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**The Invisibility of the Self in the American Society: “*Battle Royal*” by
Ralph Ellison**

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
Master's Degree in Literature and Civilization**

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Dedication

I would want to dedicate this work to my cherished parents, my sisters, my brothers, and all those who have provided unwavering support and endless inspiration during my academic journey. My path has been illuminated by their unflinching love and encouragement throughout my life. I am grateful that you continuously have faith in me.

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Above everything, I praise and am grateful to Almighty Allah for illuminating my pathway with bravery and faith.

I would like to dedicate this work to my parents, who instilled in me a passion for learning. I also dedicate this work to my loving husband, who never fails to inspire, motivate, and be patient with me all the time.

With gratitude for their unfailing emotional support, I dedicate this work to my sweetheart, my little boy, "Rassim," and to all of my siblings and family members. I also owe this effort to my friends, teachers, and other people who have always encouraged and supported me.

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Abstract

The present study explores the invisibility of African Americans in American society by critically analysing Ralph Ellison's *The "Battle Royal"*. This study aims to provide valuable insight into the struggles faced by African Americans within America's social-racial society. It investigates the concepts of invisibility and self-identity by employing critical analysis to scrutinise the systematic racism structures and their portrayal in the novel, which shape the racial marginalization experiences of African Americans. The analysis delves into the influence of cultural movements on the narrative and themes of the novel, as exemplified by the unnamed protagonist's journey through social racial experiences, marginalization, and dehumanization. The study has employed the postcolonial theory to reveal the challenges faced by African Americans, illustrating their experiences and social struggles through the focusing on the themes such as self and otherness, invisibility, and identity, as well as the symbols, imagery, and social constructs of language power in *The "Battle Royal"*. The study reveals that *The "Battle Royal"* was faithfully a representation of the African American dilemma in which it underscores the complexities of African American identity, and the impact of racial inequality resonates with ongoing efforts to achieve true equality and recognition.

Key Words: Invisibility; *The "Battle Royal"*; Racial Marginalization; Postcolonial Theory; Dehumanization

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

KKK	Ku Klux Klan
WNET -NNYC PBS	WNET- New York City Public Broadcasting Service

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General Introduction

1. Background of the Study

Black Americans have endured a long history of slavery and racial discrimination. Since the mid-1900s, they have fought for rights and rehabilitation, yet recent events and revolutions in America continue to have a major impact on their mental health. Despite advancements in education and social status, oppression, marginalization, and racial segregation persist, often rendering Black Americans' dreams unattainable due to systemic barriers.

The Harlem Renaissance, a cultural movement in the early 20th century, significantly transformed American culture, showcasing how racism shaped art and literature. During this period, the black American man sought identity and self-recognition despite facing severe social inequality. The harsh realities of slavery, marginalization, and apartheid inspired writers like Ralph Ellison.

Ralph Ellison's novel, *Invisible Man* (1952), powerfully depicts the experiences of marginalized Africans in white American society, highlighting the lasting effects of mid-twentieth-century racial segregation. The novel delves into the complexities of invisibility and its impact on African American identity. The "Battle Royal" scene, in particular, is examined in this dissertation to explore themes of identity and invisibility. This scene symbolizes invisibility and marks the beginning of a transformation from ignorance, discrimination, and unrecognition to the realization of dreams and the initiation of crucial discussions about race and identity.

The concept of invisibility is central to Ellison's work and this study. Invisibility, as used by Ellison, refers not just to the physical absence of recognition but also to the societal erasure of black identity and humanity. It speaks to the psychological and emotional impact of being unseen and unheard in a society that systematically marginalizes black individuals. The

protagonist's invisibility is a metaphor for the broader experience of African Americans who are denied acknowledgment and respect in a racially biased society. This concept is critical in understanding the protagonist's journey and the broader African American experience during the mid-20th century.

2. Statement of the Argument

The central argument of this dissertation revolves around the theme of invisibility, which has been prevalent in African American literature. The analysis of the “Battle Royal” scene provides an opportunity to examine invisibility and serves as a crucial framework for analysing the protagonist's journey in uncovering layers of meaning related to issues of power, self-perception, and the presence of traces. Despite extensive analysis of African American literature, there is still a need for a more profound comprehension of the theme of invisibility and its significance for African American identity. This study aims to fill this gap by critically examining Ralph Ellison's “Battle Royal”.

3. Research Questions

The purpose of this investigation is to address the following inquiries.

1. How Ralph Ellison explored the theme of invisibility in “Battle Royal” through his investigative approach?
2. To what extent does Ralph Ellison's “Battle Royal” reflect the pervasive invisibility of African Americans in the United States?
3. What is the significance of artistic expression in confronting invisibility?
4. In what way does Ralph Ellison's “Battle Royal” enhance our comprehension of invisibility?

4. Literature Review

Scholars have conducted in-depth investigations into the theme of invisibility within the context of African American literature, particularly in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. The "Battle Royal" scene has received considerable attention, yet the essential theme of invisibility within this scene remains under-examined. While the broader themes of invisibility and societal struggles have been explored, there is a gap in understanding the language and diction used in "Battle Royal" and its aesthetic expression.

Houston A. Baker Jr.'s 1984 study, "Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory," examines "Battle Royal" within the context of African American oral culture. Baker explains how Ellison uses blues themes and patterns to portray the protagonist's suffering and defiance. The disorientation and inhuman conditions depicted in the Battle scene are mirrored in the spontaneity and resourcefulness of blues music. However, Baker's work, while connecting Ellison's narrative to African American culture, lacks a specific linguistic analysis of the language used in "Battle Royal." His focus on blues aesthetics overshadows the discussion of how Ellison employs certain language strategies to portray the protagonist's inner turmoil, highlighting the need for more studies that address this gap.

In her 1997 study, "Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative," Valerie Smith focuses on the psychological struggle and submission the protagonist endures. She highlights the use of first-person narrative to express the main character's consciousness and inner turmoil. Despite her success in describing the protagonist's psychological conflict, Smith's analysis does not provide a thorough examination of the linguistic features used by Ellison. There is a clear need for more studies that focus on the language and stylistic devices in "Battle Royal" to understand how Ellison constructs the protagonist's mental state.

John F. Callahan, in his 1995 study "In the African-American Grain: Call-and-Response in Twentieth-Century Black Fiction," emphasises the significance of imagery and metaphor in "Battle Royal." He discusses symbols such as the blindfold, the electrified rug, and the battle itself as representations of the black race and their oppression. These symbols are crucial for understanding the protagonist's search for identity and acknowledgment. However, Callahan's focus on metaphor and imagery occasionally overshadows a more detailed examination of Ellison's linguistic choices. There is a need for further research that explores how Ellison's language constructs the protagonist's psychological state.

Claudia Tate's 1998 study, "Rhetorical Strategies in African American Literature: From Slave Narratives to the Harlem Renaissance," examines how Ellison employs irony, paradox, and rhetorical questions in "Battle Royal." These strategies contribute to the feeling of disorientation and confusion, reflecting the protagonist's mental condition. Tate also discusses the dramatic elements of the fight, where the protagonist is both the performer and the performed act. While Tate presents a detailed examination of rhetorical tropes, her work does not focus on the stylistic aspects of Ellison's prose. More detailed linguistic analyses are needed to understand how Ellison's language builds the protagonist's psychological state.

