

Tribhuvan University

Narrativization of African American Past: Memory, Identity and Cultural Trauma in
Mumbo Jumbo and *Juneteenth*

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, T.U.
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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By

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis entitled “Narrativization of African American Past: Memory, Identity and Cultural Trauma in *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Juneteenth*” submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, is an original work written under the supervision of Dr. Bal Bahadur Thapa, Central Department of English, Kirtipur. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in English. No part of the study has ever been published in any form before, and has not been presented anywhere else for the award of any degree or for any other reasons. I shall be solely responsible if any evidence is found against my declaration.

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Letter of Recommendation

Keshab Raj Gnawalihas completed his thesis entitled “Narrativization of African American Past: Memory, Identity and Cultural Trauma in *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Juneteenth*” under my supervision. He carried out his research from January 2025 to November 2025. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voce.

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Approval Letter

This thesis entitled “Narrativization of African American Past: Memory, Identity and Cultural Trauma in *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Juneteenth* ” submitted to the Central Department of English, M. Phil. Program, Tribhuvan University by Keshab Raj Gnawalihas been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

The present study examines cultural trauma of the African American people by analyzing Ishmael Reed's novel *Mumbo Jumbo* and Ralph Ellison's novel *Juneteenth*. This qualitative study ponders over why these novels portray the disturbing images from the past of the African American people, ranging from slavery to Harlem jazz culture. Both novels, as per this dissertation, are the narrativizations of cultural trauma of the African American people. They display collective injury inflicted on the African American people by slavery, racism and systematic erasure that demand narrative and ritual healing through Hickman's sermonic mourning or LaBas's mystic detective work. These novels illustrate how cultural trauma is not merely inherited but actively resisted through storytelling, exposing the wounds while offering paths to reclamation. Drawing upon the theoretical insights of Ron Eyerman and Aili Aarelaid-Tart on cultural trauma, memory and identity, this research attempts to present these novels as significant creative voices weaving individual memories and identities which stand for collective communal memories representing black cultural and ethnic awareness.

Key words: Cultural trauma, postmemory, narrativization, memory, diasporic identity

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Chapter I

Introduction: Memory, Identity and Cultural Trauma

This research presents a study of Ralph Ellison's novel *Juneteenth* and Ishmael Reed's novel *Mumbo Jumbo* with an attempt of examining the trauma of major characters and their ways of forming the community of African-American cultural heritage in the White dominated American society. In particular, it explores the role of memory and commemoration through verbal exposition as a way for traumatic revelation represented by different African American characters such as Hickman and La Bas in these novels respectively. On the surface level, these novels appear to be the historical critique of African American situation penetrating into black and white relationship, culture and myth. However, drawing upon the theoretical premises of Ron Eyerman and Aili Aarelaid-Tart for cultural trauma, memory and identity, this research attempts to foreground these novels as significant creative voices weaving individual memories and identities in the form of collective communal memory representing black cultural and ethnic awareness.

In *Juneteenth*, Ellison portrays Hickman as a symbol of a lost community fighting for their identity in America and his complicated bond with Bliss, who later betrays Black culture as a racist senator and is shot by a Black assassin, foregrounding the tangled issues of race and belonging and revealing deeper truths about African-American history, culture and self-discovery. Similarly in *Mumbo Jumbo*, Reed exposes the Black-White relations through the conflict between Jew Grew- a vibrant Black cultural movement and the Wallflower Order- a repressive White force over African-American art, culture and heritage, where Papa LaBas embodies African American memory and identity. Like Ellison's *Juneteenth*, *Mumbo Jumbo* also questions the way African-American identity and culture is suppressed in America.

Though these novels deal with historical struggles, analyzing them through cultural trauma by focusing on the loss of cultural essence as a result of oppression and the exposure of the way Reed and Ellison unveil African- American memory and identity revealing the deep impact of cultural erasure. Portrayal of LaBas and Hickman in *Mumbo Jumbo* by Reed and *Juneteenth* by Ellison respectively as the embodiment of African American past through their memory and their identity as well as their continuous struggle foregrounds the loss of African culture resulting into cultural trauma of African Americans in American location.

Ralph Ellison's *Juneteenth* and Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* blend the compelling narratives of African American people's suffering with the deeply troubled history of black people in America. The novels foreshadow the traumatic events, almost exhaustive, highly sardonic, institutionalized racism and slavery, cultural history in which African diasporic possessive traditions are traced back to Ancient Egypt. African-American people could not remain happy without their cultural belongings such as Voodoo, jazz and range of dance forms in America where such inheritance of African-American people are restricted to exercise, their cultural inheritances are taken as the matter of stigma. Reed postulates the persistence of an obsession with such affinities. Throughout the novel Reed emphasizes an idealized connection to an ancient African past portraying African heritage as something lofty and rooted in antiquity; but unfortunately, Reed points out that White-centric ideology "calling it a plague when in fact it is an anti-plague" (25). The critique and avoidance of African-American "collective memory, a form of remembrance that grounded the identity formation of a people" (Eyerman 1) turns to be troop of their trauma formation. As White-centric ideology takes African diaspora's cultural traditions and innovations as "pandemic and you will really see something. And then they will be

finished" (Reed 25); African diaspora in American landscape could not romanticize a distant African past, rather, perceived". . . as cultural process, trauma is mediated through various forms of representation and linked to the reformation of collective identity and the reworking of collective memory" (Eyerman 1). Reed presents a different framework of understanding African diaspora culture where people are treated to finish their ideology on the basis of cultural belongings. This pandemic exercise of White-centric ideology takes the form of cultural trauma on them. This framework acknowledges the deep historical roots of African culture while also celebrating its continuous innovation and adaptation. Reed postulates that African diaspora culture is not static or confined to an ancient past; rather, it is a living evolving tradition that has been shaped by the experiences of the transatlantic diaspora, including slavery, displacement, and resistance. This perspective highlights the ways in which African diaspora culture is both connected to Africa and uniquely transformed by the realities of life in America.

Reed, in *Mumbo Jumbo*, makes a deliberate argument of the significance and power of African American and African diaspora culture as a form of cultural memory. It means that the traditions, practices, and artistic expressions of the African diaspora serve as ways of 'remembering' and preserving the cultural memory of Africa, even as they adapt to new contexts and challenges. In this way, the author emphasizes the enduring and transformative power of African diaspora culture, which is deeply rooted in history yet constantly reinventing itself in response to contemporary realities. This perspective challenges the notion that African diaspora culture is either a relic of the past or a completely new creation, instead presenting it as a dynamic and continuous process of cultural remembrance and innovation.

In *Mumbo Jumbo*, Reed exposes the complexity of black white relation through the struggle between Jes Grew and Wallflower Order regarding *The Book of Thoth*, art, culture, myth and music; and PaPa LaBas as the representative figure for collective memory and identity of African Americans in American location. Such presentation in both novels queries the proximity of African American identity and culture which has long been suppressed in American location. Thus, despite the agendas that are related to African Americans' mere history in America that these texts abound, the analysis from cultural trauma that employs the lens of the loss of cultural aura due to the suppression of canonical culture can reveal important ways in which both Reed and Ellison attempt to disclose African American memory and identity representing cultural loss.

Reed, in *Mumbo Jumbo*, postulates the African American cultural memory that has been deeply affected by the violent disruption of slavery and colonialism. PaPa LaBas remembers the cause of tense of Wall Street. Black people were forced to leave that place and refusal of their enforcement caused an incident: "An incident has occurred which threatens to flapperize those yet uncommitted youngsters who adamantly refuse to eschew Jes Grew" (Reed 21). Enslaved Africans were forcibly removed from Jes Grew, stripped of their languages, traditions and spiritual practices, and subjected to systems designed to dehumanize them: "A week before, 16 people have been fired from their jobs for manifesting a symptom of Jes Grew" (21). This process of cultural dislocation and erasure created a fragmented sense of identity and history of African diasporic people. Dehumanizing behavior of White-centric ideology suffers a lot, systemic racism continues to them in order to marginalize Black voices and histories. Unbearable sufferings and threatens upon African Americans in Jes Grew "came to be central to their attempts to forge a collective

identity out of its remembrance" (Eyerman60). As Eyerman posits how personal suffering turns to be collective, *Mumbo Jumbo* serves as a metaphor for the collective memory and cultural knowledge of African diaspora for people. It is a sacred book that contains the Black cultural expression, spirituality and history. *Mumbo Jumbo* is such text that preserves the cultural memory and essential for reclaiming identity and resisting oppressive systems in American landscape.

Reed in the novel blends the fragmentation and erasure of African American cultural memory caused by slavery, colonialism, and systemic racism. It equally symbolizes the lost or suppressed histories of African diasporic people and serves as a call to reclaim and preserve these histories. The novel highlights the importance of cultural memory in the fight against oppression and the ongoing struggle for identity and self-determination. The novel ultimately underscores the resilience and creativity of African diasporic cultures, even in the face of systemic attempts to erase them as "a woman would be arrested for walking down a New Jersey street singing "Everybody's Doing It Now" (Reed 21). It is a historical narrative how suffering and traumatic condition of African American diaspora facing on a daily basis.

The portrayals of LaBas and Hickman in *Mumbo Jumbo* by Reed and *Juneteenth* by Ellison respectively as the embodiment of African American past through their memory and their identity as well as their continuous struggle foreground the loss of African culture resulting into cultural trauma of African Americans in American location. This study is to bring the discourse of trauma in relation to the experience of African Americans in terms of culture and identity in American location. Through the critical analysis of these two novels, this study examines cultural trauma of African Americans that is linked to the formation of collective identity and construction of collective memory.

This thesis attempts to foreground memory and identity as the embodiment of traumatic loss of the African American culture in American location. Further, this study makes significant contribution as it brings the situation of African American culture and identity employed both in *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Juneteenth* within the purview of critical analysis. It also makes a significant theoretical connection among memory, identity and culture of African Americans in terms of their suffering, anxiety and shock shedding light onto traumatic situation in American location.

Both *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Juneteenth* by Ishmael Reed and Ellison have received immense critical responses ever since their publications. Assessing the subject position of *Juneteenth*, critic and scholar Charles Pete Banner-Haley presents the African American standpoint in which he sees the critical importance of African Americans in American history. He sees the historical identity and existence of African Americans to mark the history of America as true history. He further asserts that “Ellison determined to grasp the meaning of being an American by removing the veil of prejudice, denial and invisibility between whites and blacks” (363-64). Here, he focuses on Ellison’s artistry to create the world of equality between blacks and whites removing prejudice, denial, and invisibility.

Foregrounding the theoretical aspect of postcolonial subject in relation to identity crisis mainly caused by the hybrid identity of the character Bliss in *Juneteenth*, S. Krishnamoorthy Aithel asserts the dilemma of protagonist Bliss’s birth caused by the cultural hybridity of African culture and American culture as he mentions that Bliss “ travels the length and breadth of the country, preaching, wooing, moviemaking and finally becoming a politician” (115) along with searching for his mother to discover his true identity.

Further, Brook Allen compares *Juneteenth* with *Invisible Man* and shows the affinity of two novels in terms of metaphor, humor and religious and historical links but it has different quality in terms of development. Allen further comments: “Juneteenth, for all its faults, contains much that is valuable. The bold and broad use of metaphor, the subversive humor, the religious and historical links, are all recognizably akin to those of *Invisible Man*, yet different and distractive enough to indicate important developments” (27). The novel contains the aspects like humor, metaphor, religious and historical aspects as mentioned in *Invisible man* but this novel is distinct and significant development of the events.

