

Narrative Technique and Identity Crisis in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*.

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Abstract

This paper analyses Ralph Ellison's presentation of the problems of socialized ambivalence and double consciousness in the African American personality in his autobiographical novel, *Invisible Man*. The main focus is on how literary form, specifically the first-person narrative technique, enables the writer to provide a vision for the African American. As such we seek to examine how narrative technique enables Ellison to reveal the identity complexities that confront African American people.

Ellison utilizes the first-person narrator to successfully present his ideas. This technique is effective because, instead of getting second-hand information from the third-person narrator as he eavesdrops on the thoughts of the protagonist, we get information directly from the protagonist himself. In *Invisible Man* the narrator (protagonist) vividly tells about his journey through contemporary America in search of success, companionship, and finally, self-identity. The protagonist eloquently provides a detailed history of his experiences, which teach him that he is invisible because almost all the people he encounters in life betray him. Thus, the nameless narrator functions in the long established tradition of the *bildungsroman* – the story of a young person who encounters varied experiences, each of the narrated episodes contributing in some way to his ultimate development.

That notwithstanding, first-person narration has its limitations – the story lacks flexibility and objectivity. This is because the reader gets information from the narrator's subjective point-of-view. But this is perhaps an advantage in *Invisible Man* since it reveals the idiosyncrasies of the protagonist. As such, this paper examines how the narrator uses this perspective positively in his quest for self-identity. In this sense then, the mode of narration not only reveals a case of identity crisis, but also a process of an evolving consciousness.

Introduction

The history of African Americans can be described as one of racial appropriations rolling down the generations. Their experiences since the days of slavery in the agricultural plantations of the American South left many of them traumatised, because of the manner in which they were brutalised by the masters. One may even go further to trace the roots of their identity complexes in the middle passage, because it stands out as a symbolic initiation into slavery. The middle passage was a painful experience in that the captured slaves from Africa were sold to provide cheap and forced labour in the white-owned plantations. Here, they were treated as property or beasts of burden, where they were made to work for long hours and flogging was the order of the day. These people as well as their descendants are part and parcel of what is popularly known as the Black Diaspora – that population of black scattered in other continents outside Africa.

The fact that the term African American has evolved over the years, from Negro to Black American to Afro-American to African American, is a clear indication of socialised ambivalence and double consciousness in the African American personality. The present term (African American) is an apt manifestation of a deep-seated desire for self-identity. It portrays

the African American dilemma in the sense that it seems to suggest that the African American is both an African and an American at one and the same time.

The earliest writings in African American literature, in which this quest for identity can be traced, were predicated on a search for personal freedom. These works, popularly known as slave narratives not only documented the experience of slavery, but they also were means of expressing defiance to white American racism and oppression. Apart from this, one may look at these individual experiences as a demonstration of what Sandra P. Pauquet calls "the epic struggle to create a language and cultural forms that express the transformation of self endemic to slavery, and the double inheritance of a transplanted and transformed African culture and a dominant, hostile European culture" (Baker & Redmond, 1989:96). In these works, individual experience can be transposed to a higher level of the entire life of the African American people. Therefore, what these writers encapsulate in their narratives is an individual as well as a broader social vision in the American society. It is within this broader framework that we examine Ralph Ellison because these earlier works form an apt backdrop for writers of the latter years, especially in the twentieth century, both as a point of reference as well as a source of inspiration in the quest for self-identity.

Definition of Terms

It is imperative, first and foremost, to understand the concepts narrative technique, socialised ambivalence and double consciousness, both in their general sense, and more importantly as they are used in African-American literature.

Socialised Ambivalence

The *Oxford Advanced Dictionary* defines ambivalence as that situation of having either both or two contrary or parallel values, qualities or meanings; entertaining contradictory emotions such as love and hatred towards the same person or thing and acting on or arguing for sometimes one and sometimes the other of two opposites. The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Encyclopedic Dictionary* (1994) offers a more succinct definition of ambivalence thus: "having or showing mixed feelings about a certain object, person or situation." Laplanche and Pontalis (1988) define ambivalence from a psychological point of view as the simultaneous existence of contradictory tendencies, attitudes or feelings in relation to a single object especially the co-existence of love and hate.

Bell (1987) defines socialised ambivalence as, the dancing of attitudes of Americans of African ancestry between *integration* and *separation*, a shifting identification between values of the dominant white and subordinate black cultural systems as a result of institutionalized racism (Bell, 1987: xvi). [Emphasis mine].