The studies reviewed provide valuable insights into the thematic and symbolic aspects of "Battle Royal" in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. However, notable gaps remain in linking the language used in the chapter to the protagonist's psychological struggle and sense of invisibility. Future research should address these gaps by focusing on the linguistic and stylistic devices Ellison employs to portray the protagonist's inner turmoil and experiences of invisibility.

5. Aims of The Study:

This study has clear objectives:

- Investigate the influence of the literary work "Battle Royal" on both the field of literature and the American society as a whole.
- analyse the theme of invisibility as portrayed in "Battle Royal".

6. Significance of The Study

This study highlights the significance of the “Battle Royal” on the exploration of inner conflict experienced by African Americans. Concepts such as alienation, invisibility, resistance, double consciousness, and self-discovery are extensively examined in African American literature. By analysing the theme of invisibility, we can gain insights into how it influences the lives of individuals.

7. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach, utilising literary analysis and postcolonial theory to examine the symbolism, imagery, and language in “Battle Royal.” This research primarily utilises secondary sources, including scholarly articles and critical essays, to explore the themes and context of *Invisible Man*. Additionally, primary sources such as Ellison's personal writings and contemporaneous reviews of the novel provide direct insights into the author's intentions and the initial reception of the work.

8. Structure of the Study

This dissertation consists of two chapters. The first chapter delves into exploring the historical context by examining the struggles, resilience, victories, and triumphs of Africans and African Americans in the Harlem Renaissance and Negritude. It investigates the historical struggles of African Americans, from slavery, dispersion, racism, and segregation to their resilience, artistic expression, and cultural impact in the Harlem Renaissance, transitioning into themes of invisibility, double consciousness, and self-perception in literature. The second chapter is about the critical analysis of “Battle Royal” and its impact on understanding and visibility through the scene of “Battle Royal”, investigating symbolism, imagery, and language. It delves into how the

impact was analysed in terms of framing, addressing visibility, and the use of literary language that is both literary and intelligent, with a specific emphasis on symbolism and imagery.

CHAPTER ONE

Uncovering African Americans' History: Exploring African American Struggles and Triumphs

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introduction

The history of Africans and people of African descent is a complex story. It lies at the centre of the history of all humanity and continues to affect global culture, politics, and social systems today. The experiences of African Americans have significantly influenced their creative output and cultural identity. These experiences range from the enduring legacy of slavery and segregation to the continuous fight for equality and representation. Exploring the historical struggles of the African American community helps in understanding its influential voices. In the history of the United States, racism and slavery have been pervasive issues for a very long time, and they have had a particularly negative impact on African Americans. The ongoing legacy of these tragedies and atrocities has had a major impact on the development of African American literature, which has served as a potent tool for articulating the experiences of oppression and resilience that African Americans have experienced within their communities. In a culture that excludes and dehumanizes them, African American authors have grappled with overcoming invisibility through their literature. African American authors reclaim their voices and assert their humanity through writing, despite societal attempts to silence them. This chapter will provide an overview of the African American struggle toward visibility and recognition, focusing on their main figures and contributions to literature.

1. Tracking the Struggles of the African American Experience

1.1 Exploring (African) Diaspora

1.1.1 Definition of Diaspora

The term 'Diaspora' traditionally refers to the historical global dispersion of Jewish people, leading to their split between different parts of the world. (Manning, 2010, p. 3). The concept of 'diaspora' has evolved over time, encompassing various dispersed communities and leading to a reinterpretation that has diluted its original meaning, raising questions about its contemporary usage. Scholars have presented diverse perspectives and interpretations regarding diasporas, engaging in debates that challenge the conventional idea of diasporas being completely disconnected from their national origins. Defining the term 'diaspora' has posed a significant challenge due to its multifaceted usage across diverse contexts and academic fields, reflecting the intricate nature of its definition. (Brubaker, 2005, pp. 1–19)

Jonathan Grossman (2018) and other scholars have put forth a comprehensive definition of diaspora, which encompasses six common attributes found in various definitions. This proposal is intricately linked to the evolving understanding of the concept of 'diaspora', aligning with the dynamic changes in how the diaspora is conceptualised and studied. Grossman (2018) proposes an integrated definition based on six common attributes, linking this proposal to the evolving understanding of 'diaspora'. According to Grossman's comprehensive definition, a diaspora refers to a community that has migrated or dispersed from its original homeland while maintaining a strong connection to it and nurturing a collective identity that is shared among its members. He emphasises the nuanced characteristics that define these dispersed groups. These groups often have a strong cultural identity and strong ties to their country of origin. Scholars' definitions underscore the profound impact of specific groups' migration from their homeland to diverse regions globally, accentuating the intricate complexities and far-reaching consequences of this displacement.

1.1.2Types of Diaspora

Scholars have provided various classifications that shed light on the complex nature of the diaspora phenomenon. These classifications are determined by their established perspectives and areas of focus. According to Judith T. Shuval's classification (2000), diaspora mobilisation can be grouped into four categories: radical strong, radical weak, moderate strong, and moderate weak. The nature of these mobilisations varies based on the level of violence in the homeland. Koinova (2012) argues that the main secessionist elites understand the significance of certain diasporas in their pursuit of independence, leading to different types of mobilisation.

Diaspora can also be classified into various categories, such as economic, political, cultural, and forced diaspora. An economic diaspora occurs when individuals choose to leave their home country in search of better economic opportunities. According to a study conducted by Adisa et al. (1999), it was found that migrants often choose to work in foreign countries and send money back to their home countries. According to Franc et al. (2020), this has a positive impact on the economic growth of both the host country and the country of origin. In other cases, individuals or groups are forced to leave their home countries due to political persecution or conflict, resulting in the formation of a political diaspora. A significant number of people find comfort in seeking refuge in foreign nations and actively engage in political activism to bring about positive changes in their home country. On the other hand, the idea of a cultural diaspora revolves around the spread of a particular culture or ethnic identity across different countries or regions. People in a cultural diaspora often have strong ties to their country of origin and work hard to protect and promote their cultural heritage.

Diaspora is often defined based on four types: forced/victim, imperial/colonial, labour, and trade diaspora. A forced diaspora occurs when a population is involuntarily displaced as a result of factors such as war, persecution, or violence. The trauma and loss endured by the displaced community, along with the obstacles they encounter in assimilating into new societies while

preserving their cultural identity, are significant aspects. The groups mentioned include Palestinians, Africans, Armenians, Irish, and Jews. However, voluntary diaspora pertains to the movement of individuals or groups who choose to leave their home country in search of better economic prospects, education, or personal liberty. Many individuals in this diaspora may maintain a deep connection to their home country and have a strong desire to preserve their cultural heritage. For example, indentured Indians seek better job opportunities by migrating to different countries, which adds to the labour diaspora that includes Chinese and Japanese. As well, groups of individuals have often migrated to various countries to engage in commerce, establish business networks, and facilitate trade relationships. This migration is known as a trade diaspora, which plays a vital role in global markets by utilising their cultural connections, language skills, and expertise in international business practices. Trade diasporas encompass a wide range of groups, such as Lebanese Chinese, Venetian businesspeople, and professional Indians. These examples highlight the vast diversity and significant influence that these networks have. (Diaspora, 2023)

1.1.3 African diaspora

The history of the African diaspora is a complex topic that entails studying the trajectory of people of African descent in various societies, including those where they are the majority or minority (Palmer, 2000). In order to fully analyze the contemporary African diaspora, it is crucial to first explore Africa itself, as the original motherland plays a vital role in comprehending the migration of its population and their cultural legacy. Individuals from sub-Saharan Africa have migrated in successive waves to different parts of the world, contributing to the global dispersal of populations from this region. These migrations began with settlements in the Old World tropics around seventy thousand years ago, spreading to Eurasia, Oceania, and the Americas. Over the past few millennia, amidst the development of societies and civilizations worldwide, Africans have persistently migrated and established communities in foreign lands.