John L. Brown considers this novel as unfinished one that includes race and identity as the subject of America. Brown argues, “*Juneteenth*, a mystic saga of race and identity, is made up of a selection of texts from the vast, unfinished novel” (156). According to Brown, *Juneteenth* is an unfinished novel and a mystic saga of race and identity as it weaves together themes of racial struggle and self-discovery in a deep spiritual and symbolic way. He notes that the book is not a complete work but carefully conveys the social destiny of African-American people.

Similarly John F. Callan takes novels of Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison as documents that expose the ground reality of African-American people. Callan claims that “it’s like assuming that because a goose and a swan happen to occupy the same barnyard, swim in the same pond, and are friends” (175). Callan takes both of the novelists as “a goose and a swan” who swim in the same pond and “both goose and swan will lay eggs, their respective offspring will be determined not by their proximity but by their genetics” (175). As both of the writers are black, they certainly lay eggs of the colour of African American social reality in America. Callan claims

that Ralph Ellison's novel *Juneteenth* is the egg intertwined with American genetics that exposes the African American people's social lives.

In the same way, Philip M. Richards takes the novel *Juneteenth* as the document of racism that postulates race relationship. It exposes the complexities of race relations in America through themes of identity, memory and reconciliation. He further comments, "*Juneteenth* is the story of the racist Senator Sunraider, who shortly after the book's beginning is shot as he delivers a speech of the Senate floor" (129). It shows how racial identity is shaped by history, performance and cultural conflict. Richards takes it as the celebration of emancipation and a symbol of America's unfinished history. *Juneteenth* presents race relations as an unfinished conversation of African-American people.

Likewise, *Mumbo Jumbo* has also got immense critical responses from the critics representing different angles of vision. For the critic Richard Swope, the goal of this novel is "cultural synthesis" and its polyvocality as well as multitextuality questions the singular truth and univocalism of western metaphysics (619). Accordingly, examining this novel in terms of the photographs, paintings and other illustrations that are included in the novel, Reginald Martin unfolds the symbolic manifestation of such indices whereby multiple and layered meanings of the narrative through pyramidal association is exposed. He further asserts that those illustrations "are more than graphic representations of scenes from the text: they are, in fact, symbolic aggrandizements of motifs stated and hinted at throughout the narrative" (55).

Envisioning *Mumbo Jumbo* from Jacobsonian standpoint of metaphor and metonymy, Amy Elias considers the Atonists (Whites) as "understandably threatened by the non-directional, improvisational, individualistic impulses of Jes Grew, for the

Hoodoo(black) perspective is based not in metonymy but metaphor"(120).Further, relying upon the postcolonial insight of interpretation, Carol Siri Johnson interprets *Mumbo Jumbo* as “a text of the colonized that appropriates and revises myths of the colony to deconstruct or ‘signify on’ the white and black literary canons...”(105). He further asserts that Reed’s use of such myths as an analogy relates to the condition of African American canon in the western hegemonic world.

Similarly, Parks takes the novel as a battle field that has been continued since last many decades between White and African American people in American landscape. Parks opines that the novel "constitutes what Michel Foucault calls a 'battle among discourses through discourse'. It is what Roland Barthes calls a 'plural text,' one where the reader must produce the meaning not just consume it" (163). According to Parks’ interpretation, the novel *Mumbo Jumbo* presents what Michel Foucault calls it a battle among discourses through discourse. It is what Roland Barthes refers to as a multi-layered social novel, where the reader must not only grasp the surface meaning upon reading but also uncover the deeper implications the novel seeks to convey.

In the same way, another critic Lizabeth Paravisini sees the novel as a satire of the contemporary society. According to Paravisini, the novel is "the imitation and distraction of literary texts, becomes a medium for social and literary satire" (113). The novel functions both a reflective and subversive art form of the social reality of that time. Reed, by imitating existing literary conventions, creates plot of the novel as a framework through which he critiques societal norms and literary pretensions by deploying irony, parody and exaggeration. This satirical dimension allows the novel to challenge dominant ideologies, expose hypocrisies, and provoke thought, transforming it into a dynamic tool for cultural commentary. Paravisini adds, "*Mumbo Jumbo* is both a satire of Western culture's concern with rationality and an example of

the reorientation of older traditions possible under Reed's aesthetics of Neo-Hoodooism" (113). It is a sharp satire of Western culture's obsession with rationality, order, and control, particularly through its mockery of institutions like science, religion, and law that claim absolute authority over truth. *Mumbo Jumbo* not only critiques the limitations of Western rationality but also demonstrates how older, marginalized traditions such as Voodoo, jazz improvisation and oral storytelling can be revitalized to create a more dynamic and liberatory artistic expression.

From the aforementioned critical interpretations of *Juneteenth* and *Mumbo Jumbo*, it can be said that these novels have got several reviews from various scholars. Critics have covered the social issues related to the White-centric ideology, narrativization of colonial insights, graphical representation of social reality, racism, historical links and cultural hybridity. But it is worthwhile to mention here that these novels have not yet been interpreted in a single research with respect to memory, identity and cultural trauma of African Americans resulted through the loss of culture, origin, suppression, subjugation and oppression by the Whites. Thus, this research attempts to fulfill this knowledge gap.

For this study, qualitative research design has been used employing trauma theory in order to examine how Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* and Ralph Ellison's *Juneteenth* narrativize African American history through memory, identity and cultural trauma. The methodology involves close textual analysis of narrative techniques such as catastrophic or deeply disruptive events that fracture their shared identity, memory and sense of meaning, resurrecting fragmented histories, collective injury that is inflicted by slavery, racism and systematic erasure alongside theoretical frameworks related to cultural trauma. Mostly, the methodology is based on Aili Aarelaid-Tart's *Cultural Trauma and Life Stories* that examines how individuals and communities

process collective trauma through personal narratives; Jeffery C. Alexander's *Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma* which argues that trauma is not an inherent result of violent events but a socially constructed process shaped by collective meaning-making; and Ron Eyerman's *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* which foregrounds that slavery constitutes a foundational cultural trauma for African Americans. Slavery as a living trauma, mediated through memory, narrative and cultural production such as literature, music and political movement.

This dissertation seeks not only to illuminate the situational complexities and subverted realities of African Americans culminating into the cultural loss in American location employed in *Juneteenth* and *Mumbo Jumbo*, but also the representation of collective identity and memory of the characters such as LaBas and Hickman resulting into the cultural trauma. In order to verify the provisional argument proposed here, this dissertation follows the theoretical stands of memory, commemory and identity linking towards cultural trauma. Basically, the theoretical assertions of Geoffrey Alexander, Ron Eyerman and Aili Aarelaid-Tart are the fundamental concepts that are required for the successful completion of the research. Eyerman claims that “as a cultural process, trauma is linked to the formation of collective identity and construction of collective memory” (61). This research attempts to foreground such identity and memory as the foundation of cultural trauma that have been employed in these novels. Further, Eyerman defines cultural trauma as “a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion” (61). This research intends to include the representative characters’ loss of identity and meaning and their restless struggle to achieve that in American location. Aili Aarelaid-Tart’s conception of

cultural trauma as a discourse in which "identities are severely damaged or questioned" (50) due to the defeat of a particular community can also be employed in order to interpret the situational complexities of African Americans in American location represented through the complex situation of characters in *Juneteenth* and *Mumbo Jumbo*. Furthermore, articles and books of different researchers, scholars as well as experts related to cultural trauma, and instructions

This study is significant in that it attempts to foreground memory and identity as the embodiment of traumatic loss of the African American culture in American location. Further, this study makes significant contribution as it brings the situation of African American culture and identity employed both in *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Juneteenth* within the purview of critical analysis. It also makes a significant theoretical connection among memory, identity and culture of African Americans in terms of their suffering, anxiety and shock shedding light onto traumatic situation in American location.

This study has been divided into five chapters. Chapter I introduces the issue, research problem, thesis statement, methodology and plan of dissertation. Moreover, it identifies research gap by carrying out a literature review of the concerned novels *Juneteenth* and *Mumbo Jumbo*. Chapter II explores what cultural trauma actually is and how it takes place. Different cultural trauma theorists' ideas have been incorporated under this chapter. Chapter III deals with memory, identity and cultural trauma in *Mumbo Jumbo*. It explores how memory and identity of African American people are shaped in American white centric society. In the same way, Chapter IV represents memory, identity and cultural trauma in *Juneteenth*. By examining narrative fluctuating between past and present in the novel, this chapter reflects the fragmented nature of African American cultural memory, commemoration of slavery

and racial discrimination prevalent in the lives of Reverend Hickman, Bliss and other characters. Chapter V examines how slavery, racism and erased histories fracture African American consciousness, while rituals, memory and resistance in these novels forge a resilient communal identity.

Chapter II

Cultural Trauma and Formation of African American Identity

Cultural Trauma refers to the collective emotional as well as psychological suffering experienced by a group, whether a nation, ethnic community or social class following a catastrophic or deeply disruptive event that shatters their shared identity, memory or sense of meaning. In the novel *Juneteenth*, the characters like Reverend Hickman and Senator Sunraider (formerly Bliss) embody the trauma of racial violence and cultural erasure as Bliss denies of his black heritage and transforms himself into a white supremacist politician. Hickman's lamentation also underscores the psychological toll of the rupture. Similarly, in *Mumbo Jumbo*, PaPa LaBas confronts the cultural genocide of African traditions through the Western 'Jes Grew' epidemic, a metaphor for suppressed black creativity and spirituality. In this way, characters have faced catastrophic or deeply disruptive events with their shattered shared identity, memory or sense of meaning which have created cultural wound in them.

Cultural wound in the mind of survival is due to the catastrophic events faced by the individual. It is not just individual psyche but collective consciousness. It leaves enduring scars in the collective psychology of the cultural group. In this regard, James Berger explores how trauma disrupts language, memory and meaning, forcing survivors to grapple with an unrepresentable past that creates scars and wound in the mind of survivors. Berger writes:

The idea of trauma also allows for an interpretation of cultural symptoms of the growths, wounds, scars on the social body, and its compulsive, repeated actions. For instance, a sense of the dynamics of trauma offers a new

understanding of the insistent returns of family disasters on talk shows that goes beyond discussions of market share and public taste. (571)

The concept of trauma, as applied to culture, provides a framework for interpreting the growths, wounds and scars on the social body. It can be visualized through recurring patterns of compulsive repetition, unresolved conflict and performative suffering. The repetition of family disasters in African American literature reveal society's unprocessed wounds, where the past is neither fully buried nor coherently narrated, but instead, erupts in distorted form that creates wound. In the texts *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Juneteenth*, compulsive repetition of distortion and eruption in the lives of African American people creates collective psychic injury.