Integration is a concept associated with Du Bois. It refers to the joining of different social groups or races. Once a person has been integrated he becomes a full member of that community. In other words, he is no longer a member of a separate racial group. This is what Du Bois is advocating for when he talks about the "Talented Tenth". His argument was that the elite black people (Talented Tenth) should be integrated into the larger white community as equals. Separate development is fronted by Booker T. Washington (1965) who argues that black and white people in America should be viewed as fingers of the same hand; one entity, yet separate. His main contention is that the black person should be allowed to prosper but within the supervisory reach of the white men.

These two schools of thought will help us have a proper understanding of socialised ambivalence since they seem to portray feelings, in the African-American of the desire to belong to both white and black races, yet they are opposing forces. We can therefore say that

socialised ambivalence as a situation where a character identifies with one race, which excludes the other, but wants to identify with both at the same time, yet he cannot have both. This paradox is well captured by the English saying that one cannot eat his or her cake and have it.

Double Consciousness

Double consciousness is defined in the *Oxford Advanced Dictionary* as a condition of double personality where one shows a measure of two separate and independent trains of thought and independent mental capabilities in the same individual. Du Bois borrows the concept of double-consciousness and integrates it in his sociological study of the African-American experience. In his classic, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois says that:

Double consciousness [is the] sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (1965:215).

We can therefore use this term to refer to a situation where one desires to identify with two races at one and the same time, but does not belong completely to any of them. This situation leads one to break certain rules in order to enjoy the freedom of belonging to the two races. This breaking of rules leads to rejection. Another term that is closely related to double consciousness is double vision. Bell defines double vision as "an ambivalent, laughing-to-keep-from-crying perspective toward life as expressed in the use of irony and parody in Afro-American folklore and formal art" (Ibid.). We can view double vision as a consequence of double consciousness.

In African-American literature, double consciousness is manifested in the double personality of the African-American characters who want to be recognised for their blackness as well as their American heritage. This problem is well captured by Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* when he says that the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line. One may as well argue that the problem of the African-American is the colour of his skin - black. This is because white America has discriminated against the African-American on the basis of his skin colour. Bell (1987) uses the terms double consciousness, socialised ambivalence, double vision and folklore to explain the socio-psychological roots of the African-American novel. To Bell, these concepts, apart from folklore, are not mutually exclusive. But for the sake of distinction, he says that double-consciousness "signifies the biracial and bicultural identities of Afro-Americans, not a psychotic or schizophrenic way of being-in-the-world" (1987: xvi).

Narrative Technique

Several narrative techniques exist. A writer may choose one or a combination of these techniques in a work of art. For the purpose of this discussion, we mention two of them - first-person point of view, and third-person point of view. A writer who adopts first-person narration must follow certain conventions. In a narrative told from this perspective, an author tells the story through a character who refers to himself or herself as "I." Such a narrator is usually a major participant in the action and recounts events as he or she remembers or hears about them. This narrative mode is sometimes limited in that the narrator can only tell readers what he saw, heard, thought or felt. He or she may sometimes be unreliable or naïve, colouring or distorting matters in ways that the reader eventually detects. Unlike the third-person narrator, the first-person narrator can only estimate or assume what other characters see, think or feel. But as readers, we must bear in mind that these assumptions are only the narrator's.

Third-person narratives come in two types, omniscient and limited. An author using an omniscient point of view assumes the vantage point of an all-knowing narrator able not only to recount the action thoroughly and reliably but also to enter the mind of any character in the work at any time in order to reveal his or her inner thoughts and emotions directly to the reader. The omniscient narrator is sometimes described as “godlike.” Omniscient means “all knowing”. As such, an omniscient narrator can tell the reader anything pertinent to the story no matter when it occurred, where it happened or who did it. This narrator can also enter the minds of all the characters and tell the reader what they saw, thought or felt. In essence, an omniscient narrator has all-seeing powers; a consciousness that can move wherever it pleases.

