle royal," and Tod Clifton's puppet show, reinforce racial hierarchies and humiliate the Black participant. In *The Famished Road*, the political rally and the giving of gifts become like rituals that are used to watch people and to manipulate them. It makes the poor more dependent on what the politicians want. These public actions are not only shown, but also a kind of control that makes oppression deeper by turning the people into passive actors in their own suffering. Both novels explore conflicted relationship history and progress. In *The Famished Road*, spirits and ancestral memory are always present, reminding characters that the past cannot be erased by political change. The struggle for a new progressive identity is complicated with the necessity to honor tradition. In contrast, *Invisible Man* shows a society that want to forget or change the history of Black suffering, with the institutions that aims e to keep clean version of memory instead of facing the hard truth. Both books say that real freedom is impossible if people don't face the past, no matter if the memories are kept or just ignored on purpose.

b) Psychological Alienation and the Fragmented Self

The deepest harm inflicted by oppression is unseen. In both *Invisible Man* and *The Famished Road*, the most lasting effects of colonialism and racism are internal in the confusion, anxiety, and internal division that define the minds and hearts of individuals living under these systems. The journey toward selfhood in these novels is marked by psychological struggle by the need to survive not just external violence, but the silent, daily battle within. In Okri's work, the sense of being "in between" is not just a matter of myth or culture; it is a lived psychological reality.

The young Azaro is being pulled in two directions: one towards the world of the spirits, the other towards the responsibilities of family and society. This is not merely a conflict of spirit but a deeply emotional one. The feeling of not belonging anywhere, being "half here" creates a loneliness that cannot be described. "It is terrible to be always in-between...I wanted to taste of this world, to feel it, suffer it, know it, to love it.." (Okri, 1991, p. 3). This makes a constant sense of anxiety and feeling of not belong, like life can just go away without anybody seeing or care. In Ellison's novel, this inner fight is mostly shown as feeling invisible.

The anonymous narrator informs us how, with the over time, he finds himself doubting his own existence: "You often doubt if you really exist. You wonder whether you are not simply a phantom in other people's minds" (Ellison, 1952, p. 4). It is not just a passing thought; it is a life style. The need to conform, to be what others expect, creates a growing sense of unreality. The narrator's journey is filled with moments where he is forced to question who he is and whether his feelings, expectations, and fears even exist. This inner conflict is made worse by having to wear a disguise constantly. Whether as a student, an employee, or a political orator, he must continually perform for other individuals, rarely being able to be himself.

The inferior feeling of the narrator is not natural; it is developed, learned from a world that does not consider him as a human being. Both novels show how oppression creates tension and even paranoia. In Okri's story, the constant presence of spirits, the unexpected violence,

and the struggle to protect loved ones create a world where safety is always uncertain. The father's dreams are haunted by failure and loss, while the mother's exhaustion is a daily reminder of how hard it is to keep hope alive. The fantasies of the child are not merely magical but signs of a mind under pressure, trying to make sense of chaos.

In *Invisible Man*, the psychological toll of invisibility is described in physical terms. The narrator explains: "It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen, although it is most often rather wearing on the nerves" (Ellison, 1952, p. 4). The constant effort to be recognized, to "convince yourself that you do exist in the real world," leads to moments of anger and despair. After a physical fight, he reflects, "I was both disgusted and ashamed. I was like a drunken man myself, wavering about on weakened legs" (Ellison, 1952, p. 5).

The sensation of being as ghostlike figure shaped by other thoughts is not just sad it is exhausting, and sometimes it drives him to lash out, desperate to be seen. Fanon's concept of "Double consciousness" with the experience of seeing oneself from the other's point of view is the underlying theory of both novels. The Okri child is always aware of how he appears to his parents and to the spirits, never able to rest in a single self. The narrator in Ellison's work is pulled between the man he knows he is and the roles he is forced to play. This "twoness" is a deep feeling of division. "Without light I am not only invisible, but formless as well and to be unaware of one's form is to live a death" (Ellison, 1952, p. 6). The search for wholeness becomes a struggle to bring together the scattered pieces of identity.

Survival in these worlds requires more than physical strength; it requires psychological flexibility, the need to adapt, to mask true feelings, to anticipate danger, and to recover from disappointment is a daily challenge. In Okri's book, the mother's strength is shown in her ability to keep going, even when she is exhausted. In Ellison's, the narrator's ability to "develop a certain ingenuity" (Ellison, 1952, p. 7) is both a blessing and a burden. These movements keep them going, but they also make sense of estrangement from one's true self. Despite the pain,

both books suggest that healing is possible. The journey is not easy, and it is never complete, but sometimes the character glimpses the possibility of wholeness. In *The Famished Road*, the decision to remain in the world, to face suffering rather than avoiding it, takes courage. In *Invisible Man* the retreat underground is a chance to reflect and begin again. "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). This long rest is an opportunity to heal, to gather strength, and to imagine a new self. Both novels reveal that the psychological trauma is central to their protagonist's experiences, yet each novel expose this trauma through distinct cultural, existential, and personal struggles.