Psychic injury causes a long lasting wound in collective consciousness. In *Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma*, Jeffery C. Alexander argues that trauma is not an inherent result of violent events but a socially constructed process shaped by collective meaning making. Unlike psychological trauma, which focuses on individual suffering, cultural trauma emerges when a group consciously interprets and narrates a catastrophic event as a fundamental threat to its identity and memory. He opines, "Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (1). It is clear that trauma is attributed to real or imagined phenomena, not because of their actual harmfulness or their objective abruptness, but because these phenomena are believed to have abruptly and harmfully affected collective identity. Similarly in the same article, Alexander brings a definition of cultural trauma from Neil J. Smelser in this way: "A memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or

situation that is a) laden with negative effect, b) represented as indelible, and c) regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions" (44). Alexander posits his strong view about the language of the traumatized people. He opines:

Collective sufferings have not been compelled to accept moral responsibility, and the lessons of these social traumas have been neither memorialized nor ritualized. . . Collective traumas have no geographical or cultural limitations. The theory of cultural trauma applies, without prejudice, to any and all instances when societies have, or have not, constructed and experienced cultural traumatic events, and to their efforts to draw, or not to draw, the moral lessons that can be said to emanate from them. (27)

In these lines, Alexander asserts that collective sufferings and social traumas often go unacknowledged, lacking moral accountability or formal remembrance through memorials or rituals. It emphasizes that such trauma transcends geographical and cultural boundaries, affecting societies universally.

Alexander emphasizes the trauma as mental process that distorts and shapes the traumatic response foregrounding the meaning of trauma as not a raw imprint of the event itself, but a complex, psychologically mediated reconstruction over the generations. The essence is that trauma emerges from the interplay of event, psyche and defense mechanisms, rather than from the event alone. He further asserts that "trauma approach places a model of unconscious emotions, fears and cognitively distorting mechanism of psychological defense between the external shattering event and the actor's internal traumatic response" (5) that affect the inner psyche. When people grapple between external and internal events with repression, things are made traumatic. In this sense, in both novels *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Juneteenth*, blacks are

suppressed on the basis of racism. It creates vast difference between two races. So they cannot defend external shattering events. They face cultural loss which germinates traumatic disorder and wound in their mind. He emphasizes the role of external forces in framing trauma through narratives, symbols and rituals, which determine whether an event becomes a lasting wound in collective consciousness. His theory shifts the focus from the event itself to its representation, illustration of how societies negotiate pain, assign blame and seek redemption. This framework is crucial for analyzing literary works like *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Juneteenth*, where African American Cultural trauma is actively reconstructed through storytelling.

Similarly, Ron Eyerman argues that cultural trauma within the Black community stems from systemic process of othering marginalizing them as outsiders; slavery's dehumanization that stripped them of dignity and agency, along with identitylessness resulting from the erasure of cultural heritage and persistent racism reinforcing structural oppression. Defining cultural trauma in *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*, he highlights the way the Black community's avoidance whether due to internalized stigma, survival strategies, or societal pressure are applied to suppress painful histories.

He argues that slavery constitutes a foundational cultural trauma for African Americans, one that has been continuously reinterpreted over time to shape collective identity and resistance. According to him, "The 'trauma' in question is slavery, not as institution or even experience, but as collective memory, a form of remembrance that grounded the identity-formation of a people" (Eyerman 60). Here, he explains that the trauma being discussed is not slavery as a historical institution or the direct live experience of enslaved individuals as it was ended in the past, but rather, how slavery is remembered collectively by later generations. It emphasizes that this collective

memory, the way slavery is recalled, interpreted, and internalized over time has become a foundational element in shaping Black identity. Rather than just a historical fact, slavery functions as a cultural trauma, a shared narrative of suffering that influences group consciousness, solidarity and the ongoing struggle for recognition and justice. In this sense, the trauma persists not because people directly endured slavery, but because its legacy lives on through stories, cultural representations and systematic inequalities that continue to define Black experiences. These interconnected mechanisms create a cycle of unresolved grief and fractured identity, shaping a cultural trauma that persists across generations which is the framework of cultural trauma discussed in *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*.

According to Eyerman, trauma is not just an individual rather it runs generations to generations. He explains cultural trauma as, "an event or an experience, a primal scene that defines one's identity because it has left and thus must be dealt with by later generations who have had no experience of the original event" (74-75). It means cultural trauma is not just an individual or isolated event. It is a foundational and identity shaping experience that reverberates generations to generations. Despite not getting direct witness, the original traumatic event inherits its cultural weight, compelling them to confront and reinterpret its legacy. With this reference, Eyerman suggests that trauma transcends time, embedding itself into collective memory and identity formation where later generations must clasp with its unresolved echoes through narratives, rituals, or social movement as Jes Grew members in *Mumbo Jumbo*.

Eyerman's framework emphasizes confrontation of historical injustices while reconstructing collective memory and identity through recognition, reparative justice,

and cultural renewal, which is applicable to the novels *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Juneteenth*. In *Mumbo Jumbo*, Reed engages in cultural renewal by reclaiming African diasporic traditions, subverting Eurocentric narratives and restoring erased histories. Similarly, *Juneteenth* also shows the delayed emancipation of enslaved Black Americans that functions an act of publicly acknowledging historical oppression. Both novels and traditions exemplify Eyerman's model by transforming cultural trauma into sites of resilience, where memory is not passive but actively reshaped to forge identity, reconstructing collective memory through recognition, reparative justice and cultural renewal.

Aili Aarelaid- Tart's *Cultural Trauma and Life Stories* acknowledges the way individuals and communities process collective trauma through personal narratives, arguing that "cultural trauma as a social practice, and also a collective discourse for creating new interpretations of the past, more suitable for the new social reality" (20). For him, cultural trauma is not just a historical event but an ongoing, socially mediated process of meaning-making. Drawing on case studies from post-Soviet societies, she demonstrates how life stories; oral histories, memories, and autobiographical accounts serve as a crucial tools for individuals to reinterpret painful pasts, negotiate identity and resist imposed historical narratives. She writes, "The trauma discourses appearing at the level of the collective subject are in my study presented as certain numbers of told stories about lived lives" (20). Here, she demonstrates how the social issues turns to be a collective affair and it hinders long lasting, emphasizing the fact that trauma's impact depends on how it is framed, remembered and transmitted across generations with reference to post-Soviet society. Her claim is that personal narrative can either reinforce or challenge dominant trauma discourses, prevailing the interplay between individual agency and collective memory

in shaping post-traumatic recovery. Her perspective of trauma theory is particularly relevant for analyzing marginalized histories, such as those in *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Juneteenth*.

Aili Aarelaid-Tart's insight reminds us that cultural trauma is less about the event itself and more about the struggle to narrate it. Defeat forces communities to either cling to fractured identities or create new ones, often through contentious discourse. She takes cultural trauma as discourse; a way of narrating and interpreting events that shapes collective memory. Unlike individual trauma, cultural trauma is a shared narrative that emerges when a group struggles to make sense of a disruptive event such as genocide or systematic oppression. She further writes:

The speciality of cultural trauma as a discourse is that it appears in a situation when a particular community has been defeated and as a consequence, identities are severely damaged or questioned altogether. Cultural trauma is formally recognized as a disorder, where a narrative of temporary use comes into being, and yet it must be overcome as soon as possible. Due to the transformation of the political needs after the traumatic events, the past is usually reinterpreted as black and white, and previous values lose their meaning. (50)

Aarelaid-Tart's idea is that cultural trauma happens when a community suffers a major defeat like war, oppression or loss of freedom and their identity gets shattered. In response, people create stories to explain what happened, but these stories are often temporary and over-simplified, painting their past as either all good or all bad while old beliefs lose their importance. The trauma is treated like a wound that needs to be healed quickly, especially because political and social needs change after the crisis. But the real challenge is moving beyond this fractured identity and rebuilding a new,

stronger sense of self. This helps explain why events like in *Juneteenth* or stories like in *Mumbo Jumbo* are not just about pain rather they are about how communities reinterpret their past to survive and reclaim their future. As the idea of Aarelaid-Tart is about the framework of cultural trauma rooted in defeat, damaged identities and the struggle for narrative control, it represents the historical legacy and African American culture in *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Juneteenth*. Both texts and events reflect how black communities in the US have clinched with the aftermath of systematic violence, erasure and the reclaiming of cultural identity.

Aarelaid-Tart believes that cultural trauma is not static rather shaped by overlapping identities, historical legacies and power struggle. Suppression of black culture in *Mumbo Jumbo* by white institutions illustrates that trauma is not just a historical wound but an ongoing battle over identities and their historical belongings. With an increase in life stress and a decrease in the capacity to screen the impact of a trauma, cultural trauma can be transmitted across time and generation as a bond of survival. The development of an ambitious theoretical model of cultural trauma builds a new understanding of the way social groups interact with emotion to create new and binding understandings of social responsibility. Looking at the meaning making process as an open ended social dialogue in which strikingly different social narratives compete for influence, they outline a strongly constructivist approach to trauma and apply this theoretical model in a series of extensive case studies including the slavery, human pain, agonies and sufferings. Regarding it, Aarelaid-Tart writes:

The discourse of cultural trauma proceeds on all levels of the different modes of human time. With the life stories splitting into narratives of health problems appearing during the changes or premature deaths of relatives (biological time), of hoping for the mercy of god (religious time), of the material chaos in

everyday life or the troubles of managing one's life during deficit economy (economical time), of the attitude towards a sharply transformed worldwide doctrine (political time), etc. from the point of view of an individual life course, cultural trauma is often a period in which one should rethink the previous life trajectory. (48)

In these lines, Aarelaid-Tart shows that the development of a theory of cultural trauma proceeds with an examination of the state of alarm in very wider social identities. Cultural trauma unfolds across multiple dimensions of human experiences such as biological, religious, economic, and political, each shaping how individuals process disruption. Trauma fractures life stories into narratives of health crises and loss of biological time. It fractures religious time, economic time, and political time.

Trauma is a cultural construction. In order to transform the trauma "carrier groups" play vital role. "Carrier groups are the collective agents of the trauma process" (Alexander 11). They have to make the meaning of certain event, which is taken as a horrendous aspect or matter of fear. The "carrier groups" establish a collectively acceptable meaning of the event and try to make it as a threat. Anyone or anything else can be a carrier group. It might be either individual or institutional. Any social organization, language, media, religion, state bureaucracy, narratives, art, literature etc. can perform the role of carrier group. As matter of text, 'carrier groups' meditate between the even trend collective psyche. It depends upon social and political situation as well as ongoing debate and ongoing struggle between social groups. In Smelser's term:

. . . cultural trauma is so contingent on forever changing and ongoing social and political conditions and on ongoing processes of negotiation and contestation among groups. I make this assentation in full knowledge of the

fact that interested groups (including governments) often represent cultural trauma as indelible marks or scars, forever nagging at the body social and the body politics. (51)

In Neil J. Smelser's term, cultural trauma is an ever-changing social and political phenomena and constant debates and struggles between different groups. It often portrays cultural trauma as permanent scars, something that constantly haunts society including governments.