The migration of black people from sub-Saharan Africa, known as the “sunburst” of settlement beyond their homeland, created strong connections to regions like Egypt, other parts of North Africa, and Arabia (Manning, 2010, p. 1). Additional settlements across the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Atlantic Ocean brought African settlers to Asia, Europe, and the Americas. Four major slave trades occurred in Africa between 1400 and 1900. The largest and most famous trade was the trans-Atlantic slave trade, in which West African, West Central African, and Eastern African slaves were transported to European colonies in the New World from the 15th century onwards. The trans-Saharan, Red Sea, and Indian Ocean slave trades were smaller and preceded the trans-Atlantic. Northern Africa received southern Saharan slaves during the trans-Saharan slave trade. The Middle East and India received slaves traded from the interior of the Red Sea. The Indian Ocean slave trade transported Eastern African slaves to the Middle East, India, or Indian Ocean plantation islands. Because of this wave of trade, the continent lost nearly 20 million slaves (Nunn, 2017). The best estimates show that Africa's population was half what it would have been without the slave trade by 1800 (Manning, 1990). Europeans used kidnappings, raids, and warfare to enslave people. Historical accounts suggest that widespread insecurity, violence, and warfare harmed societies' institutional, social, and economic development. Scholars have shown that the slave trade weakened states, legal institutions, and political and social institutions. (Nunn, 2017).

1.2 Surviving Oppression: Slavery and Racism in America

1.2.1 Slavery

Africans were subjected to various slave trades. The trans-Atlantic slave trade was the most detrimental among various slave trades. Over four centuries, the Atlantic slave trade saw the transportation of more than 10 million Africans to the Americas against their will. This massive movement of people occurred between the late 15th and mid-19th centuries, spanning three continents in the different slave trades across Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

The trans-Atlantic slave trade was the most extensive forced migration of individuals in history and played a crucial role in repopulating the Americas. The institution of slavery and the practice of the slave trade played a vital role in the exploitation of gold and agricultural resources in the Americas. The cultivation of sugar plantations, in particular, heavily relied on a substantial number of enslaved individuals to drive economic expansion. The economic necessities and the increasing prices of slaves resulted in the cessation of the trade as a result of fluctuating economic circumstances and evolving market dynamics. (Eltis. 2007).

The trans-Atlantic slave trade had a deep and enduring effect on the lives of those who were slaves and their offspring. These experiences had a significant influence that went well beyond their own lives, leaving a long-lasting mark on the economy and history of different places worldwide and moulding global narratives. The enduring psychological discomfort and trauma experienced by the descendants of enslaved individuals eloquently demonstrate the significant influence of slavery on African Americans. Evidence suggests that inner-city African American adolescents consistently endure the consequences of trauma, hence perpetuating cycles of trauma. (Sannisha& Kimberly, 2019). This historical inheritance has had a significant influence on the mental health of those of African descent. Various consequences can result from the events, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and a sense of racial prejudice.

Manning Marable's book 'Living Black History' underscores the significance of comprehending the past in order to mould the future of racial interactions in America, with a particular focus on the lasting impact of slavery. (Marable, 2006.)

1.2.2 RacialDiscrimination

Racism is the establishment of a social order that places specific individuals or groups above others based on factors like colour, ethnicity, language, culture, or religion. Political, cultural, and economic factors have shaped and perpetuated this widespread problem for centuries.

Consequently, a hierarchical system has emerged, granting rights and resources to those deemed above the human line while depriving those below of their rights and the recognition they merit. Racism in the United States is marked by both overt and covert expressions, frequently without enough acknowledgment of the inherent prejudices. (Stanchi. 2021).

Over time, the Supreme Court has changed its interpretation of the term, resulting in a more limited definition and a skewed inclusion of bias against whites. Majority opinions indicate that the Court is less inclined to label even apparent instances of racism, like the Ku Klux Klan, as racist. Racism has a noticeable effect on African Americans, which can be observed in multiple areas of their lives, such as disparities in health, inequality in the economy, and challenges in education. This has led to an unequal emphasis within the criminal justice system, contributing to the increased pressure of psychological stress and social seclusion. The presence of these systemic challenges has hindered the full participation of African American groups in society, hence impacting their general welfare and advancement. The relentless endeavour for parity and fairness remains an enduring struggle throughout multiple facets of American culture, requiring continuous endeavours to address and surmount these obstacles. (R. et al., 2018). Racial discrimination has a substantial impact on the psychological well-being of African Americans, resulting in the emergence of sentiments of inferiority and internalised oppression. The aforementioned experiences have had a tremendous influence on African American writing and

artistic expression across a range of literary genres. They illuminate the enduring impacts of institutional racism and prejudice.

1.3 Cultural Resilience and Artistic Expression

1.3.1 The Great Migration

The Great Migration is the name given to the mass migration of black Americans from the North to the South, with the most common pattern being from the rural South to the urban North. This massive demographic shift was essential and greatly affected American culture and society. It was mainly because of the Great Migration that the Harlem Renaissance happened. There is a long backstory to The Great Migration, all stemming from the end of slavery at the end of the Civil War. In this case, many black Americans moved to the North to escape the violence and injustice they experienced in the South.

Under Reconstruction, Southern blacks gained voting rights rapidly and became an important section of the voting public. Black officials were elected into office in many southern states. It all seemed to be going very well, but when reconstruction ended, many states in the Deep South slowly dismantled the voting rights for blacks that an outside authority was not enforcing through the use of clever exclusive tactics like the grandfather clause and literary tests. Southern blacks were effectively enfranchised; though not officially racist, it was obvious that these tactics were directed at blacks after the turn of the century, and it only got worse for southern blacks. Jim Crow laws are racial (Gavins, 2015).