An author using the limited point of view recounts the story through the eyes of a character, or more than one character, but not all. The reader is thus usually privy to the inner thoughts and feelings of only one character and receives the story as that character understands and experiences it, although not in that character’s own voice. Such a narrator is generally an observer in the action. Ellison for example, employs the first-person perspective in *Invisible Man*. The manner in which this story is narrated is generated by the African-American experience. In *The Afro-American Novel and its Tradition*, Bell observes that “the collective formal use of the narrative tradition by Afro-Americans [illuminates] both the limitations and possibilities of the human condition from their perspective” (1987: xvii). This argument becomes important to this discussion since our interest is to analyse how narrative technique reveals the idiosyncrasies of the protagonist. We shall therefore use narrative technique not just in the traditional sense of the term, but in a more symbolic manner. For instance, given that ambivalence is a psychological condition, one can identify it through the various positions taken by the narrator. As such, the narrative technique employed by Ellison can then be seen as a manifestation of socialised ambivalence and double consciousness in the African-American personality.

Biographical Background

Born in Oklahoma City in 1914, Ralph Ellison attended Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, where he studied music. It was at Tuskegee that he was exposed to literary works of writers like T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, who profoundly influenced his interest and development in writing. His interest in music also greatly influenced his literary style. For instance, some elements of jazz music are evident in the structure of *Invisible Man*.

Like his contemporary and mentor Richard Wright, the geographical movement of Ellison from the South to the North had a strong bearing on his development as a writer. Ellison moved to New York in 1937 where he met Wright. This meeting was very important because it was Wright who encouraged Ellison to embark on writing as a career. But while Wright was born in the State of Mississippi in the Deep South, Ellison’s Oklahoma falls on the borderline between the North and the South, better known as the Mason Dixon line. As such, Wright’s sentiments toward white people are different from Ellison’s. This is because apart from encountering white people earlier in life, Ellison says the relationships between the races were more fluid and hence more human than in the former slave states of the South like Mississippi. In fact Wright, who came into contact with white people later in life, says that most of what he initially knew about whites was through rumours and it is from this that he formed his opinion about them. At the same time, despite the fact that they were both confronted by many limitations as black people, Ellison never felt a sense of inferiority.

Ellison is best known for his *bildungsroman* – a novel that describes the development and experiences of a protagonist – *Invisible Man* (1952), which won the National Book Award in 1952. The novel has continued to receive critical acclaim, and this underlines its importance and relevance in the American literary scene. In 1965 for example, it was judged by a *Book*

Week poll consisting of about 200 critics, authors and editors as “the most distinguished work published in the last 20 years”. Ellison is also well known for his collection of essays, *Shadow and Act* (1965) and *Going to the Territory* (1986). In these essays, Ellison expresses his controversial critical as well as political views on a wide range of issues. These essays form a good basis for understanding Ellison’s literary development.

Invisible Man as Representation of the Historical Phases Of The Black Man In America.

Invisible Man is the story of a young black man who embarks on a spiritual as well as a physical journey of self-discovery in a society that is racially discriminating. It is in the process of this journey that the hero discovers that in the eyes of white America, he, as an individual is invisible. He travels from the South to the North, a journey that is symbolic because it is in the North that his consciousness and attitude change as he involves himself in the radical politics of the Brotherhood. This motif of movement is represented by the phrase “keep this nigger boy running”. The society in which the protagonist lives is such that he is like a rat trapped in a vicious maze. In the end, he comes to terms with himself, as well as the dictates of the society and instead of getting destroyed by the series of betrayals encountered along the way, he survives. That is why one can consider *Invisible Man* in the tradition of the *bildungsroman*, since each of the narrated episodes contributes in one way or another to the protagonist’s ultimate development.

Invisible Man may be interpreted in a number of ways. At a personal level, for instance, one can read it as the story of a young man who embarks on an odyssey to the North in search of an identity. At a societal level, one can look at it as a metaphor of the black man’s history and the stages he passes through in an attempt to assert his sense of identity and belonging in America. Be that as it may, the voice of the narrator reveals other voices that are also disoriented. What all these voices symbolize is the dislocated history of the black person in America. These narrative voices as well as the narrator’s experiences in *Invisible Man* reveal various historical stages that the black person has gone through in America, and the concomitant identity crisis that he experiences.