Azaro's trauma is not just physical but also spiritual and always repeating, because of his abiku destiny. He is meant to keep going back and forth between the spirit world and the human one, never really staying or feeling he belongs anywhere. This existential burden is compounded by material hardships: the poverty of his family and the brutality of his father create deep insecurity and psychological wounds, and the lack of stable shelter contributes to his feelings of instability and fear. His trauma is also compounded by double rejection he is bullied and left friendless by both humans and spirits, and manipulated by characters like Madame Koto, who use him for their own gain. In contrast the narrator trauma in *Invisible Man*, is persistent and social, continuously disappointed attempts to meet societal ideals. His pain is also intensified by the absence of nurturing parental figures, leaving him without a secure foundation for identity. The narrator also experiences profound estrangement from all communities never fully accepted by Black, white, and political groups and is similarly manipulated by institutions and organizations, losing a sense of agency and self-worth. Another feature of trauma is confusion between dreams and reality. For Azaro, this is especially vivid: his terrifying visions blur boundaries and cause disorientation, making it difficult to distinguish

what is real. In *Invisible Man*, Ellison's use of stream of consciousness and surrealistic presentation reflects the narrator's internal confusion and mental instability.

Both books situate personal trauma in the context of larger social chaos. Azaro internalizes corruption and violence within Nigerian society, while the narrator's trauma is an extended, structural condition shaped by the unruliness of American society.

c) Myth, Memory, Symbols, and Temporal Disruption in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*.

In Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the characters use myth, memory, and symbols as ways to disrupt time and counter the linear histories of post colonization that try to lock their identity in a state of oppression. Azaro, the spirit-child, and the unnamed narrator confront societies that impose historical timelines; postcolonial stagnation in Nigeria, racial oppression in America that deny them agency. By engaging with mythic and memory-related symbols, they dissolve the distinctions between past, present, and future, creating fluid temporal spaces where identity can be reimagined.

Drawing on Frantz Fanon's assertion that decolonization demands a radical reordering of historical consciousness. In *The Famished Road*, the masquerade festival is a powerful symbol that shakes up the idea of time moving in a straight line, blending the ancestral past with the present. During the festival, the community comes together to see "The Masquerade was terrifying and fiery, its funereal roar filled the street with an ancient silence." (Okri, 1991, p. 7), their dances showing stories of victory and sorrow. These figure, go beyond the limits of time, bringing up a shared memory that existed before colonial disruption. For Azaro, watching the masquerades creates a feeling of timelessness: "All around me were silent figures in great masks. All around me were ancestral statues." (Okri, 1991, p. 105). This moment pushes back against the postcolonial story of progress turning into stagnation, as the festival brings back a

cyclical African sense of time. Fanon argues that the colonized must break with the rhythm of colonial history to invent their own future. The masquerade, as a mythical symbol, lets Azaro tap into a flexible identity founded in a community's past that continues into the present, challenging the time constraints of a nation stuck in colonial legacies.

Another symbol that disrupts time is Azaro's encounter with the old man, whose visions mix past, present, and future into one story. His blindness, in a way, gives him the ability to see across different times, showing Azaro an identity free from fixed history.

"...It was the old man. He seemed to be staring at me. For the first time I noticed that he had hooves for feet. Golden hooves. I turned in the opposite direction and hobbled away painfully. Then I got tired and didn't care what happened to me any more". (Okri, 1991, p.183)

"When people keep running, something keeps pursuing them". (Okri, 1991, p.266) the blind old man said. He was expressing the difficulty of breaking free from colonial time, echoing Fanon's idea that the colonized must rediscover the history of their own people to challenge the distorted historical myths imposed by the colonizer. Through the old man's mythical visions, Azaro gains a sense of fluid time, placing his identity in a flow that resists the rigid despair of postcolonial Nigeria. In *Invisible Man*, the narrator's recurring dream about his grandfather acts as a memory-based symbol that challenges the straight-line progression of racial oppression. Early in the novel, the grandfather's dying words, "keep up the good fight" (Ellison, 1952, p. 16), linger in the narrator's mind, coming back in a dream where the grandfather gives him a briefcase filled with "papers that laugh when unfolded" (Ellison, 1952, p. 33). This dream blends time, connecting the grandfather's past resistance with the narrator's current struggles and future hopes. The laughing papers represent the broken promises of fitting into society, showing a repeating cycle of betrayal that the narrator must overcome. Fanon's call to reject the historical narrative imposed by the oppressor. By returning to his grandfather's mysterious advice, the narrator reimagines his identity as part of a resistant family line, free from the time limits of a society that tries to make him invisible.