Segregation was enacted in many Southern cities. There was also the fashionable trend of the Lost Cause of the Confederacy. This was a nostalgic and rose-coloured view of the pre-Civil War South that claimed that enslaved blacks had been happy and content working on plantations, and that was for everybody's benefit that way. This had some Southerners accuse blacks of being ungrateful and that the society of the antebellum South was better for them. Of course, those

same people also believed that blacks were simpletons and could not handle the complexities of a new modern society. The belief that the loss caused by the Confederacy was entirely sympathetic to the Confederate cause was widespread enough in the South that it led to more negative developments in race relations. One of these was the re-emergence of the Ku Klux Klan, which officially restarted in 1915. In the 1920s, the KKK had reached record numbers of members, which led to increasing violence and hostility towards blacks, as well as the increased influence of the KKK in southern politics. (Fryer & Levitt, 2011)

Throughout the post-reconstruction and Jim Crow periods, lynching was still practiced. The 1920s were almost at the tail end of the era that saw a significant number of lynchings, so with all this still ongoing in the 1920s, it was not a good time to be black in Southern America. Millions of blacks still lived in the former Confederate States, and more than 40% of the Southern population in this era was black. (Gavins, 2015) . However, without any real power or social influence, they could not really do very much. At the same time, the liberal ideas of increasing voting rights for blacks in the reconstruction were being implemented. They had not wanted to leave, mostly because it was the only home they knew. There had been a more or less equal amount of social mobility for them in the North and the South, but when that ended, there was little left for them in the South with the increased voting rights for blacks in the reconstruction period.

They were indeed a force to be reckoned with at the polls, and this was resented by many whites as well as Southern Democrats who did not stand a chance against the Republicans in the South. Being the party of Lincoln, the man who freed the enslaved people, the Republican Party received nearly all the votes of newly freed blacks, which, keep in mind, was nearly 40% of the population, thus resulting in an ugly racist campaign to disenfranchise blacks yet again. (Gavins, 2015)

These crises and intellectual shifts catalysed social and political transformation. They displayed a novel mode of artistic representation, resulting in a surge of Americans migrating to the Harlem area of New York. This migration brought about a profound alteration and advancement in the cultural , literary, and artistic dimensions of black African Americans..

1.3.2 Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance, the New Negro Movement, or Black Renaissance, was an outpouring of artistic production and expression by African American artists and writers that took place shortly after World War I and lasted between 1920 and 1935 in Harlem, New York, to raise awareness about racism and obtain freedom and justice. It was one of America's most prosperous, vibrant, and culturally generative artistic periods, and the work that emerged from it continues to shape the landscape of African American arts and letters.(Crew, 1987)

In the years leading up to the 1920s, blacks in Massachusetts began to migrate to northern cities in order to escape the increasingly racist South. This migration continued into the 1920s, and one of the most popular destinations was the Harlem district in New York, which became the headquarters of significant cultural developments in the black community. The increased concentration of black intellectuals and artists led to a faster spread of ideas and a higher output of work. Initially, we dubbed this flourishing of black culture and thought as the New Negro Movement. However, the movement later adopted the name Harlem Renaissance due to its crucial role in that area. Hundreds of thousands of Southern blacks had joined the relatively better-off Northern blacks, creating higher concentrations of black Americans in Northern cities and establishing their communities.

A generation of black intellectuals emerged as a result, encouraged to take greater pride in their race. Blacks had generally thought that subservience to whites was demeaning and beneath them, but now they felt like they could openly resist that role in society.

This movement was very diverse regarding visual art, literature, and music. Many creative artists contributed to the Harlem Renaissance. From the artistic side, photographer James Van Der Zed, sculptor Richmond Barth, artist Aaron Douglas, Meta Fu, and Eric Fuller presented many works inspired by the experiences of black Americans and depictions of life. During that era, blacks endured hardships due to class and racial segregation.(Crew, 1987)

In the literary realm, the most prominent names were Langston Hughes, James Walton Johnson, and Zora Neale Hurston, a conservative writer of the folklore of black southern life. She wrote about black women's experiences and further exemplified this in the book *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Hurston and other writers experimented with various styles, striving to elevate culture and showcase the accomplishments of African Americans, both historical and contemporary. Langston Hughes was one of the most famous poets. He was born in 1901 in Joplin. In 1926, he published his book of poetry, *The Weary Blue*. Hughes's poetry reflected his experiences as a black American poet, drawing from his travels, movements, and interactions with the working class, as well as their unique experiences and lives. He drew inspiration for his writing and wrote his first poem, *The Negro Speaks of the Rivers*, in 1920, at the age of 17. As well as his seminal article *The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain*, which is regarded by many as an essential work of writing that articulates the Harlem Renaissance.(Stephens, 1999b)

Even though it predates the real beginning of the Harlem Renaissance, it perfectly captures its spirit. Hughes briefly tracks the history of black Africans from the Old World to the New World. The collective experience of black Americans bound them together. He argues that the African race is as ancient as the rivers, as old as the great civilisations, and at least as legitimate as the white race. The renowned edition of the survey graphic featured contributions from Walter White, an investigator of lynching incidents who made efforts to pass a federal anti-lynching bill. Additionally, it included poems by esteemed writers such as Claude McKay and

Countee Cullen. McKay and Cullen were prominent figures in the literary movement known as the Harlem Renaissance.(Stephens, 1999b)

A significant figure in academia and research, James Weldon Johnson was a well-known lawyer and poet who co-wrote *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, now known as the national anthem. This special issue also featured Arthur Schomburg, a pioneer in black history. He was an Afro-Puerto Rican man who developed one of the world's most significant collections of printed material about the Black Diasporic experience.(Stephens, 1999b)

Of course, there were countless jazz musicians in the entertainment field: Mason-Dixon; Josephine Baker, the famous dancer and singer; Bill Bojangles Robinson, the tap dancer and actor; and Paul Robinson, the singer and stage performer. In the film world, one black filmmaker was vital during this period. Oscar Micheaux was important, not only as one of the first black filmmakers but also as an independent filmmaker who achieved some success.

To conclude, the Harlem Renaissance was a cultural and creative movement. It was the explosion of literature and art by black African-American intellectuals, artists, and authors who used their artistic and literary privileges to heighten consciousness about racism and its ramifications on the lives of black people in the United States. These intellectuals and artists focused on cultivating "black expression in a hostile environment." The movement allowed black artists to assert their identity and actively pursue their aspirations for liberation and justice.

1.3.3 Negritude

Negritude is a literary movement. It was born out of the Paris intellectual environment of the 1930s and 1940s. It is a product of black writers joining the French language to assert their cultural identity. They were searching for a cultural and social identity, and they found it in their common ideal of affirming pride in their shared black identity and African heritage through the

reclaiming of African self-determination, self-reliance, and self-respect. Senghor defines Negritude as:

Negritude... is neither racialism nor self-negation. However, it goes beyond mere affirmation; it is a process of rootedness and self-confirmation, a validation of one's essence. It is nothing more or less than what some English-speaking Africans have called the African personality. (Order, 2020).

In 1923, Paulette and Jeanne Nardal initiated the Clamart Salon, a gathering place where artists, writers, and intellectuals from the black diaspora convened. Their discussions centred around the ideals that would later define the Negritude Movement. In 1931, Aime Césaire, Leon Damas, and Leopold Senghor (often referred to as the movement's "fathers") met in Paris. That same year, Paulette Nardal and Haitian Dr. Leo Sajou began publishing the *Revue du Monde Noir* (Review of the Black World), a publication that stimulated thought and discourse within the movement. In 1934, Césaire, Gontran Damas, and Senegalese poet Léopold Sédar Senghor continued to contribute to the development of Negritude.