With respect to identity formation, psychoanalytical trauma theory talks about the individual identity, which is formed on the basis of one's psychological wound or shock. This theory gives the model of unconscious emotional fears and psychological defense mechanism. It purposes external and internal event; the external forces to traumatize internal part of mind, which is more important. Freudian psychoanalysis claims that the individual identity is determined by person's unconscious mind. For it, unconscious part of mind is primary factor to form identity. With the same vein, the traumatic event giving shock in the unconscious part of mind motivates the human beings towards the formation of their identity. Unlike psychoanalytical approach of trauma theory, cultural trauma theory believes in the group solidarity, which is essentially caused by the traumatic event. That event challenges the ongoing status of the collective psyche and their identity reaches in the verge of danger. Then, that very traumatic event is politicized with the purpose of construction and reconstruction of the group identity. The identity is revised, memorized and reutilized through various processes. When the event is politicized, the rival group may try to use the strategies of 'calm down'. Mostly the politicization of event, creation of trauma and formation of group identity may happen in such cultural groups, who do not have any access to the state beneficiaries and the government functions as the rival group for them. That may

bring various strategies to make failure for their politics. The government may function as a passive agency. While talking about identity formation Neil, J. Smelser's statement is worthy to quote here:

Collective trauma, affecting a group with definable membership, will, of necessity, also be associated with that group's collective identity. Put simply, a meaningful cultural membership implies a name or category of membership, and the social psychological representation of that category produces a sense of psychological identity with varying degrees of salience, articulation and elaboration. (43)

Smelser sounds a bit paradoxical when he mingles cultural identity with psychological representation. It is difficult to distinguish whatever Smelser is cultural or psychoanalytical trauma theorist. In fact he is seeing cultural trauma through the eyes of psychoanalysis. The cultural identity also involves the psychological identity because collective identity abounds in each individual psychology and memory.

Any event turns out to be traumatic when it is remembered or memorized. So, memory is an inevitable part of trauma theory. The physical shock creates mental shock. That very internal shock remains inside the mind. When same kind of event is seen again, the previous shock is triggered and the victim is traumatized. For the dramatization, the remembrance plays pivotal role. This kind of memorizing method was used by Sigmund Freud himself while he was treating the psychological patients. It is said that he used to advise his patients to remember their past events, relations, dream etc. Contemporary medical science also uses same kind of glimpse of the events by which the patients are victimized. This kind of re-traumatizing strategy of medical science is the real study of psychological trauma because it involves individual memory.

Memory is given high priority in cultural trauma study. Cultural trauma theorists believe that memory contains fertile ground for the politics. For them, memories are used to make the state policy also. The same idea is strengthened by Jenny Edkins, who, in her essay "Remembering Relationality," observes:

The memory of the organized violence of genocides, slaveries, wars, famines, and latterly terrorism has become an important site of political investment. Writers in cultural studies, comparative literature, anthropology history and sociology are involved in analyzing not only the commemoration of such events, but also the practices of retribution, recovery and reconciliation that follow in their wake. . . . A number of authors focus specifically on the memory of wars, or genocides, others examine the relation between collective memory and cultural or national identity. (100)

Memory is highly politicized for the purpose of external benefits. Especially political authority uses such method of memories to take authorial advantages. The real study of cultural trauma lies in its study of traumatic memory. If a memory destabilizes the unity of the people, such memories are needed to forget, otherwise memories play vital role to re-traumatize the people again and again. The political authority gets a chance to play in this process of re-traumatization.

The cultural-trauma theories proposed by various scholars help us understand how the African American past is retold and reshaped into shared cultural trauma in the primary texts. These ideas show that trauma is not just an individual experience; it is also a collective wound that influences a community's memory, identity, and everyday life. Such theories clarify how the novels depict the inherited pain of post-memory, identity loss, diasporic displacement, slavery, racism, and historical violence—and how these wounds are remembered, narrated, and passed down from

one generation to the next. They also help us see how characters struggle with fragmented identities, attempt to reclaim their forgotten histories, and use storytelling as a means of healing or resisting oppression. In this way, these theoretical insights serve as valuable tools for examining how both novels transform African American historical suffering into powerful narratives that speak to cultural memory and ongoing collective trauma.

In short, these theories reveal how the novels portray the shared pain of slavery, racism, and historical violence, and how these injuries continue to echo across generations. They guide us in understanding the characters' battles with broken identities, their attempts to rediscover their pasts, and the role of storytelling in healing or resistance. Ultimately, these insights provide a strong framework for analyzing how both novels turn African American history, memory, identity, and trauma into meaningful and enduring narratives.

Chapter III

Memory, Identity and Cultural Trauma in *Mumbo Jumbo*

This chapter explores how memory and identity are shaped by cultural trauma, particularly through the lens of African American history and the suppression of Black cultural expression in the novel *Mumbo Jumbo* by Ishmael Reed as it narrativizes both explicit and implicit forces of systematic oppression of African culture and tradition by western hegemony. Consequently, it creates a fragmented collective memory, which in turn complicates the reconstruction of identity. Reed, in this novel, embodies historical narratives that incorporate cultural memories and resistance.

Reed constructs a rigorous yet satirical cultural history, tracing Afro-American traditions of possession back to Ancient Egypt. Reed frames practices like Voodoo, jazz, and various dance forms - central to Caribbean, Latin American, and African American cultures as both distinctly accessible. Reed critiques the Euro-American and African American fixation on African origins, exposing its ties to imperialist theft while challenging Afro-centric and Black Power narratives that often idealize an ancient African past while neglecting living diasporic traditions. Instead, he presents African diaspora culture as both ancient and dynamically evolving, shaped by transatlantic experience rather than static heritage. Moreover, Reed asserts the enduring power of African American traditions as vital acts of cultural memory, reclaiming Africa's presence in the Americas. Through a pastiche of texts and images, he dramatizes how the past "possesses" the present, reframing debates over cultural appropriation as a tension between historical inheritance and contemporary creativity as Ron Eyerman claims that "trauma in question is slavery . . . a form of remembrance that grounded the identity-formation of people" (60). Eyerman identifies that the

enduring trauma of slavery is a form of remembrance that grounded the identity-formation of African-American people in American landscape. Reed excavates a cultural history marked by both celebration and rupture, engaging with the Afro-American experience as "the kids want to dance belly to belly and cheek to cheek while their elders are supporting legislation that would prohibit them from dancing closet than 9 inches" (Reed 21). In this line Reed's narrative traces possessive traditions belly dance and cheek dance back to Ancient-Egypt, not as a static origin myth but as a living, contested legacy forged in the restriction of American legislation. Restriction over dramatization and celebration of Ancient Egyptian cultural practices mirror the diasporic struggle to reconstruct cultural memory amid the fractures of slavery, where Africa exists as both a lost homeland.

Trauma is like a bone fracturing after being bent and stressed and then repairing leaving a permanent vulnerability, or a wound which will leave a scar and sensitivity which can be seen in case of African-American people in the American landscape as they are penetrating and wounding in terms of their cultural lineage as Reed discloses the dehumanizing behavior, "Christianity has never been worldly nor has it ever looked with favour on good food and wine . . . introduction of Jazz into the cult" (62). The American mainstream Christian society has created taboo about Jaaz culture which has created psychological hindrances in the mind of African Americans. Trauma causes a feeling of helplessness on them. It has affected their future self-esteem, social awareness, ability to learn and physical health. One's usual coping skills are not sufficient to deal with trauma.

Reed, in the novel, postulates Afro-centric and Black Power movements and tries to regain its impulse in order to expose the traps of an ancient African past while overlooking the creative resilience of diaspora traditions. The African American

obsession with origins, in Reed's expression, is thus a symptom of this unresolved trauma: a compulsive return to the scene of imperialism that simultaneously distorts and fuels cultural trauma. For Eyerman, cultural trauma is not merely a historical event but a recurring site of negotiation, where identity is perpetually reassembled. Reed exposes this by presenting African diaspora culture as neither purely ancestral nor naively new but as a dynamic interplay of survival and innovation, their Jaaz culture as an improvisation under constraint, Voodoo as a syncretic resistance, and the novel itself as a possessed text haunted by the past that creates a collective ground for African American people. Eyerman, regarding the formation of collective identity and cultural trauma claims that ". . . cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion" (61). Eyerman emphasizes that cultural trauma is not a personal problem rather it is a group issue. It is a social stigma that occurs upon a member of that society and whole society starts to suffer. In *Mumbo Jumbo*, too, Reed uses the competing forces of Jes Grew; a force that has no end and no beginning: "A mighty influence, Jes Grew infects all that it touches" (Reed 13). It is linked to the Harlem Renaissance and the cultural expositions, its roots extend back to ancient African rituals.

The African American obsession with origins, in Reed's narration, is thus a symptom of this unresolved trauma, a compulsive return to the scene of imperialism that simultaneously distorts and fuels cultural affinity. By equating textual evidences with cultural appropriation, Reed reframes the debate about the past's grip on the present which turns to be generative force, where trauma's fragments are resembled into different forms as Eyerman claims, "The notion of an African American identity was articulated in the later decades of the nineteenth century by a generation of black

intellectuals for whom slavery was a thing of the past, not the present" (61). In this way, *Mumbo Jumbo* is a testament to Eyerman's claim that trauma is the ground from which diasporic identity emerges, not as a fixed inheritance but as an ongoing act of past memory.

Trauma is not a readymade thing, rather it is constructed by cultural norms and values in African American society, but "[t]he Wallflower order attempts to meet the psychic plague by installing an anti-Jes Grew" (Reed 17) sentiment that creates traumatic situations among and between African American people. Wallflower Order, a secretive white supremacist organization has maintained its rules and regulations which suffer much and more to the entire African American people in America as they are "(a)laden with negative effect, (b) represented as indelible, and (c) regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions" (Eyerman 61). Eyerman argues that the formation of African American cultural trauma emerges as white American society systematically attempts to erase African Americans' fundamental cultural frameworks such as their spiritual traditions, artistic expressions, and collective memory replacing them with Eurocentric norms laden with negative effect. American mainstream society systematically restricts their cultural belongings which creates psychic and social rupture on them. The lines show how American mainstream society is responsible to create trauma on them:

Unbeknown to him he is being watched by a spy from the Wall-Flower Order .

. . The 2nd state of the plan is to groom a talking Android who will work tithing the Negro, who seems to be its classical host; to drive it out, . . . break down this Germ, keep it from behind the counter. To begin the campaign, No Dancing posters are ordered by the 100s . . . "Jes Grew is the boll weevil

eating away at the fabric of our forms our technique our aesthetic integrity,"

says a Southern congressman. (17)

Reed exposes how Wallflower Order systematically attempts to erase African Americans' fundamental cultural frameworks such as their spiritual traditions, artistic expressions, and collective memory in order to replace them with White centric norms laden with negative effects such as shame, fear and distortion of their identity as Eyerman argues it as slavery.