Another symbol that disrupts time is the Sambo doll, which the narrator sees when Tod Clifton sells these racist figures on a Harlem street. The doll, “jerking on invisible strings” (Ellison, 1952, p. 431), brings up a painful history of minstrel shows and slavery, yet its mechanical dance also mocks the idea that Black identity can be controlled today. The narrator’s shock “Why was he doing this? Why bring the past into the present like this?” (Ellison, 1952, p. 432) shows he sees the doll as a bridge across time, forcing him to face history’s ongoing presence. Clifton’s act of selling the doll turns its oppressive meaning into a critique of continued control. Fanon notes that “the colonized must reclaim the symbols of their degradation to transform them into tools of liberation” (Fanon, 1952, p. 29). Through Clifton’s ironic act, the Sambo doll helps the narrator rethink his identity outside the fixed story of racial oppression, embracing a fluid sense of time where past struggles fuel future resistance.

d) Toward Liberation: Voice, Storytelling, and Identity Reclamation

The journey to liberation in both *The Famished Road* (1991) by Ben Okri and *Invisible Man* (1952) by Ralph Ellison is not only a struggle against external systems of oppression but also a quest to reclaim the inner voice that has been silenced or distorted by the world. Freedom in this context is not simply a matter of breaking free from chains or disobeying rules; it is about finding how to speak, remember, and tell one's own story in a world that tries to define it for you. Both writers, through their books and interviews, reveal how voice and storytelling serve as tools to resist erasure and reclaim identity.

Ralph Ellison, in his interview 1967 with Studs Tarkel, emphasizes that voice is a way for Black Americans to assert their individuality against a society that renders them invisible. He describes *Invisible Man* as an exploration of "identity and self consciousness," where the narrator struggles to be seen as a person rather than a stereotype. Ellison states, "The Negro must discover his own way of expressing himself... not only as a protest but as an affirmation of his own humanity"(Tarkel,1967). Which aligns with the narrator’s doubting his existence

because others define him. For Ellison, writing a novel was the way to give his narrator a voice that resists such erasure, combining pain, humor, and complexity to encompass the entire scope of Black experience.

Ellison's use of music, particularly Louis Armstrong's "What Did I Do to Be so Black and Blue," is central to his idea of voice, refers to the narrator saying: "feel its vibration, with my whole body" (Ellison, 1952, p. 8). The writer explains that jazz and blues carry the "specificity of Negro experience" (Ellison, 1952, p. 12), allowing Black people to express emotions and histories suppressed by society. He sees music as a form of storytelling that captures both suffering and resilience, creating a space where the narrator feels alive. The "Blackness of Blackness" sermon uses call and response to produce a collective voice, a ritual of memory that combines pain and pride (Ellison, 1952, p. 467). Ellison describes this as a way of "making poetry out of being invisible" (Ellison, 1952, p. 468), turning shared experiences into a tool for liberation.

The narrator's underground retreat, described as: "warm and full of light" (Ellison, 1952, p. 6), is where he writes his story. Ellison explain that this space serves as an area of reflection where the narrator can speak to his invisibility and establish his identity by writing. He emphasizes that writing is not just a personal act but a cultural one, as Black Americans contribute to American identity through their art. The author rejects the idea that his work should only protest racism, saying, "I'm not a protest writer... I'm trying to deal with the complexity of the human condition" (Tarkel, 1967) .His focus on individuality and artistic freedom reflects his feeling that freedom lies in self-definition, not in external expectation.

In other hand, Ben Okri's reflection on his novel, for The Booker Prizes in 2023,views storytelling as a collective act that reclaims African realities from colonial distortions. He writes: "To observe our reality through our own eyes requires a purification of mind and a reinvention of language" (Okri, 2023).Okri sought to capture the "imaginative richness of

Africa," (Okri, 2023) , rejecting the Western realism because it can't show the full reality of his childhood, which was full of many layers and different kind of experiences. He explains, "The techniques used to describe western life were inadequate for depicting the multidimensional world of my childhood... I had to invent a tone that could accommodate the ordinary and the mythical". (Okri, 2023). This drives the novel's structure, where Azaro's account shifts between the realm of the living and that of the spirits, embodying the fluidity described as allowing "pain, hope, tradition, and change" to coexist.

Okri sees storytelling as a survival skill, a way to resist erasure by weaving communal voices, neighbors, and spirits to create a choral narrative that transforms suffering into shared meaning. He recalls that his father's belief in ancestors, his mother's enigmatic storytelling, and Nigeria's oral traditions shaped his approach: " The flamboyant way people narrated their experiences... made it clear to me that I had to reconfigure my language and my storytelling."(Okri, 2023). He believes that colonial accounts impose a foreign perspective over African realities and that his novel attempts to "alter the inner way we saw our realities." (Okri, 2023) by giving voice to the mythical.