The New Negro Movement's politics and the Harlem Renaissance's poetics greatly influenced the Negritude movement. The contrast between the moderate Old Negroes and the militant New Negroes, who prioritised self-expression, cultural identity, and political activism, persisted throughout the Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro movement. (Rabaka, 2020, p. 43).

The literary geniuses helped push the movement of African Americans into European countries to find themselves and express their culture through literature. Going to Paris symbolised freedom, African Americans' exploration, and their identities.

Negritude meant going back to African roots through literature. It was also influential because reading and writing were things that white society prohibited Africans and African Americans from doing. Not only did African Americans overcome that, but they used their ability to read and write to their advantage by sharing their history and intellectual writing. Essentially, it comprises three components: Africans' cultural identity, their departure from African racism, and their exploration of African ideology through literature. People of colour were able to explore their identity before colonisation stripped them of their roots and sense of place. In conclusion, this movement highlighted the importance of African Americans' expression. Literature helps us put emotions and ideas on paper.

1.4 The Notion of The Self and The Other in African American Literature

African American literature has long grappled with the complex interplay between the self and the other, reflecting the struggle for identity and belonging in a society marked by racial oppression. Through powerful narratives and unique perspectives, African American writers have explored themes of alienation, invisibility, resistance, double consciousness, and the quest for self-discovery in the face of societal marginalization. This exploration of the self and the other has shaped the literary landscape, challenged dominant narratives, and pushed for a more inclusive understanding of humanity.

By giving a realistic image of the experiences of black Americans with slavery, racial discrimination, and segregation, African American writers turned inward to discuss the psychological traumas that racism causes for their people. Problems like feelings of loss, inferiority, and lack of confidence are a few of the psychological topics that African American literature brings to the surface and addresses directly. This introspective approach allowed for a deeper exploration of the impact of systemic racism on the mental health and well-being of black

individuals, shedding light on the lasting effects of historical oppression. Through their writings, African American authors sought to challenge stereotypes and empower their community to reclaim their identity and self-worth.

3.1 The Concept of the Self

The notion of the self in American literature is exemplified in the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who underscored the significance of self-reliance and non-conformity in his essay *Self-Reliance*. Emerson urged individuals to trust themselves and be independent, highlighting the idea that conformity is detrimental to self-reliance. Additionally, Washington Irving's tales of colonial America, such as *Rip Van Winkle*, contribute to American mythology by exploring themes of identity and change. While Emerson focuses on individual self-reliance, Irving's stories reflect societal shifts and personal transformations in American literature. (Braithwaite, 1925). The intricate and multi-dimensional theme of the self and the other in African American literature mirrors the historical and social environments in which it originated. African American literature has evolved over time, responding to changing societal norms and legal structures, as seen in Kenneth W. Warren's argument that African American literature as a distinct entity may have ended after the legal abolition of segregation in the 1950s. Additionally, the development of African American children's literature has also played a role in shaping the themes of self and others in this literary tradition. (Ross, 2012). It explores themes of identity, race, and culture through the lens of African American experiences.

It often challenges dominant narratives and offers alternative perspectives on history and society. This literature highlights the importance of recognising and valuing the unique perspectives and voices of marginalised communities. By focusing on the experiences of African Americans, it sheds light on the complexities of identity and the impact of systemic oppression on individuals and communities. Through exploring themes of otherness, African American literature also sheds light on the resilience and strength of marginalised communities in the face

of adversity. It serves as a powerful tool for promoting empathy, understanding, and social change. By amplifying the voices of those who have been historically silenced, African American literature challenges dominant narratives and encourages critical reflection on power dynamics in society. It also offers a platform for dialogue and advocacy for social justice, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and equitable future for all.

3.3 Invisibility of the Self in African American Literature

The theme of the invisibility of the self is prevalent in African American literature, particularly in works such as Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, which is a reflection of the struggles and experiences that African Americans have in society. The literature that is written by African Americans frequently focuses on topics such as racism, discrimination, and the search for identity in a society that marginalises them. This theme highlights the challenges faced by African Americans in asserting their individuality and finding their place in a society that often overlooks or oppresses them, focusing on topics such as racism, discrimination, and the search for identity. By exploring these themes, African American literature sheds light on the complexities of race relations and the ongoing struggle for equality and recognition. (Maciel, 2017)

The invisibility of the self in African American literature can be attributed to the emphasis on collectivism and community over individualism. This cultural value often leads individuals to prioritise the needs of the group over their identity. Additionally, the concept of "saving face" in African American literature societies can further contribute to the invisibility of the self as individuals may suppress their true thoughts and emotions in order to maintain harmony within the group.

In African American literature, the concept of invisibility is often explored, particularly in works like Ellison's *Invisible Man*. This theme reflects the feeling of being unseen or

marginalised in society, which is a common experience for African Americans due to historical oppression and discrimination. Thus, African American literature aims to shed light on the struggles and challenges faced by African Americans in asserting their identity and existence in a society that often renders them invisible. (Angel. et al., 2014)

By giving a realistic image of the experiences of black Americans with racial discrimination, African-American writers turned inward to discuss the psychological traumas that racism causes for their people. Problems like feelings of loss, inferiority, and lack of confidence are a few of the psychological topics that Harlem Renaissance literature brings to the surface and addresses directly within African American literature. The theme of invisibility, particularly concerning the African American experience in the Southern United States, stands out as a significant focus. It encapsulates the sense of being unseen and unheard in a society that systematically marginalises African Americans. This theme is particularly evident in the works of authors like Ellison, whose seminal novel *Invisible Man* explores the profound invisibility felt by African Americans due to racial prejudice and societal neglect. The invisibility theme is not just a historical reflection but continues to be relevant in contemporary discussions about race, identity, and the quest for equality in the United States. This metaphor serves as a powerful symbol of the African American quest to attain visibility, recognition, and equal rights as full-fledged citizens.

3.4 Double Consciousness:

In *The Soul of Black Folk* (1903), the concept of double consciousness was initially presented for the first time by Du Bois, an African American sociologist and writer. According to Du Bois, the concept of double consciousness refers to the state of confusion and duality that African Americans go through as a result of the fact that they were identified as both American and Black while living in a culture that is hostile towards black people. This psychological state

is a reflection of a "torn-ness" (p. 7) of thought that the black subject fights with, as well as the conflict between an American identity (i.e., white and anti-Black) and a black identity. Du Bois argues that this internal conflict leads to a sense of constantly viewing oneself through the eyes of others, ultimately impacting the self-perception and identity formation of African Americans in society. This concept has been influential in understanding the complexities of race and identity in America.

Du Bois's concept of double consciousness sheds light on the ongoing struggle African Americans face in reconciling their dual identities within a society that perpetuates racism and discrimination. By recognising and addressing this internal conflict, individuals can begin to navigate and challenge the oppressive systems that shape their self-perception and identity. Acknowledging and confronting the presence of double consciousness enables individuals to navigate and confront the oppressive structures that influence their self-perception and identity. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness serves as a powerful tool for empowerment and resistance against the forces that seek to diminish the self-worth of African Americans.