African American culture as Reed fictionalizes is built on diasporic memory. Voodoo, Jazz, Hoodoo, dance- all rooted in communal, nonlinear, embodied ways of knowing. However, Wallflower Order views these traditions as chaotic, primitive or threatening so that it by misusing administrative power tries to restrict it at all, but cultural memory and people's affinity with it is equally important with their lifeline and they are ready to cross all the boundaries perpetuated by American white centric ideology in order to keep their cultural legacy. Jes Grew is also the representation of both repetition and a parallel to the culture of previous eras. The end of the novel also depicts that "Jes Grew was latching onto its blood" (Reed 216). Despite being remaining in America, they could not forget their cultural legacy and its lineage are furthermore charted to an Ancient Egyptian "theater accompanying these rites, these agriculturalists rites" (161). Jes Grew illustrates an African American and African tradition, it is also a possessive force. "Jes Grew has no end and no beginning. It even precedes that little ball that exploded 1000000000s of years ago and led to what we are now" (204). Cultural legacy is closely connected with the inner soul of people which can be seen in the manifestation of African culture in America even today. Black people are intermingling to their cultural conducts they inherit; they deliberately conduct their cultural connotations despite being facing innumerable

obstacles. They remember their "previous history of the library system. To add to that, people walk all over New York speaking Creole and wearing tropical clothes; the women long white dresses, the men linen suits" (64). The demonstration in New York City is due to their cultural affinity that belongs to their cultural practices, but unfortunately, the "Wallflower Order launched the war against Haiti in hopes of allaying Jes Grew symptoms by attacking their miasmatic source" (64). The Wallflower Order, a secretive white supremacist organization, takes action against their cultural demonstration which creates indelible suffering and pains upon their group identity. When there comes the question upon group consciousness, there occurs cultural trauma as Alexander claims, "Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (6). Alexander opines that if anything happens upon group consciousness, it generates the question of existence. Black people demonstrate cultural rallies with their cultural dress as they are guided by "religious and aesthetic freedom" (64), The Wallflower Order commits censorship and attacks "against Haiti in hopes of allaying Jes Grew symptoms" (64). It turns to be a collective issue and "an artist happens upon a new form he shouts "I have Reached My Haiti!" (64). Among demonstrators, an artist goes against The Wallflower Order as he feels the American government snatching their cultural roots that belongs to them.

Like physical or psychic trauma, the articulating discourse surrounding cultural trauma is a process of mediation involving alternative strategies and alternative voices. Eyerman believes that “. . . memory helps to account for human behavior. Notions of collective identity built on this model, such as those within the

collective behavior school theorize a 'loss of self' and the formation of new, collectively based, identities as the outcome of participation in forms of collective behavior like social movement" (64). It is a process that aims to reconstitute or reconfigure a collective identity through collective representation as a way of repairing the tear in the social fabric. The Wallflower Order's dehumanizing movement creates the question of their existence of Identity. Hierophant, the leader of the Atonists, seeks to suppress the Jes Grew member as they demonstrate for their existence by saying "Lord, If I can't dance, no one shall" (65). Demonstrators feel insecurity in America as it penetrates and controls the black communities. It creates the question of inequality and the right to protest against inequality as the American constitution imagines equality among and between all citizens of it but it arrests and imprisonment of Black people under the protest that "Jes Grew has gripped the vitals of America" (66) exposes deep rooted racial and cultural anxieties, challenging the myth of equal identity of all in America. This persecution reflects historical and systematic oppression, where Black cultural expressions are criminalized reinforcing hierarchies of power. The resulting cultural trauma manifests as a rupture in the social fabric, as the suppression of Black vitality embodied by Jes Grew reveals America's fear of difference and its resistance to pluralism. Reed critiques this through satire and Afro-centric symbolism, illustrating how institutionalized repression not only targets Black people, but also seeks to erase their cultural contributions, leaving lasting scars on collective memory and identity.

Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* reveals the cultural trauma experienced by Afro-Americans as a result of historical oppression, systematic erasure and the commodification of Black culture. Ali Aarelaid-Tart states that "the specialty of cultural trauma as a discourse is that it appears in a situation when a particular

community has been defeated and as a consequence, identities are severely damaged or questioned altogether" (50). Cultural trauma is that very phenomenon that occurs when a community's defeat leads to severe damage or questioning of identities. The claim is deeply reflected with Reed's portrayal of Black identity in American geographic locations. Through the novel's fragmented narrative, it is easily visible that how African American identities are destabilized by forces such as white supremacy, religious co-optation and cultural appropriation, leaving the community in a state of existential and spiritual crisis.

One of the cultural practices that connects the Afro-Americans to their cultural practices is Voodoo or Hoodoo which is their Black spiritual exercise that they are experiencing since their ancestral periods. The germination of trauma is inevitable on them as the government of America sanctions over it in order to eliminate it. Their cultural practices are inherently important to them. There is no right to question any one of their cultural practices. The government even restricts media and newspaper due to the fear of unmasking their brutality upon them as "We had orders from the Occupation Forces that no news of this war would be printed on the mainland" (58). The government Occupational Forces have ordered not to cover any news regarding the Afro-American's exhibition of Voodoo or Hoodoo. The Wallflower Order threatens them in this way which degenerates the traumatic situation on their amygdale, "We warned you, pop, but now you've really done it, Your style was too fancy anyway. We like strong lively short verbs and present tenses and you can't adapt to this American style, pops, Damn you. The people outside, listening through the glass window, are shocked at this use by Hinkle Von Vampton of abusive profanity" (58). Hinkle Von Vampton, who works and aims to eradicate Jes Grew and maintain the dominance of Western civilization upon them, behaves with the member

of Jes Grew bitterly. In these lines, he is dealing with the Wallflower and working on behalf of them. He warns the member of Jes Grew and equally criticizes their styles being too fancy and low grade. He forcefully orders them to follow American styles of cultural belongingness. The protagonist of the novel Papa LaBas and Hoodoo detective struggle to restore lost traditions and people who are its member watching their ancestral cultural assets, the people outside visualizing cultural demonstration, Hinkle Von Vampton's bitter words and banishment of the cultural performances leads them towards cultural trauma. Their cultural norms and values settled in their mindset get fragmented, they remember the pain and agonies they have been facing in America. Reed's American community in *Mumbo Jumbo* is depicted as fragmented, its identity diluted by centuries of oppression, leaving many characters disconnected from their heritage that harmonizes with Aili Aarelaid-Tart point of view that "for an individual, cultural trauma is often a period in which one should rethink the previous life trajectory" (48). As claimed by Tart, members of Jes Grew remember their cultural trajectories which were handed over by their ancestors; they seem in the verge of danger which revives unbearable pain and agonies in the mind.

Historical defeat and the loss of Afro-American lineage is another focal point that generates the traumatic condition of black people remaining in America. White people in order to create the identity crisis, they wear African dresses and apply different types of gel and lotion so as to criticize them. "Hinckle Von Vampton's 1 blue eye blinks and then fixes upon the swarthy form before him. A man in trousers, a few sizes too large, suspenders, hair pasted down with a bad smelling grease" (58). In these lines Reed through parody and satire, shows how American white-centric ideology tries to prove Black culture as inferior than that of White culture. In Black culture, African people have their own traditional practices to apply things in their

hair and body that suits for their body, but Hinckle Von Vampton applies "smelling grease" (58). These lines depict how White-centric ideology in America has historically sought to marginalize and demean Afro-American cultural practices while enforcing assimilation. This process contributes to cultural trauma, a collective psychological wound inflicted upon a group through systematic degradation of their identity as Eyerman writes, "The abolitionist movement provide a context, a ready audience, a network of media and influential individuals within which to construct and disseminate an image of slavery that was counter to the images and practices of the dominant society" (73). Eyerman opines that dominant American culture has framed Afro-American traditions such as dress, hairstyles, and vernacular as inferior, uncivilized or low-grade. This evident in Mumbo Jumbo through the character Hinckle Von Vampton, a white figure who appropriates Black aesthetics such wearing Black dress, using hair grease, styling his hair in black manner not out of respect, but as a means of mocking and controlling Black identity. His actions symbolize how white supremacy commodifies and distorts Black culture while pressuring Afro-Americans to abandon their own practices in favour of assimilation.

Enforcement of Wallflower Order for assimilation such as suppressing natural Black hairstyles, forcing White-centric dress codes, or ridiculing Afro-American speech create a psychological rupture where Black individuals are made to feel that their natural expressions are wrongly presented.

Their traumatic condition does not stem from a single violent event but from the ongoing, systemic suppression of Black identity, whether through the enforcement of Eurocentric beauty standards, or the forced abandonment of traditional dress and hairstyles. These acts of cultural erasure create a psychological rupture, where Black individuals internalize the message that their natural expressions are wrong and

inferior. In *Mumbo Jumbo*, Reed illustrates it through characters, who either resist or succumb to assimilation, mirroring real world dynamics where Black people navigate between self-erasure and defiance. The trauma, as Caruth suggests, lingers in consciousness, manifesting a repetitive, unresolved distress. One that is passed down through generations, shaping collective memory and identity, they want to preserve it. Papa LaBas as an astro-detective is known about conspiracy of Wallflower Order. He has opened "Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral" which "is located at 119 West 136th St." (49) in order to uncover the conspiracy against black culture and take stand against white supremacy and figures like Hinckle Von Vampton. He detects how Wallflower Order has stolen, distorted, or erased their traditions and wants to restore it. PaPa LaBas works in Harlem "Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral" as he is guided by ancestral memory and wants to restore again. He works there ensuring and "A piano recording plays jelly Rool Morton's "Pearls," haunting, melancholy . . . feed, celebrated, drummed to until it deserts the horse and *govi* of its host and goes on about its business" (50). PaPa LaBas as an unstoppable cultural force symbolizes both the persistence of Black cultural vitality and the unresolved tension between suppression and liberation, embodying Caruth's idea of trauma as an unhealed wound that demands recognition and recovery. By installing Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral in Harlem where he continues to teach Voodoo ritual practices, he just wants to heal cultural trauma by restoring several connections to African heritage. As an astro-detective, he underscores that the crimes he investigates are the theft of identity, the distortion of time and the war on Black consciousness. In this way, Reed positions PaPa LaBas as a representation of resistance, fighting not just with an individual but with the psychic violence of white supremacy against Afro-American people as postulated in the novel *Mumbo Jumbo*. As Eyerman illustrates how White-centric power structure stigmatizes black culture to

maintain dominance, in the novel *Mumbo Jumbo*, Reed illustrates ways of cultural domination upon black people living in America.

Despite the cultural trauma, *Mumbo Jumbo* is not the narrative of defeat of African-American culture rather it is the elusive Jes Grew that represents the irrepressible spirit of Black culture, which white institutions fear but cannot fully eradicate. In the novel, the Wallflower Order represents Eurocentric forces that fear Jes Grew, a spontaneous, infectious cultural movement rooted in African traditions, it "is no dream of an old man but . . . dynamic, engrossing" (54) embodies black cultural practices like jazz, dance, and Hoodoo spirituality, which resist Western suppression. The Wallflower Order, through figures like Hinckle Von Vampton, seeks to contain and sterilize Jes Grew, mirroring historical attempts to erase Black culture through slavery, minstrelsy, and religious conversion. Their fear stems from Jes Grew's uncontrollable nature; it thrives outside institutionalized religion and rigid social structure empowering Black people through improvisation, rhythm, and ancestral memory.

Opposing this suppression, the Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral, led by PaPa LaBas, acts as a sanctuary for Afro-American cultural preservation. LaBas, a Hoodoo detective, works to recover the stolen "Jes Grew Text," a sacred manuscript symbolizing Black cultural autonomy. The Cathedral, unlike the Wallflower Order's secrecy, operates openly, embracing polytheism, oral traditions, and chaos as forms of resistance. As the narrator reflects, "The Cathedral was a place where the old gods could be worshipped without interference," (51) highlighting its role in safeguarding African cultural affinity. By reclaiming the Jes Grew text and rejecting western cooptation, the Cathedral ensures that black cultural identity remains vibrant, self-determined and uncontainable defying the Wallflower Order attempts at erasure.