A cursory glance at the history of the African Americans shows the quest for freedom at two levels – both physical as well as spiritual freedoms. African American slave narratives contain vivid accounts of dramatic ways in which former slaves escaped from plantations in the South to the North. A case in point is Frederick Douglass’s *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* in which the writer gives a captivating account of the brutalities of slavery, and his subsequent escape to the North. From these narratives, one may consider the journeys to the North as metaphors of the black man’s quest towards self-realization. At the same time, the protagonists are in search of refuge from a hostile world that has shut them out from a good comfortable life as well as opportunities. In a similar pattern, the hero in *Invisible Man* embarks on an odyssey to the North hoping to find a fulfillment of his dreams. His journey acquires a symbolic status in the sense that the physical movement from one geographical location to another becomes a movement from one level of spiritual achievement to another. By the end of this physical journey, it becomes apparent that the nameless hero has acquired a sense of spiritual fulfillment.

The journey to the North is therefore a form of metamorphosis in the narrator’s life. This process begins when the narrator goes to work for Liberty Paints, a company that is contracted by the government to manufacture white paint. This particular episode is significant in the narrator’s journey of self-realization in the sense that it is at this stage that he seems to go through a total transformation and his consciousness is from this point onwards renewed.

This is also an episode that is laden with symbolism that would help us unravel and understand the black person's experience in America.

As he goes to work, the narrator joins other workers who earn a living by toiling in the many factories in the North. Incidentally these workers are exploited in the sense that their labour has contributed to the development of America just like slaves who worked in plantations during the era of slavery. This scene may also be seen as symbolizing slaves going to board the ship that was to take them to the Americas where they were to supply cheap labour. As such, the scene relates to the dislocating history of the black person in America. In this case, the middle passage is the crucial link between slavery and Africa and it cannot be negated.

The signboard at the factory gate, which reads, "Keep America Pure With Liberty Paints" demonstrates the white racism that characterizes America. It is therefore ironical that white folks assume that America is pure if it is kept white. In fact, it is the sweat of the black factory workers that keeps America pure. Moreover, the use of that word "Liberty" is also ironical in that there is no freedom at all for the black workers. If anything, they are living in a kind of bondage, as if they are still slaves. The only difference now is that they are compelled to work in these factories by the difficult economic situation in America.

The company's trademark, the screaming eagle, is symbolic of the white man's vision. This is because the eagle, a bird that enjoys soaring high in the sky, has a vision that is so sharp that it can spot a tiny object from a distance as far away as eight kilometres. One may interpret this as the white man's cunning in that he can see beyond what the black people see. It is clear that the narrator is hiding his name from the reader deliberately. For instance, when he goes to ask for a job at the factory, Kimbro, a supervisor asks the boy who has taken the narrator in that section, "What's his name?" At this point, the narrator intrudes, cutting short the conversation to tell the reader what happens next. It is as if he is afraid of being recognized by other people, although from the beginning it is clear that he wants to remain invisible. Instead of allowing the boy to tell Kimbro his (narrator) name the narrator says, "The boy read my name off the card" (p.194). What this shows is that the narrator only allows the reader to see him from the eyes of other people. In this way then he suppresses his voice in expressing himself.

Another symbol that the narrator uses to depict the dislocation of the black person's history is that of the ratio of making the white paint at the factory. The narrator is given instructions on how he is supposed to mix the paint – he is to add ten drops of a black substance in each bucket in order to come up with the white paint whose brand name is "Optic White". One batch of this paint was to be used in painting a national monument. What this signifies is that the people of both black and white races constitute a nation - America. At the same time, this mixture of races compares well with W. E. B. Du Bois' policy of accommodation where he advocated for what he called the Talented Tenth. According to Du Bois, the black elite, who comprised the Talented Tenth, was to be included in all institutions of government since they, as members of the black race formed a significant part of America's population. One can therefore conclude that Ellison is making an allusion to the Reconstruction period in America when the people of the black race were actively involved in agitating for their rightful place in the mainstream American society.

After the accident at the factory, the narrator goes through a harrowing experience at the factory's hospital. During this time, he is in a trance. It is as if he is poised between wakefulness and sleep. He is asked a very important question, "WHAT IS YOUR NAME" and this is foregrounded to emphasize the theme of invisibility. It is at this point that he is confronted with the question that he has all along been trying to avoid. But now that this question is addressed to him, he has no way to escape. He answers the question by saying that, "I realized

that I no longer knew my name. I shut my eyes and shook my head with sorrow. Here was the first warm attempt to communicate with me and I was failing" (p.234).