Conclusion

The African American experience has been characterized by an extensive and intricate history of adversity, fortitude, and creative manifestation. African Americans have demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of significant challenges, ranging from the atrocities of slavery and the enduring impact of racism to the achievements of the Harlem Renaissance and the Civil Rights Movement. African Americans have exhibited exceptional fortitude and ingenuity in response to these difficulties, as evidenced by the Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance, which sparked a cultural and creative movement that honoured black identity and confronted prejudice.

The concept of self and other is a prominent subject in African American literature. The statement highlights the continuous effort of African-Americans to establish their uniqueness and dignity in a culture that has always aimed to degrade and exclude them. African Americans have made significant contributions to the cultural, social, and political aspects of the United States, despite the considerable obstacles they have encountered. It is imperative that we acknowledge and address the lasting effects of slavery and racism, and strive towards a fair and impartial society.

CHAPTER TWO :

**Critical Analysis of the Theme Invisibility in “Battle
Royal” in *Invisible Man*.**

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Introduction

This chapter will examine Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, particularly “*The Battle Royal*”, to delve deeper into the theme of the invisibility of self and identity in American culture. This chapter will explore the fundamental meanings of invisibility and identity and shed light on the challenges black African Americans face in the American society. Throughout the tale, the narrator reveals his experiences, which describe the injustices and persecutions he faced, which were common among the black community. African Americans worked hard to gain recognition and visibility in a racial and barbaric society, thus, this chapter will investigate and examine the theme of invisibility of African Americans.

2.1 Ellison's Biography

Ralph Ellison, the writer of the 1952 novel *Invisible Man*, is one of the most influential African American authors and cultural intellectuals of the 20th century. Oklahoma was a shelter for many whites who took advantage of its lands from the end of the nineteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth century. Many whites brought with them racist views and implemented Jim Crow laws that encouraged racial segregation. Nevertheless, there were opportunities for African Americans in this region to escape poverty in the South. Ellison's parents were among those who benefited from these opportunities. Ellison was born on March 1, 1914, in Oklahoma. (Jimoh, 2003)

His mother, Ida Millsap, worked as a housekeeper in the homes of affluent whites and often carried home magazines for Ellison. These magazines contributed to broadening Ellison's perspective on his nation's cause and motivated him to consider

that going beyond his limited environment could lift him out of his meagre conditions. His father, Lewis Ellison enjoyed reading, and one of his favourite writers was Ralph Waldo Emerson. He named his son after Emerson because he wanted him to be a writer. But he didn't live to see this; he was killed on a construction site when he was a supervisor. Ralph himself was three years old. His mother sank quickly into the social world, and she ended up working mainly as a hotel maid. She took jobs at the Biltmore Hotel in Oklahoma City and other places, where she consistently humiliated her s.

In an interview with National Educational Television (now owned by WNET - NYC PBS) with renowned reporting from New York City, Ellison stated that he loved the teaching profession because he had excellent teachers, particularly Zelia Berro, the music director for Oklahoma City's university schools. This ignited his passion for music, leading him to excel at his trumpet playing and eventually become the student bandleader. Thus, there was a feeling of hierarchy, prestige, authority, and so on; nevertheless, Ellison demonstrated a deep interest in jazz and other modern art forms at an early age, which would subsequently show themselves in his writing. In 1933, he enrolled in Oklahoma City's Frederick Douglass School and proceeded to Tuskegee Institute in Alabama to complete his schooling. (OHS Film and Video Archives, 2012).

Ellison, dissatisfied with the racial atmosphere of the Deep South and what he perceived to be Tuskegee's conservatism, transferred to New York City in 1936 without earning a degree. The cultural legacies of the Harlem Renaissance, as well as opportunities to meet authors such as Langston Hughes and Richard Wright, drew him there. (Washington, 2001). The year 1938 marked his return to New York, where he resolutely resolved to pursue a literary vocation. During the period between 1938 and 1942, he maintained employment with the Federal Writers' Project while striving to

establish his career as a writer. Having served in the Merchant Marine as an alternative to the segregated United States military from 1943 to 1945, throughout the segregated era of World War II, Ellison occupied the position of steward in the Merchant Marines between the years 1943 and 1945.

In 1958, upon his return to the United States, Ellison resumed his position at Bard College, instructing Russian and American literature. He also began work on his second novel, *Juneteenth*. In 1950, he formed a partnership with the author Albert Murray. They subsequently published *Trading Twelve*, a compilation of letters between Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray. In 1964, while working on his novel *Shadow and Act*, In 1975, Ellison became a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Ellison died on April 16, 1994, and his second unfinished novel, *Juneteenth*, was published in 1999. In 2010, he released an expanded edition of this literary work under the title *Three Days Before the Shooting*. (Jimoh, 2003)

1.2 Navigating Invisibility in *the Battle Royal*

1.2.1 The Concept of Invisibility

The concept of invisibility means more than just physical presence or absence; it also means erasing identity, cultural heritage, marginalisation, and the denial of individuals and their effectiveness (Jimoh, 2010.). Additionally, Franklin described invisibility as “an inner struggle with the feeling that one’s talent, abilities, personality, and worth are not valued or even recognised because of prejudice and racism” (Franklin, 1999, p. 761).

This concept is consistent with the protagonist’s unacknowledged internal conflicts due to racial segregation, as he represents all black Americans.

Ellison's (1952) words, "I am invisible. There is nothing wrong with it; only individuals choose not to recognise me" (Ellison, 1952, p. 16), highlighting the protagonist's sense of invisibility due to his race. Since he is black, he is invisible, and the pursuit of such individuals is not solely motivated by self-interest. Instead of recognising their identity, listening to their voices, and achieving dignity and equality, the metaphor of the *Invisible Man* underscores how society fails to recognise and acknowledge his humanity. Moreover, Ellison challenges readers to face the intricate aspects of identity, vision, and power in American culture, particularly as they connect with race, by presenting them from the perspective of the protagonist's journey. (Abbott, 1993)

The narrator reveals his experiences, which describe the injustices and persecutions he faced, which were common among the black community. The African Americans worked hard to gain recognition and visibility in a racial and barbaric society; thus, this chapter will investigate and examine the theme of the invisibility of the African Americans in American society.

2.2.2. Main Themes of *Battle Royal*

The story's point of view is presented in a first-person narrative, which allows readers to see events and experiences from the perspective of the main character. The main character refrains from identifying himself but instead refers to himself as an "invisible man." Also, there are flashbacks in this narrative, with the narrator, who is presumably grown and in the later stages of adulthood, looking back on himself as an 18-year-old boy. the older man against the naivety of the young man. (Singh, 2024).

Thus, Ellison explains that in his novel, through the protagonist, when he said:

It goes a long way back, some twenty years. All my life I had been looking for something, and everywhere I turned someone tried to tell me what it was. I accepted their answers too, though they were often in contradiction and even self-contradictory. I was

naïve. I was looking for myself and asking everyone except myself questions which I, and only I, could answer. It took me a long time and much painful boomeranging of my expectations to achieve a realization everyone else appears to have been born with: That I am nobody but myself. But first I had to discover that I am an invisible man! (Ellison, 1952p. 16)

This model of first-person narrators being unreliable is evident in the young man's belief that he has been brought to the location to give a graduation speech and be honoured. He continues to believe this even as he is disrespected, abused, hollered at, and made to feel stupid. The young man naively believes he is being honoured, which is not true. The reader can see that the grown man, looking back, recognises the poor treatment, but the 18-year-old boy does not realise the position he is in (Singh, 2024).