Okri's reflections reveal the personal cost of his work. He considers writing *The Famished Road* as a "species of madness," noting, " No one knows what I went through writing that book... You would have to have grown up in Nigeria when I did, with all those beliefs, fears and terrors, to understand what it took to push through that spirit material"(Okri, 2023). The spiritual elements of the book, like Azaro's *sabiku* nature, illustrate his belief that African realities include the unseen which Western frameworks ignore. By writing "a mixture of innocence and knowledge,"(Okri, 2023). He aims to "transfigure our perceived pre-determined fate with an explosion of freedom" (Okri,2023).

Ellison and Okri both see storytelling as a path to liberation, but their approaches reflect their distinct contexts, Ellison's focus on racial invisibility in America and Okri's postcolonial

reclamation in Africa. Ellison, in his interview, emphasizes the individual voice, saying, “The Negro writer has to find his own way... to say, ‘I am somebody’”(Tarkel, 1967). Reflecting his desire to create a character who could live all these experiences and keep his own sense of self.

In contrast Okri uses, the collective voice, drawing upon African oral traditions, he expresses: “The realistic technique is sequential, but the realities of which I speak are often spiral, sometimes tangential, possibly simultaneous”.(Okri, 2023) This informs the novel's choral structure, where Azaro's story weaves multiple voices. Okri aims to decolonize Africa's stories, avoiding the Western linear forms. Unlike Ellison’s solitary narrator, Azaro’s voice is inseparable from his community, reflecting Okri’s belief that "our reality is a product of culture and consciousness."(Okri, 2023). This communal focus contrasts with Ellison but shares the aim of resisting external definitions. Ellison suggest that Black art is forced to "make something out of the chaos"(Tarkel, 1967)) . While Okri declares he wanted to "give voice to the extraordinary nature of our deeper possibilities"(Okri, 2023). Both see storytelling as a healing process, by turning pain into meaning.

The reasons for prioritizing voice differ but are unique. Ellison's focus on the need to break racial stereotypes in America where Black contributions are integral but ignored. He says, “The Negro is part of America... his experience is part of the American experience” (Tarkel, 1967). Okri’s perspective is driven by the need to reclaim African naratives from colonial distortion, noting, “We have described our reality through the language and perception of others”(Okri, 2023). Both view storytelling as resistance, echoing Fanon’s idea that a national culture is “the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself” (Fanon, 1961, p. 188).

Both writers are certain that narrating one's own story is the first step towards humanity. Their interviews illustrate the cultural and personal stakes in their work, demonstrating how liberation is a daily act of speaking, remembering, and not being silenced.

Conclusion

This research has analyzed the complex relations of identity, oppression, and resistance in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991), using Frantz Fanon's postcolonial theories, including colonial alienation, double consciousness, and the constant struggle for liberation. By undertaking comparative analysis, this thesis has highlighted how these novels present psychological and social experiences of colonialism and racism affecting individuals and collective identities

In the first chapter, we focused on the protagonists' individual experiences in societies that oppress and deny them, both personally and collectively. The liminality of Azaro as an *abiku* in *The Famished Road* embodies the postcolonial Nigeria experience, where the living must grapple with existing between the spiritual and material worlds. Azaro's refusal to return to the spirit realm, after dying, rather creating new consequences for himself acknowledges human agency and resilience, with which Fanon agrees in that he insists that we cannot resist alienation without engaging with reality. In the case of the unnamed narrator in *Invisible Man*, Fanon illustrates a process of moving from naive conformity to self-realization, which comes at the cost of his psychological identity, in pursuit of an illusion of safety. The unnamed narrator

retreats underground, which is a process of reflection and storytelling for him. While Fanon utilizes reasons of conducting oneself in a certain way to reclaim individual agency and resistance to being human.

In the second chapter, we provided a thematic comparison of identity and resistance in both novels but discussed their similarities and differences in subjects and perspectives. Okri used African mythology and spiritual resistance as the basis for his narrative and viewed identity as fluid and communal, shaped by cultural memory and oral history. By contrast, Ellison grounded identity in the historical and political implications of racial segregation and cultural psychosis in America, turning to memory, jazz, and writing as tools for taking back oneself. Both novels illustrate Fanon's idea that oppression can make people doubt themselves and feel divided. However, they also show that liberation begins when individuals or communities reject imposed roles and redefine their own narratives. While *The Famished Road* emphasizes forms of spiritual resistance and community, *Invisible Man* focuses on forms of individual and political resistance, appealing to the diverse nature of ways to resist in the pursuit of liberation.

Ultimately, it should be asserted that both , and *The Famished Road*, have the ability to deeply observe the effects of colonial and racial oppression. Using Fanon as a theoretical framework, both novels call to attention the urgent necessity to confront psychological alienation and systemic erasure to develop authentic identities.

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