The doctors at the hospital continue asking him his identity by posing the questions: "WHO... ARE ... YOU? And WHAT IS YOUR MOTHER'S NAME?" These questions enable him to go through a moment of self-searching and in that way he tries to unravel the mystery behind his identity. When he eventually recovers from this trance, he seems to have already gone through a process of rebirth. This process is symbolized by the cutting of the umbilical cord with a pair of scissors. From this point onwards, the narrator becomes a new man. He comes out of the life-supporting machine a completely changed man. One of the doctors tells him, "well, boy, it looks as though you are cured. You are a new man. You came through fine" (p.239).

Harnessing Folk Consciousness as Negotiated Identity

After leaving hospital, the narrator meets a woman whose name is Mary Rambo. Since he has already been barred from the men's house for ninety-nine years and a day, Mary offers to give him a place to sleep. Mary therefore becomes an important character in the narrator's life since she is the one who leads him to understand himself and to view himself from a new perspective. She symbolizes folk consciousness as well as motherly affection, a typical phenomenon in African American history in the sense that the mother figure tends to dominate the African American family, especially in cases where she is a single parent, or when the father is separated from the family by a demanding job or even another woman. Mary warns the narrator that he must be very careful while in Harlem and must not allow the life of this city to corrupt him.

So far, the experiences that the protagonist has gone through after expulsion from college have made him regain consciousness. By this time he is feeling and reacting differently compared to what he calls pre-invisible days. This is because, being a new person, his quest for an identity has been revived. Says he:

I had no contacts and I believed in nothing. And the obsession with my identity which I had developed in the factory hospital returned with a vengeance. *Who was I, how had I come to be*" (p.253). [Emphasis mine]

These questions show that the narrator is ready to go back to the history of his people for this is where he will find his roots. At the same time, for him to come to terms with the present, he must look back to where he has come from.

In his search for an identity, the narrator is gripped by a powerful feeling of nostalgia for his home in the South. This longing for home is prompted by the cold reception he receives in the North, as symbolized by the first winter he encounters there. He says that, "And the white ice was melting to a form of flood in which I threatened to drown, I awoke one afternoon to find that my first northern winter had set"(p.254). This weather gives him a depression coupled with alienation, feelings that are shared by other black men who have come to New York from the South. These men have travelled northwards in search for freedom. The narrator says that they are all "caught up in post-Civil-War dreams of freedom within segregation" (p.250). This winter can also be looked at as a symbol of the cold reception that the western world accords the black person.

While eating yams that he buys from an old man in the street, he remembers his home in the South, although this is also accompanied by other bitter memories about his past life. For instance, he recalls Bledsoe and how he hated this man with a passion for wanting to expel him from college. The yams are also significant in the sense that they enable the narrator to remember the rich folk culture of his people in the South. This experience revitalizes his sense of identity. After eating these yams, he proudly asserts, "I am what I am" (p.259). He identifies

with the South especially when he says that Southerners attach a lot of importance to yams and they really go for them. He plays with the pun by adding that, "They are my birthmark, I yam what I am" (p.260). Eating yams is therefore part of the narrator's history in the sense that the yam can be transposed to represent a cultural artifact of not only his Southern experience but also his African identity. As a cultural artifact therefore, food enables the narrator to reconcile with his past because tasting the yam only evokes memories of the past, which he would rather not forget, yet he goes through a dislocation when he moves to the North.

One day as he walks along the streets of Harlem, the narrator witnesses an incident where two white men are evicting a white couple from a house. He becomes infuriated with this act such that he mobilizes the crowd in returning the furniture back to the house. This incident ends in a demonstration in the streets. It is during this time that a member of the Brotherhood notices him. The speech that he delivers to the crowd impresses this brother such that he later introduces the narrator to the Brotherhood. By joining the Brotherhood, the narrator acquires a new identity. He also seems to have acquired a new personality in that he is given a new name, though this name is never disclosed to the reader. In essence, he wants to remain nameless and hence invisible. Perhaps he is aware of the fact that if he tells the reader his name, he will become limited as one character and yet he would like to remain a multifaceted character. The best option for him therefore is to remain nameless.