Some of the story's overarching themes are more apparent than others, which makes it evident that the tale revolves around racial inequity in the years preceding the civil rights movement. The invisible man, a boy who excels in school and receives accolades for it, is the main character of the novel. The unnamed narrator said:

On my graduation day I delivered an oration in which I showed that humility was the secret, indeed, the very essence of progress. (Not that I believed this – how could I, remembering my grandfather? - I only believed that it worked.) It was a great success. Everyone praised me and I was invited to give the speech at a gathering of the town's leading white citizens. It was a triumph for our whole community. It was in the main ballroom of the leading hotel. When I got there I discovered that it was on the occasion of a smoker, and I was told that since I was to be there anyway I might as well take part in the “Battle Royal” to be fought by some of my schoolmates as part of the entertainment. The “Battle Royal” came first. (Ellison, pp.17-18).

This gives the wrong impression of equality. However, as was seen from their actions, powerful white males only see equality as a theoretical idea and want to maintain the status quo for this young black boy. As this story about youthful naivety has already mentioned, the protagonist was eager to believe that everyone was on his side and that everyone was good by nature. Of course, he grows cynical and disillusioned, and he discovers that this is untrue. This man realises at last, during the “Battle Royal”, that not everyone is on his side.

2.3 Symbols and Imagery in “Battle Royal”

2.3.1 Wearing Masks

A theme of wearing masks runs throughout the novel. Before that, there is a metaphorical mask, so the reader can consider how the narrator presents himself one way while having something else going on inside. Ducks, for example, appear exceptionally calm over water, but their feet are frantically paddling beneath the surface. Similarly, this novel is full of people who reveal one face to the public while harbouring distinct and conflicting thoughts behind that veil (Stéphane, 2020). Hence, the grandfather's exhortation to his child and grandson at the beginning of the story is especially telling:

Son, after I am gone, I need you to keep up the great battle. I never told you, but our life could be a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy within the enemy's nation ever since I gave up my gun back within the Recreation. Live together with your head within the lion's mouth. I need you to overcome 'em with yeses, weaken 'em with smiles, concur 'em to passing and pulverization. Let 'em swallow you till they upchuck or bust wide open. (Ellison, 1952, p. 16).

The first thing that comes to mind of the reader when he reads this advice is that it is suggesting that to be a good, agreeable person, the best way to get a head start in life is to just go along with these white people, say yes to them, grinning at them, agree with them, and so forth. In order for this entry to begin, "I need you to keep up the great fight," The grandfather is telling his son and grandson to keep pushing back and battling against inequality. However, he is not saying to do it openly. Instead, he advises fighting by agreeing with them and acting like a spy within the enemy's country. He suggests wearing a veil mask of agreeableness and calmness, which would allow them to appear non-threatening and thus stay safe while secretly resisting from within. He emphasises that this agreeable demeanour is just a mask, not their true selves. (Lee, 1970).

Furthermore, as Ellison illustrated, "Her hair was yellow like that of a circus kewpie doll, the face heavily powdered and rouged to create an abstract mask, the eyes hollow and smeared a cool blue" (p. 19).

First, the dancer's makeup is described as a mask, covering her real self with over-the-top cosmetics. Second, the narrator noted that "they were tossing her in the air like you would at a hazing," and above her red, fixed smiling lips, he saw "the terror and disgust in her eyes, almost like my own terror" (pp. 20–21). This reveals that she is hiding behind a mask of fixed, false cheerfulness while feeling terror and disgust inside.

There is a section in the text where the boy expresses contradictory feelings about the woman. He claims to be really attracted to her and longs to have a sexual relationship with her, but he also expresses hatred and a desire to act violently against her. He wants to stop staring at her but is unable to. This woman has not been brought

out to entertain the boys; rather, she has been brought out to make them feel inferior and aroused, only to be humiliated. The boy is both aroused and humiliated, furious with her for making him feel this way. He wants to look good in front of the others but also wants to hide and protect her, likely because they are both being exploited by the same group of men and they are both terrified and disgusted by it. He realises that they are both victims of the same oppressive forces.

2.3.2 The Battle Royal

The Battle Royal scene clearly represents the protagonist's invisibility. Although the narrator grew up in the same society as the middle class, his social situation and education were better than those of other black men. He never expected to be treated with such humiliation because of his education.

I suspected that fighting a Battle Royal might detract from the dignity of my speech. In those pre-invisible days, I visualised myself as a potential Booker T. Washington. But the other fellows didn't care too much for me either. and there were nine of them. I felt superior to them in my way, and I didn't like how we were all crowded together into the servants' elevator. Nor did they like my being there (p. 18).

However, he had to enter this battle, which was merely entertainment for the white men. They were a group of blindfolded black people who felt inferior and were forced to fight each other under the cheers of the white men. In addition, they were stripped of their clothes in an atmosphere of chaos and violence. Despite their feelings of humiliation and inferiority, they were unable to refuse.

The narrator kept fighting to preserve his dignity, which made him distinct from the others. Despite being blindfolded, they triumphed over him, reminding the narrator of his origin and the truth that he could not integrate into their society. In this battle, he became equal to the other black men, who were stripped of their humanity and dignity and treated like animals rather than humans. (Stéphane, 2020)

The scene of the Battle Royale symbolizes the persecution, violence, racial segregation, marginalization, classism, and all kinds of political and social injustice that the African American community experiences from the white man, who represents power, strength, and dominance. This scene demonstrates the narrator's forced isolation and deprivation of rights in a white American society that brutally denies their humanity. The narrator must accept and acknowledge his identity as a black man in the context of this conflict.

Despite the brutality of the battle and the insults the protagonist endured, the naive narrator emerges with an awareness that life is a struggle for survival. After the battle, only the *Invisible Man* and another man are left. This man beats him severely, and they are all encouraged to crawl to a mat to get their money. The mat is electrified, and they are forced to their knees to collect money while being electrocuted.

Get down around the rug now,” the man commanded, “and don't anyone touch it until I give the signal... As told, we got around the square rug on our knees. Slowly, the man raised his freckled hand as we followed it upward with our eyes (Ellison, 1952, pp. 26–27).

The black students fought each other to obtain coins, symbolising the economic situation that the African American community experienced, including racial segregation, marginalisation, inhumanity, and slavery. This economic situation forced them to fight for money, and despite the narrator's education, it did not matter to the

white men. In other words, the success of the African American man not only threatens white society but also puts the African American community at risk

2.3.3 The Blindfolds

The blindfolds in the Battle Royal scene symbolise the marginalisation and blindness imposed on African Americans, rendering them unable to see their true situation or potential. This metaphorical blindness suggests that oppression, abuse, and racial discrimination prevent them from recognising their identity and worth. The brutal treatment they endure, comparable to that of animals, reflects the dehumanising view held by the white oppressors. The stripping of their clothes and dignity and inciting them against each other further illustrate their dehumanisation, as the narrator said: "Blindfolded, I could no longer control my motions. I had no dignity. I stumbled about like a baby or a drunken man," then he said, "Streaks of blue light filled the black world behind the blindfold." (Ellison, p.22). Their inability to defend themselves or reject their treatment indicates a profound internalisation of their marginalised status, a result of long-standing oppression. This acceptance of their situation as natural underscores how systemic racism blinds individuals to the possibility of change, making them passive and resigned to their plight. (Admin, 2019)

2.3.4 The Dream

The novel features recurring imagery of the head and lines, initially presented in a circus-like context. The girl is dressed like a circus Kewpie doll, and the boys fight like animals. Eventually, the boy dreams he is at a circus with his grandfather, who refuses to laugh at the clowns. Up to this point, the boy believes he should perform to please others, but his grandfather's refusal signifies that he should not be a clown for other's amusement.