Erasure of ancestral traditions creates cultural trauma in the lives of people as Eyerman argues that the violent impositions of slavery and systemic racism inflicted deep psychological and cultural upon African people in America, disrupting ancestral traditions and forcing a fractured identity shaped by oppression. Generally in African society, fat women are taken as healthy and beautiful but as they are remaining in America, the American society has created a narrative that beautifulness remains always in slim. The following lines show the forceful cultural assimilation which has created trauma on them as, "Nowadays we dance morning, noon and night. What is more, we are unconsciously, while we dance, warring not only against unnatural lines of figures and gowns but we are warring against fat" (46). In these lines, Reed critiques the Eurocentric aesthetic impositions that have sought to suppress African cultural expressions, particularly through dance and body image. By stating, nowadays we dance morning, noon and night, Reed highlights how African traditions celebrate movement, rhythms, and bodily freedom contrasting sharply with western ideals of rigid, controlled forms and thinness. The act of dancing becomes both resistance and survival, as Black Americans unconsciously battle not just restrictive dance styles.

The act of dancing becomes both resistance and survival in these lines: "We are making ourselves lithe and slim and healthy and these are things that all reformers in the world could not do for us" (46). All the standards that reformers wants to do, Black Americans unconsciously battle not just restrictive dance styles but also the shaming of Black bodies that do not conform to white standards. This forced assimilation into American norms, whether in fashion, dance, or beauty, it creates a traumatic dissonance, stripping African people of their innate cultural practices. Even in this struggle, the persistence of dance serves as unconscious rebellion, reclaiming

autonomy over the Black body and rejecting the psychological violence of cultural erasure. According to Eyerman, trauma is not just physical but also epistemic, erasing languages, religions, and kinship structures while imposing Eurocentric norms, leaving generations to grapple with a dual consciousness of survival and cultural loss. Hence, "slavery was traumatic many seem obvious, and, for those who experience it directly, certainly it must have been" (61). Slavery creates traumatic situations, as Reed traces the effect of slavery on contemporary African American behavior patterns in the form of cultural assimilations. Thus, while slavery and its aftermath created trauma, the novel much like Eyerman's analysis, shows how African Americans have continually reconstructed identity through resilient, dynamic cultural practices.

Reed has flashed the secrecy that is hidden in American white centric ideology. How Wallflower Orders influence Afro-Americans and treat with them as an object. PaPa LaBas including other member of the society are aware about the hidden secrecy of Wallflower Orders, therefore they also open Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral office in order to preserve their culture, they published books. PaPaLabas Remembers it was the time of 1920's, unanimous person attacks on Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral. LaBas remembers those suffering days in this way: "The late Teens and early 1920s are a bad time for civil liberties. In Bisbe Arizona, 1971m 1,1100membersof the Industrial Workers of the world (Wobblies) are subjected to the tortures of a vigilante mob. January 23, 1920 'Reds' are routed from their beds, imprisoned or deported" (48). It is PaPa LaBas who has faced many traumatic incidents due to the cultural confrontation. His longing for the preservation of their own cultural norms and values are the responsible factors for his suffering. He remembers the past days and traumatizes in present condition whenever he remembers the past happenings. In order to preserve cultural affinities, he including

other members of the society opens Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral, but "the Wallflower Order which attends to the Dirty Work" (48). American White centric ideologist so as to dismantle their cultural identities and belongings such as art, artifacts, books caught in fire and destroy. As white centric jury was there, "the prosecutor requests to approach the bench. After a short conference, the judge dismisses the case" (48) because all these people were aligns in order to destroy their cultural identities. The court dismisses the case, "Public Health has also been hassling us" (48-49). Poor PaPa LaBas could not do anything but, "PaPa LaBas, conscious of the contemporary since Berbelang's attack, writes this into his black notebook" (49) which gives unbearable pain and agonies whenever he unfolds it and see it. He triggers towards the incident of 1920 and suffer a lot.

In this way, this analysis of Reed's novel *Mumbo Jumbo* shows how African American memory, identity and cultural trauma are deeply connected. Through humor and satire, Reed shows how Black culture has been suppressed by white dominance. Yet it survives through traditions like jazz, folklore and spirituality. The novel's chaotic style mirrors the struggle to reclaim identity amidst historical trauma, suggesting that African-Americans preserve their heritage though storytelling and resistance, even when facing erasure. Reed highlights how collective memory shapes identity and helps heal cultural wounds.

Chapter IV

Memory, Identity and Cultural Trauma in *Juneteenth*

Ralph Ellison's posthumously published novel *Juneteenth* deals with the complexities of African American culture and identity in American location with the help of the characters Reverend Hickman and Bliss who later on turns out to be a race-baiting senator Sunraider. Through the fluctuated narrative between past and present, this novel reflects to the fragmented nature of African American cultural memory, commemoration of slavery and racial discrimination prevalent in American location.

The novel *Juneteenth* opens up with the pathetic condition of Black people. The common theme in this novel is the daily lives experience of racism in twentieth century America. The novel shows the bitter reality and dehumanizing activities upon black people as white centric ideology is guided by its logos. In the realm of White centric ideology, the novel dramatizes the experience of the Afro-Americans who are shattering their collective identity, the novel *Juneteenth* is such testament that revives lost agency of Black people whenever they were deliberately treated as commodities and things and imported to American geographical locations. Ralph Ellison, as he belongs with that community, he intentionally wants to revive "Juneteenth" which is their common festival, previously it was celebrated in African continent, and now he wants to share it among and between African American people as a common thing hoping that it would be a shared entity that entails collective identity as Kansteiner believes "the memory wave in the humanities has contributed to the impressive revival of cultural history" (179). In these lines Kansteiner dramatizes that how memory wave revives shared historical thread that connects people within a single circle, where they feel their collective identity. The novel *Juneteenth* portrays the

African people's common festival where they celebrate and exercise their collective cultural aura. The lost cultural matter revives and grounded in this novel, hardships, burdens and convictions were the responsible things taken by American white centric society, the narrator remembers "its blessing and curse – is a matter of the past being active in the present – or of the characters becoming aware of the manner in which the past acts on their present live" (Ellison xv). The book is about the historical sufferings, pain and pangs of African-American people they had been tolerating since last many decades which has created a kind of wound in their mind. It depicts the ground reality of American society at that time which bears a long history of slavery, racial discrimination and segregation. The blacks nowadays are favorably referred to as a people of color. They are treated inhumanly to a point they were deprived from their roots and having no chance to speak their agonies, Hickman says:

They cut out our tongues . . .
 . . . They left us speechless . . .
 . . . They cut out our tongues . . .
 . . . Lord, they left us without words . . .
 . . . Amen ! They scattered our tongues in their land like seed . . .
 . . . And left us without language . . .
 . . . They took away our talking drums . . . (105)

In these lines, it exposes that black characters suffer from the agony of cultural trauma. It is Hickman who remembers black people's ground reality in the American Geographical region they faced. These lines exposure to the racially divided society, incurs heavy psychic casualty. The rational and cohesive structure of the character's psyche is torn by the traumatic assault. The extent to which the constant racial discrimination produces the virtual condition of alienation, humiliation and

embarrassment creates extreme anguish and trouble. The repeated exposure to racism leads to the beginning of racial trauma.

Black people in the racial American society are subjected to white centric ideological norms and values. It has used its weapons to suffer blacks, but the blacks' revolt against its domination and fight for their identity and equality. In order to get release from racial domination, Hickman, a Black preacher, adopts a white child named Bliss and raises him as his own son. He hopes that when Bliss grows up, he will use his position possibly as a light-skinned or white man to fight for equality between Black and white people. However, things do not go as he hoped. Bliss later rejects his Black upbringing, chooses to live as a white man, and even becomes a racist politician. This betrayal deeply hurts Hickman and the Black community that once loved and protected Bliss. Hickman states, "we dreamed a dream and worked for it but the world was simply too big for us and the dream got out of hand" (253). This line captures the crushing weight of trauma and broken hope of black people. His words reflect not just personal disappointment, but the collective trauma of Black Americans who invested in the promise of racial progress, only to see it distorted or destroyed by systemic racism. The "dream" symbolizes the belief that raising Bliss, a child who could navigate both Black and white worlds, might bridge racial divides. As Bliss rejects his upbringing and embraces white supremacy, Hickman's hope becomes a source of pain, revealing how racism warps even the purest intentions. The phrase "the world was too big for us" suggests powerlessness against oppressive forces, while "the dream got out of hand" implies that trauma arises not just from failure, but from witnessing something nurtured with love turn into a weapon. This moment underscores how cultural trauma lingers the betrayal, it is not just Bliss's, it is the betrayal of an entire community's faith in justice and redemption.

Reverend Hickman, a black character and the protagonist of the novel, tries to play a role to establish social harmony. He appoints Bliss in Church who works under him and he also calls him as "daddy" despite the difference in color. A black person who appropriately cares a child of white people and always appreciate him in his each and every steps of life, but the White people are quite selfish. The mother who abandons him in his early childhood "and I named him Bliss" (244). Hickman baptizes him as "Bliss". He never thought of his mother until one day while he is role playing the resurrection in the Church under the auspices of Hickman, he hears a white women screaming, "He is mine. MINE! That is Cudworth, my child. My baby. You gypsy niggers stole him, my baby. You robbed him of his birthright!" (133). Throughout the life, somebody calls Bliss as her son. She not only claims him to be her son, rather she utters bitter words towards black community and as "Negro" that indicates white people's segregation and their notion towards black people remaining with them in American geographical region:

And he thought, Yes, she's white all right, seeing the wild eyes and the red hair, streaming like a field on fire, coming towards him not at a pace so swift it seemed suddenly dreamlike slow. What's she doing here with us, a white sinner? Moving toward him like the devil in a nightmare, as now a man's voice bombed from far away, Madam, LADY, PLEASE – this here's the House of God! (133)

These lines are the powerful depiction of cultural trauma which refer to the collective psychological and emotional distress experienced by a group due to devastating historical events that disrupt their identity and sense of meaning. The statement reveals deep-seated racial and colonial tensions, illustrating how trauma is transmitted across generations and manifests in violent, dehumanizing language.

The speaker's claim 'He is mine. MINE!' reflects a history of ownership and entitlement tied to white supremacy, where Black as she addresses "gypsy" people were historically treated as their personal property. The accusation 'You gypsy niggers stole him' evokes racialized paranoia, a common feature in colonial and slaveholding societies where white fear of rebellion of what they claimed justifies brutal oppression as Ron Eyerman claims, "The trauma in question is slavery" (60). Slavery is not just an economic system, but a catastrophic cultural rupture that reshapes identities, power structures and collective memory across generations that manifests in the verbal utterances of Bliss's so-called mother.

Dehumanization and racial othering can be seen as she uses "gypsy niggers" which is purely a racial slur targeted group of humanity, reinforcing cultural trauma rooted in slavery, forced assimilation and genocide. The description "wild eyes and the red hair, streaming like a field on fire" (133) aligns with racist tropes of the racist white woman and encapsulates how historical injustice such as slavery, colonialism and racial terror are continue to haunt the present. The white woman's outburst is not just personal rage but a re-enactment of systemic violence, while the Black characters are forced into a defensive position even in a sacred place. The scene illustrates how cultural trauma is cyclical, passed down through generations in language, fear and systematic oppression.