Ras is another important character who represents a historical phase of the black people in America. As much as Ellison denies that he did not intend to draw comparison with any historical figure or period, it is obvious that Ras stands out as a metaphor for the Back-to-Africa Movement. Marcus Garvey led this movement and Ras may be seen as an embodiment of its militant spirit. For instance, he opposes the narrator and Tod Clifton whom he accuses for working with white people in the Brotherhood. He sees them as betrayers of the black cause. As his name, Ras the Exhorter, suggests, he is a revolutionist. He evokes the image of the Rastafarian movement where the members of this movement, in addressing one another use the name "ras". Ras is also a symbol of the black identity not only in America but also in Africa and the Diaspora. This is because the title "ras" is also associated with Ethiopia, where the Rastafarian movement draws inspiration. In this sense then Ras can be viewed as a character who represents the militant spirit of black identity that was in vogue during the days of Harlem Renaissance as well as the Back-to-Africa movement.

The portrait of Frederick Douglass and Brother Tarp's chain are other symbols of particular epochs in the black man's history in America and are reminders of the days of slavery. The portrait of Douglass that Tarp hangs on the wall evokes certain memories in the narrator's mind and reminds him of his own grandfather whose voice echoes in his mind although he tries to shut it from his ears. The chain that Tarp gives to the narrator symbolizes the breaking away from the bondage of slavery while Douglass' portrait may be seen as representing the black people's resilience while in captivity and their determination to break out of it. Like Douglass, Tarp himself escaped from the South. He walks with a limp because he used to pull the chain in a chain gang for nineteen years. When he goes to the North, he identifies himself with the Brotherhood in the same manner that Douglass joined the Abolitionist movement that campaigned for the abolition of slavery in America.

Another character who is important in the historical relevance of *Invisible Man* is Rinehart. This is because Rinehart provides insight into the phases of history that the black person in America has gone through. At one level, Rinehart can be viewed as a character who represents the Harlem Renaissance. It is during this period that black people in America affirmed their cultural pride through various ways specifically through the arts. This period was also characterized by riots in the streets where many people lost their lives. The peak of this movement can be traced in the 1920s although its influence spilled over to the 30s and 40s.

Harlem became an important city for the black people in that it symbolized a place for the liberated black community; people who had freed themselves from the worst oppression of racism. Artists were also attracted to Harlem because the place provided black people with opportunities to flourish in their talents and, through their success, gain self-fulfillment. On another level, Harlem provided black people in America with new ways of thinking and expressing themselves as well. Given that Rinehart is a character with many parts, and hence multiple personalities, he provides himself with possibilities of acquiring new identities. As we had observed earlier, this is a tactic of surviving in the American society and as a black person, Rinehart adopts ways of disguising himself through his many parts:

Still, could he be all of them: Rine the runner and Rine the gambler and Rine the briber and Rine the lover and Rinehart the Reverend? Could he himself be both mind and heart? What is real anyway. He was a broad man, a man of many parts who got around. Rinehart the rounder. It was true and I was true. His world was possibility and I knew it.... The world in which we lived was without boundaries (pp.486-487) [Emphasis mine].

From this passage, it is clear that Rinehart is a character who could not agree to be limited by circumstances around him for he was well aware of the fact that the world provided him with many possibilities. What we see in Rinehart is the spirit that was dominant during the days of Harlem Renaissance and even later. This is because Harlem was to become the centre for the black people who were migrating from the South to the North. Historically, this massive exodus to the North can be viewed as a contradiction to Booker T. Washington's famous "Atlanta Address" (which is enacted by the narrator in his speech after the Battle Royal), in which he urged the black race to seek possibilities in the South by putting down their buckets where they were. This great migration to the North led to the creation of another world by the black community and can be viewed as a rejection of Washington's call for them to remain in the south.

It is however worth noting that little did these people know what Harlem and the North in general held for them. They were oblivious to the greater forces that were operating behind the scenes of Harlem – white patronage. This is well manifested in the Brotherhood where white members seem to censure everything that goes on within and yet pose as friends to the black cause. Some black people however seem to be aware of the fact that the white people may not be genuine after all. For instance, Ras strongly opposes the narrator and Clifton for working in liaison with the white men. It is only later that Clifton gets disillusioned with the Brotherhood and goes to the streets where he hopes to be closer to the people he has been fighting for.

Closely related to the foregoing argument is that, Booker T. Washington's philosophy of independence, which took over from the abolitionist movement and as symbolized by Frederick Douglass, starts waning towards the end of the First World War. This is replaced by another generation that is symbolized by Harlem, which becomes the centre for black opinion in America. In *Invisible Man*, these historical stages are well presented by the narrator, who remains invisible throughout the story. In other words, the narrator tries to mask himself by denying the reader access to his name and hence his identity. It is Jim Trueblood who unmasks what the narrator and others have been trying to cover up as far as the true picture of the African American is concerned. As his name suggests, Trueblood is true to his nature in that he has already accepted himself. He is a character who has experienced the brunt of slavery, and this has left him traumatized. The trauma is symbolized by a scar on his face that was inflicted upon him by his wife during the night he committed the sin of incest with his daughter. All the same, Trueblood is not ashamed of it – he is only guilty of this act of incest. The narrator and other black people like Bledsoe do not want white folks to know this side of the

picture about the black person, yet they are responsible for conditions that compel the black man to sin.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that there is something unique about the contribution made by Ellison's narrative technique to the unmasking of contemporary African American identities. In other words, through his work it is possible to understand what it takes to be an African American. This is achieved through the manner in which the writer has successfully manipulated literary form – point of view – to present the problematic issue of identity in the African American personality. At the same time, through the nameless narrator, Ellison has vividly catalogued stages in the complex history of African Americans. He does this through symbolic representation and characterization. In this way, he presents characters who are multidimensional, and this phenomenon is in itself a manifestation of double consciousness and socialized ambivalence in the African American personality. This explains why he employs the voice of a nameless narrator to tell the story. By remaining unnamed, one cannot ascribe him to a particular characteristic trait. At the same time, the narrator takes advantage of this namelessness to hide behind a series of personalities.

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Digo Anthroponymes: Meaning and Significance

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Abstract

This paper investigates the meanings and significance of names amongst the Digo of Kenya, who are Bantu and how the names are given to newly born members of the community. The paper focuses on semantics of the names, and to some extent, the morphology. The data was obtained from 10 respondents who were about 70 to 80 years: 5 men and 5 women. The study found out that names in this community have meaning and are of great importance. They identify a person, convey message, preserve the family roots and culture, and are not arbitrary.

Introduction

A name is important to any human being in the world as a means of identification. Many names in Kenya, identify a person in two ways; first that he is different from another person, second the ethnic groups he comes from, for example Anyango (Luo), Nyachae (Kisii), Kariuki (Kikuyu), Mutua (Kamba), Arap Moi (Kalenjin), Omar (Swahili) e.t.c. Names are not arbitrary, says Ziff as cited by Carroll (1985; 163).

Many scholars have investigated the meaning of names in different communities in Africa semantically and also morphologically. Swilla (2000) dealt with *Chindali* names in Tanzania, Essie (2000) also dealt with the same subject in the *Ibibio* community in Nigeria, Katakami (1997) investigated the *Mbeere* names in Kenya, Choge (1997) investigated the meaning of names in the *Nandi* community, Wembah Rashid (1992) investigated names and the system of giving names in the *Makua* community in Tanzania. Muzule (1998) investigated names found around the Great Lakes in East and central Africa and found that they reflect more than identification. Akinnaso (1980) looked at the sociolinguistic basis of *Yoruba* personal names in the perspective of anthropological linguistics.

All these researches have revealed that names amongst the African communities have meaning and are very important. They reflect behaviour, time and even metaphors. This has vividly shown that names have meaning. Hancock and Goodwin have shown that some English names have meanings e.g. Chapman (hawker), Porter (watchman), Stanfield (born in a store field), Bradwell (born near a wide well) e.t.c as cited by Choge (1997:24 – 25). Therefore, Shakespeare's allegation in the play "Romeo and Juliet" that names are arbitrary is not quite true.

The contribution of this paper is that Digo names also have meaning and they are a means of identification in a society. The fact that the meaning of a name may not be known in a community does not mean it is arbitrary as Muzule (1998:46) argues:

"It is postulated here that failure to decipher the meaning could be caused by semantic, morphological change(s) undergone by the name or lexeme(s) concerned. There is no way a person of this era can know the meaning of a lexeme that dropped out of the language a century ago without leaving traces behind, as these languages have no written history going that much back".

Digo names are inclusive in the statement above attributed to Muzule. Digo are neighbours of the Swahili who have a long history of interaction (Chiraghdin and Mnyampala, 1977: xi, 19). Their languages are so similar syntactically, morphologically and semantically. However, Digo language has not been thoroughly researched on and is a language, which has no written history.