The transmission of cultural trauma across generations is starkly illustrated through the asymmetrical experiences of Bliss and the Black community that raised him, particularly Reverend Hickman. Cultural trauma defined as a shared psychological wound inflicted upon a group by systemic violence and historical oppression permeates the lives of Hickman and his congregation but remains unrecognized by Bliss, whose white identity protects him from its effects. This

dynamic is evident when Bliss, despite being nurtured by Hickman in the Black church, passively allows his mother's racist outbursts and she says, "I'm taking him home to his heritage . . . he is mine, you understand? I'm his mother!" (133). His silence signifies not just complicity but a fundamental disconnect from Black suffering, a privilege afforded by his white lineage. Cultural trauma is painful, shared memory of a relevant membership group or society he or she belongs to. Bliss does not feel this trauma because he refuses to remember or identify with the pain of the Black community. His white identity lets him ignore the past, while Hickman's people are trapped in a cycle of reliving their suffering. This theory explains why trauma lasts for generations: it's not the event itself, but the unfinished process of remembering the way it keeps resurfacing in emotions, art, and culture that keeps the wound alive. Bliss spends most of the time in the Church with Hickman and the black congregation, but his heart starts to ache right now as he encounters the incident of the white woman's claim, he is traumatized and is drawn to see life on a wider perspective. This incident ignites a flash in his psychology and he himself starts to question about his origin. Slowly and gradually, he shifts his interest with black congregation. He disappears and runs away from the black community that nurtured him because he suffers a lot due to his identity crisis. Trauma emerges on him as he starts to think who actually he is.

White women's encounter germinates restlessness in the life of Bliss which caught him into the ocean of psychological turmoil. Psychoanalytic theory of trauma is not the experience itself that produces traumatic effect, but rather the remembrance of the mind-blowing evidences that occur in the lives of people which occurs in the life of Bliss that germinates psychological suffering in his life. In Caruth's term "psychoanalytic theory of trauma is not the experience itself that produces traumatic

effect, but rather remembrance of it . . . As a reflective process, trauma links past to present through representations and imaginations" (17). Trauma is not just about what happened, it is about how the past haunts the present through memories, dreams, and imagination. Bliss undergoes his psychological accounts that who actually he is, which leads him to a distorted identity-formation.

Regarding the identity formation, LaCapra says that "certain subject – positions may become especially prominent or even overwhelming, for example those of victim or perpetrator . . . wherein one is possessed by the past and tends to repeat it compulsively as if it were fully present" (12). LaCapra provides critical aspect of identity formation under traumatic conditions, where certain subject-positions such as victim or perpetrator can dominate a person's sense of self to the point of overwhelming their present experience. This phenomenon is deeply tied to trauma's disruptive impact on memory, agency and identity. Identity in case of Bliss seems typically a fluid, evolving construct shaped by his experiences and social interactions. Bliss after the interaction of white lady, moving away from the path that Hickman has showed him on early at his childhood. He could not tolerate the pain of identity crisis. The girl whom he loves much more, calls him but he does not enjoy a love tryst. He mentions how his soul has been divided when he started to follow a beautiful woman by writing, "Bliss loves Laly" but "me the preacher wiped it out. Then I wrote, Bliss loves you know who, and the preacher me wiped that way. So only bliss and loves remained in the sand" (66). At the moment, Bliss is divided between two selves, one is still Bliss and other is a new entity that does not resemble Bliss by any means because he is suffering from identity crisis. He is unable to cope up with the situation of traumatic situation because he is torn between past and present, between what is true and what he wants to be true. He is confirmed that he is having a double, somebody

who is living within him but is totally different from him. On that moment, there are only two persons, but he goes on hallucination. He starts to dream, "Mister-Movie-Man, she said, you dreaming again?" (70). He feels that there is third person except him and his girlfriend. He is so perplexed that he turns around to look for the third person, but he cannot see anybody because the third person is present in his psyche only.

According to Alexander, trauma can lead to various survival strategies that may initially help individuals cope with overwhelming experiences, but these strategies can have negative long-term consequences. Healing and recovery often involve transitioning to heal their coping mechanism to improve overall well being and mental health as Alexander claims, "trauma comes to be a survival strategy too" (2), when traumatic events revive time and again that help to continue with life. Trauma is not just matter of past but future too. In the novel, Bliss, is a trauma survivor, as a survivor, he performs different types actions in order to cope up with overwhelming situations that be falls on him. He shifted quickly from movie-making to politics. He wants to create an identity for himself and make people believe in him since he has confidence that nobody will be asking about his ancestral root if he managed to become famous and successful in politics. "He feels humiliated by a fate that threw him among Negroes and deprived him of the satisfaction of knowing whether he is a Negro by blood or only by culture and upbringing" (305). Bliss's trauma arises from the violent dissonance between his fluid, unanchored identity and the rigid racial categories imposed by society. His humiliation is not merely about being "among the Negroes" but about being denied and his fragmented self. "He tells himself that he hates Negroes but can't deny his love for Hickman" (305). Bliss delves in interrogation whether his identity is rooted in blood or culture. For him, the lack of

a definitive answer exacerbates his trauma. If Blackness is cultural, his upbringing by Hickman makes him Black, but if it is biological, his unknown parentage leaves him in doubt. This unresolved tension mirrors broader ambiguity about race as both a social construct and an imposed hierarchy.

Bliss's transition from movie-making to politics in the novel reflects his strategic attempt to obscure his racial ambiguity and evade the trauma of identitylessness; by immersing himself in the performative realm of politics, a space where image and rhetoric often overshadow personal history, he creates a public persona that deflects scrutiny of his racial origins. As Alexander suggests, trauma can become a "survival strategy," and for Bliss, adopting the role of a white supremacist senator allows him to weaponize his self-denial, using political power to enforce the very racial hierarchies that torment him internally. This performance is both an escape and a reinvention, a way to bury his unresolved past under the spectacle of authority, yet it ultimately exacerbates his psychological fragmentation, as the repressed identity he flees resurfaces in moments of crisis, exposing the unsustainable nature of his coping mechanism.

Eyerman on "Cultural Trauma Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity" talks about the relationship between racism and the cultural trauma of African American people. Slavery was the point of origin of the shared past that provided the foundation of the black community for their identity. "As a cultural process, trauma is mediated through various forms of representation and linked to the reformation of collective identity and the reworking of collective memory" (61). In these lines, Eyerman talks about the formation and manifestation of cultural trauma, where culture is a process on which trauma seems in various forms and representation. Senator Sunraider utters bitter words as "And who can doubt our

future when even the wildest black man . . . 'Hear me out: I say that even the wildest black man rampaging the streets of our cities" (19).

Member of black community could not tolerate the bitter words of Senator Sunraider who betrays Hickman and the people who brought him up and worked hard to educate him and teach him how to be a good preacher in the church. Hickman's insult creates a wound in black fabric and starts to ache their psyche which exacerbated him attacking the way black people behave during his speech on a Senate floor. His verbal attack upon black civilization is so harsh that drives a black young man to shoot him with several bullets. The act of shooting is a result of insults by the Senator when he refers to some black people driving a Cadillac car in the streets of New York City. He suggests that legislation to be made to change the name of Cadillac to "Coon Cage Eight" (20) not because of its highly performative eight cylinders "but because it has now become such a common sight to see eight or more of our darker brethren crowded together enjoying its power, its beauty, its neo-pagan comfort, while weaving recklessly through the streets of our great cities and along our superhighways" (20). It is a striking example of Senator's racist rhetoric, where he weaponizes irony and political authority to demean Black Americans. On the surface level, he delivers a bigoted proposal to remain a luxury car namely "Coon Cage Eight", an outrageous suggestion that reduced Black cultural ownership which plays the vital role to unite black people from "I" to "We". The transformation of "I" into "We" through cultural trauma is a process where collective suffering of black young man becomes the foundation for shared identity and resistance. Drawing on Jeffery C. Alexander's theory of cultural trauma, trauma is not merely an individual psychological wound but a socially mediated phenomenon – a narrative constructed by groups to make sense of catastrophic suffering and mobilize solidarity. When

Senator Sunraider (Bliss) as a politician criticizes black people, tries to snatch their fundamental rights and tries to continue systematic oppression such as slavery, colonialism, racial violence, the trauma is carried not just in individual memory but in cultural symbols, rituals and stories, a young "man was firing toward the podium" (21).

Bliss's journey in Ralph Ellison's *Juneteenth* reflects a profound struggle with identity, as he attempts to escape his Black roots in pursuit of power and whiteness. His moment of crisis starts right now. When he is shot and cries out in African American vernacular, "Lord, LAWD,' . . . WHY HAST THOU . . ." (23) reveals the unresolved tension between his adopted white persona and his true self. The response from Hickman, his Black surrogate father, "For Thu hast forsaken . . . me," (24) underscores the spiritual and cultural disconnection Bliss has suffered by rejecting his past. His evasiveness and denial of his origins leave him fractured, as he seeks wholeness in political power while abandoning the community that once nurtured him. The bullet's impact forces him to confront the truth: his rejection of Hickman and his Black identity has left him spiritually empty, despite his high-status position.

Ellison illustrates how Bliss's detachment from his roots poisons his spirit, rendering him incomplete. His pursuit of power in the white-dominated political sphere is ultimately hollow because it requires the erasure of his authentic self. Hickman and the Black community represent the missing pieces of his identity, the very sources of strength he has forsaken. The novel suggests that true fulfillment comes from embracing one's full history, rather than suppressing it for societal acceptance. Bliss's physical and emotional collapse at the end of the passage symbolizes the inevitable consequences of self-betrayal, his power is meaningless without the cultural and personal foundation he has denied.

In this manner, Ralph Ellison's *Juneteenth* and Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* engage with the narrativization of the African American past by weaving personal and collective memory into their fictional landscapes, reflecting broader themes of cultural trauma, identity formation, and historical reckoning. In *Juneteenth*, Ellison draws from his own life as his orphanhood and his transition from music to writing to create the journeys of Bliss and Hickman, both of whom grapple with fractured identities in a racially divided America. Bliss's denial of his Black roots and Hickman's transformation from a Jazz musician to a preacher mirror Ellison's own artistic evolution, suggesting that the African American experience is one of constant reinvention in response to systemic erasure. The novel's central conflict, Bliss's tragic attempt to assimilate into whiteness, serves as an allegory for the broader cultural trauma of forced self-alienation, where the suppression of Black identity leads to spiritual disintegration. By framing Bliss's crisis through the lens of memory as he suddenly recalls of Hickman's voice when shot, Ellison underscores how the past, no matter how buried, resurfaces with violent urgency, demanding recognition.

Similarly, *Mumbo Jumbo* engages with cultural memory by reclaiming African diasporic traditions that white hegemony has sought to suppress. Reed's satirical, fragmented narrative mirrors the nonlinear ways Black history is often preserved, through oral traditions, music, and resistance rather than dominant historical records. Both novels challenge monolithic narratives of American identity by insisting on the necessity of embracing hybridity. Ellison, particularly in *Juneteenth*, pushes for a synthesis of Black and white cultural forces, arguing that true progress lies in acknowledging interdependence rather than perpetuating division. The trauma of racism, both texts suggest, can only be healed through the recovery of suppressed histories and the integration of marginalized voices into the national

narrative. In this way, Ellison and Reed use fiction not just as storytelling but as an act of cultural restoration, insisting that identity is inseparable from memory, and that forgetting or willfully abandoning one's past leads to existential and societal ruin.

Both novels deal with the cultural trauma, but the ways and circumstances are quite different. *Juneteenth* focuses on a Black preacher's struggle with identity and betrayal in a racist American society by dramatizing how trauma affects individuals. In contrast, *Mumbo Jumbo* takes a satirical approach, mixing history and myth to show how Black culture has been suppressed and reclaimed. While *Juneteenth* is serious and psychological, *Mumbo Jumbo* is playful and chaotic, arguing that laughter and creativity are ways to fight trauma. Both novels highlight pain, but Reed's novel celebrates resistance through culture, while Ellison's digs into personal and national wounds.

Chapter V

Narrativization of Cultural Trauma of African Americans in *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Juneteenth*

Mumbo Jumbo and *Juneteenth* serve as literary testimonies to the cultural trauma embedded in the African American experience, with Ishmael Reed and Ralph Ellison using narrative fragmentation, historical reclamation, and identity crises to expose the wounds inflicted by systemic erasure and forced assimilation. Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* disrupts linear history through its chaotic, polyphonic style, celebrating African diasporic resilience while satirizing White America's attempts to suppress Black cultural expression. Meanwhile, Ellison's *Juneteenth* delves into the psychological toll of racial denial, as Bliss's tragic fragmentation embodies the self-destructive consequences of disowning one's heritage. Both novels insist that healing from cultural trauma requires confronting the past not as a static record but as a living, disruptive force that demands acknowledgment. In their respective ways, Reed and Ellison argue that African American identity cannot be whole without reconciling with history, and that true liberation lies not in escape but in the defiant, creative reassembly of the stolen inheritance.

In *Juneteenth*, Ellison employs narrativized memory as a central device to delve into the African American experience. The novel's protagonist, Senator Adam Sunraider, formerly known as Bliss, embodies the fragmented identity resulting to cultural trauma. His journey oscillates between his past as a child raised by African American Reverend Hickman and his present as a white senator who has renounced his origins. This duality reflects the internal conflict and identity crisis stemming from a traumatic collective history.

Ellison's portrayal of Bliss's memories serves to highlight the enduring impact of slavery and racial oppression on individual and collective identities. The senator's recollections are not linear but are fragmented and interposed with symbolic imagery mirroring the disrupted and non-linear nature of traumatic memory. This narrative technique underscores the difficulty of reconciling a painful past with a constructed present, a theme central to the African American experience as articulated by cultural trauma theory.

The formation of Bliss's identity is deeply influenced by the cultural trauma of slavery and its aftermath. Raised within the African American community, he is nurtured by its traditions, spirituality, and collective memory. However, his later rejection of this community and adoption of a white identity signify an attempt to dissociate from the traumatic past. This act of self-reinvention compels individuals to redefine themselves in response to collective suffering.

Ellison illustrates that such a redefinition is loaded with internal conflict and alienation. Bliss's internal turmoil and his ultimate demise suggest that denying one's collective past and the associated trauma can lead to a fragmented and unstable identity. This narrative arc emphasizes the necessity of acknowledging and integrating collective memory to achieve a cohesive sense of self. Reverend Hickman and the African American community in *Juneteenth* function as custodians of collective memory and identity. Their rituals, stories, and the celebration of *Juneteenth* itself serve to preserve the history and experiences of their people, providing a sense of continuity and resilience in the face of ongoing oppression. This communal remembrance acts as a counterbalance to the erasure and denial exemplified by Bliss.

Ellison portrays the African American community's collective memory as a source of strength and a means of confronting cultural trauma. Through shared narratives and traditions, the community maintains its identity and resists the fragmentation imposed by historical and systemic injustices. This depiction aligns with Aarelaid-Tart's perspective on the role of cultural narratives in restoring coherence to a community's identity post-trauma.

Mumbo Jumbo positions a serious, almost exhaustive, and yet highly sardonic, cultural histories in which Afro-diasporic possessive traditions are traced back to Ancient Egypt. Reed situates practices epitomized by Caribbean, Latin American, and African American artforms including Voodoo, jazz, and a range of dance forms, simultaneously as specific to African diaspora culture, and as an aspect of human experience which is, quite simply, open to anyone. Reed documents the persistence of an obsession (both Euro-American and African American) with African origins, and how it is tied to imperialist theft. Here the author responds to Black Power and Afro-centric paradigms which have sometimes been seen to situate an African inheritance in terms of a lofty idealism lodged in an ancient past, while simultaneously forgetting African diaspora tradition altogether in favor of a “new” Black culture. In contrast to that tendency, Reed elaborates a system of African diaspora culture which is both ancient and endlessly innovative, which is not only linked to Africa but also forged in the experience of transatlantic diaspora. He also makes a deliberate case for the distinctive and established power of African American and African diaspora culture and tradition as modes of ‘remembering’ the cultural memory of Africa in the Americas. To this end, Reed builds a pastiche of a wide range of written texts and images, as part of a practice in which previously existing texts can be seen to possess

the novel. He thus figures the troubled question of “cultural appropriation” as potentially equated to the possession of the textual present by the past.

Cultural trauma in *Mumbo Jumbo* stems from slavery’s violence and systemic erasure. Ron Eyerman defines this trauma as a collective wound shaping African American identity. Reed illustrates this through the Wallflower Order’s attempts to ban Black cultural expressions such as dance, Jazz, Voodoo, framing them as chaotic or threatening. The novel critiques how white supremacy enforces assimilation, inflicting psychological harm by devaluing Black traditions. Characters like Papa LaBas resist, embodying Eyerman’s claim that trauma is not just historical but an ongoing negotiation of identity.

Jes Grew represents the unstoppable vitality of Black culture, thriving despite repression. The Wallflower Order’s campaigns such as "No Dancing" posters mirror historical efforts to criminalize Blackness. Reed contrasts this with the Mumbo Jumbo Katherdal, a sanctuary for African diasporic traditions. Papa LaBas, as a Hoodoo detective, works to recover stolen cultural artifacts, symbolizing resilience. The novel argues that Black cultural memory persists through improvisation (Jazz) and syncretism (Voodoo), defying Eurocentric containment.

Reed satirizes forced assimilation, showing how Black bodies and practices i.e. dance restrictions, ridicule of natural hairstyles are policed. The Wallflower Order’s tactics such as erasing histories, co-opting Black aesthetics create internalized trauma. Characters grapple with dual identities, echoing Cathy Caruth’s theory of unresolved psychological wounds. Scenes like Hinckle Von Vampton’s mockery of Black dress reveal how white supremacy commodifies while suppressing African traditions, leaving lasting scars on collective consciousness.

Despite trauma, *Mumbo Jumbo* celebrates cultural survival. The Cathedral and Jes Grew embody resistance, asserting that Black identity is neither lost nor static. Reed's fragmented narrative mirrors the diasporic struggle to piece together memory amid rupture. Eyerman's framework underscores how African Americans reconstruct identity through art and collective action. The novel ends ambiguously Jes Grew eludes eradication, suggesting trauma's legacy is countered by enduring creativity.

Ralph Ellison's *Juneteenth* explores African American identity through the fractured relationship between Reverend Hickman and Bliss (later Senator Sunraider), whose rejection of his Black upbringing symbolizes the betrayal of collective hope. The novel oscillates between past and present, mirroring the fragmented nature of cultural memory, where celebrations like Juneteenth serve as anchors for shared identity amid systemic racism. Hickman's lamentation, "They cut out our tongues . . . left us without words" (105), epitomizes the trauma of erasure, echoing Ron Eyerman's claim that slavery's legacy is a cultural wound. Bliss's transformation into a racist politician underscores how systemic oppression distorts even intimate bonds, turning Hickman's dream of racial harmony into a source of collective pain.

Bliss's identity crisis erupts when a white woman reclaims him during a church play, screaming, "He is mine! You gypsy niggers stole him!" Her racist outburst triggers his dissociation from Blackness, exposing the trauma of racial ambiguity. The novel frames trauma as a collective phenomenon. Eyerman's theory aligns with Hickman's congregation, whose shared suffering, the world was too big for them, contrasts Bliss's individual evasion. The Black community's resilience-embodied in sermons, music, and *Juneteenth*- becomes counter-memory against white supremacy. Conversely, Bliss's political rhetoric ('wildest black men rampaging') exemplifies how trauma cycles through generations, as his internalized racism

perpetuates violence. The young Black shooter embodies Alexander's transformation of 'I' into 'We' where collective trauma fuels resistance.

Bliss's downfall illustrates the psychic toll of denying one's roots. His dying plea 'Lord . . . forsaken me' mirrors Hickman's earlier grief, revealing the void left by cultural disconnection. Ellison suggests that true identity integrates past and present: Bliss's hollow power collapses because he rejects the community that shaped him. The novel concludes that healing requires confronting trauma, not fleeing it—a lesson for a nation grappling with its racial legacy.

To wrap up, in *Juneteenth* by Ralph Ellison and *Mumbo Jumbo* by Ishmael Reed, characters grapple with deeply disruptive events that fracture their shared identity, memory and sense of meaning leaving enduring cultural wounds. In *Juneteenth*, Reverend Hickman and Senator Sunraider (formerly Bliss) embody the trauma of racial violence and erasure, as Bliss's denial of his Black heritage symbolized by his transformation into a white supremacist politician that mirrors the broader African American struggle with historical forgetfulness and forced assimilation. Similarly, in *Mumbo Jumbo*, Reed's characters confront the cultural genocide of African traditions through the Western 'Jes Grew' epidemic, a metaphor for suppressed Black creativity and spirituality. PaPa LaBas's quest to reclaim lost knowledge reflects Reed's Neo-Hoodooist belief in resurrecting fragmented histories. Both novels depict cultural trauma as a collective injury, inflicted by slavery, racism and systematic erasure that demands narrative and ritual healing, whether through Hickman's sermonic mourning or LaBas's mystic detective work. These texts illustrate how cultural trauma is not merely inherited but actively resisted through storytelling, exposing the wounds while offering paths to reclamation.

In this study, the researcher has employed the cultural-trauma frameworks of Ron Eyerman and Aili Aarelaid-Tart along with the concept of Geoffrey Alexander to deepen the understanding of racism and African-Americans' lived experience within the American landscape. These theoretical perspectives illuminate the way past suffering, diasporic identities, and suppressed or fragmented memories continue to function as carriers of trauma that shape present realities. Through a close reading of *Juneteenth* and *Mumbo Jumbo*, the research demonstrates the process cultural trauma moves across generations—informing how African Americans understand themselves, the way American society responds to them, and why persistent racial tensions remain embedded in contemporary life. Such insights clarify that modern racism cannot be understood solely as individual prejudice; rather, it is rooted in inherited wounds, silenced histories, and ongoing struggles for recognition and belonging.

This study opens pathways for future scholarship. Upcoming researchers may extend this work by examining cultural trauma in other African American novels or by exploring how memory and identity manifest in contemporary Black cultural expressions such as music, visual art, or film. Such comparative studies would further enrich our understanding of how cultural trauma continues to shape African American narratives in the twenty-first century.

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