In the dream, the boy finds a briefcase with an envelope containing more envelopes instead of a scholarship. This mirrors the real briefcase, suggesting that both are designed to keep him busy and distracted. The scholarship briefcase is a tool for the white men to control him, knowing his intelligence could threaten their power. They offer him an opportunity that seems beneficial but is ultimately a way to keep him in their grasp.

Before boxing, the boys wear white blindfolds, symbolizing their ignorance of their true enemies. Instead of fighting each other, they should recognize the men in the crowd as their real oppressors. The quote which is “filled with important papers that will help shape the destiny of your people” (p.32) the quote highlights the deceptive nature of the opportunities given to them, meant to control rather than liberate.

2.4 Language and Power:

Language is a tool for communication and the human system, which is rich in imitative symbols that help people express their feelings, understand meanings, and contribute to the creation and sharing of social reality. According to Foucault (1979,) illustrated “Power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (p.92). Power carries several meanings, depending on each person and how this concept is used by those with authority. A positive concept is a responsibility to unite people for positive, while those with dominance are for corruption and spreading conflict in society. (Lenski, 1966; Sassenberg et al., 2014) Additionally language plays a significant role in power dynamics, reflecting the power of the individual, the group, and the history of society through its use. In addition to dominating and imposing influence, language also has the power to unite or divide people.

2.4.1 Language as a Tool of Domination

The language and discourse used by the white men in the story are infused with contempt and humiliation, treating the black men as inferior and less than human. This language of domination reinforces the systematic stratification and racial segregation imposed by white society, depriving black individuals of their humanity and dignity. (Abbot, 1993)

2.4.2 Examining the Societal Construct

Ellison demonstrates that language is a tool for discrimination and oppression. Through the narrator's awareness of how the white community views black people as having no identity or heritage, he experiences a profound sense of shame and self-disrespect.

The educational system further perpetuates this oppression with language and discourse that maintain racial discrimination and tyranny. Despite his education, the narrator finds himself increasingly oppressed and humiliated. Language is a means of control and dominance. When the narrator mentions "social equality" in his speech, Ellison wrote:

Social responsibility," I said. " What?" "Social... . ." "What?" they yelled. "equality" The laughter hung like smoke in the sudden stillness. I opened my eyes, puzzled. Sounds of displeasure filled the room. "Are you sure that 'equality' was a mistake?" "Oh, yes, sir," I said. "I was swallowing blood." "Well, you had better speak more slowly so we can understand. We mean to do right by you, but you've got to know your place at all times. All right, now, go on with your speech." I was afraid. I wanted to leave, but I also wanted to speak, and I was afraid they'd snatch me down. (p. 30)

This speech triggers immediate astonishment and silence among the white audience, revealing their deep-seated fears and the forbidden nature of equality in a racially stratified society. Their reaction underscores the importance of controlling language to maintain their dominance.

From the beginning of the novel, the narrator struggles with his invisibility, contending with the language imposed on him and the marginalisation that this

language brings. The inhumane treatment he endures, both physically and verbally, exemplifies the systemic racism embedded in the language used by the oppressors. Despite the physical and verbal abuse, the narrator maintains a careful adherence to educational values and proper language. However, this adherence is also a means of survival within a system designed to keep him subjugated. The scholarship he receives after his speech, although seemingly a reward, is a tool for further control, intended to guide him in a "proper direction" that aligns with white societal expectations. (Abbott, 1993)

2.4.3 The Dehumanization through Language:

Ellison uses animal imagery to highlight the racism and sexism prevalent in the story. The white men view black men as animals and white women as sex objects, dehumanising them both. The narrator's description of black people as "cattle, coons, snails, rats, seals, and dogs" reflects the white men's perception. This dehumanisation continues even after receiving the scholarship, which the narrator describes as "made of sheepskin," further emphasising the animalistic view imposed on black people. (Samuels, 1984)

Wilfred D. Samuels (1984) notes that the storyteller, despite his insights and impact, is subjected to dehumanisation and viciousness by white society. The "Battle Royal" itself could be a pondering act of corruption, constraining the youthful dark men into a brutal and mortifying exhibition for the white men's amusement. The lift, an image of isolation and equivocalness, speaks to the entanglement of these youthful men in a cycle of abuse.

The narrator's announcement, "I am an invisible man," means the significant effect of the dehumanising dialect and treatment with which he perseveres. This intangibility is both strict and metaphorical, reflecting the societal refusal to recognise humankind and character. Ellison wrote:

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe, nor am I one of your Hollywood movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance—of flesh and bone, fibre and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus side shows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me, they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me. (Ellison, 1952, p.5).

The narrator's experiences with prejudice and partiality, from his expulsion from college to his encounters in New York, help outline the unavoidable and systemic nature of racial separation. The dialect of mediocrity and dehumanisation forced by white society significantly influences the dark individual's self-perception, strengthening sentiments of marginalisation and invisibility.

2.4.4 Language and Identity:

Language is known as a tool of communication, but there is another hidden contradiction. Language is considered a social practice that determines self-identity. It also builds strength in relationships between different members of society. Black African-Americans experienced marginalisation and racial segregation under the guise of language prejudice, which is considered a manifestation of racial discrimination and marginalization. O'Neil (1998), in *The Real Ebonics Debate* (1998), explained: "That is, one can generally say the most appalling things about people's speech without fear of correction and contradiction" (p. 42).

Discrimination on the basis of language, which is a form of racism in societies that claim to be democratic but use language for prejudice, has used it as a powerful tool to monitor the boundaries of race and class and thus define identity. This is

particularly relevant to the protagonist of the novel, as he struggles to understand himself, regardless of his social status. His origins and extreme prejudices form the foundation of his identity. In language, which led to turmoil and struggle to build the identity that he struggled to search for, and in the way of defining himself and his identity, he began to struggle to display. This, in turn, led to the continued feeling of invisibility, even in expressing his self and identity, because this black man has no right to say or express his feelings, identity, or demand his rights, while the white man has the right to say whatever he wants, even if it is in harsh and horrific language. (Parmegiani et al., 2006).

I could hear the bleary voices yelling insistently for the Battle Royal to begin. "Get going in there!" "Let me at that big nigger!" I strained to pick up the school superintendent's voice, as though to squeeze some security out of that slightly more familiar sound. "Let me at those black sonsabitches!" someone yelled. "No, Jackson, no!" another voice yelled. "Here, somebody, help me hold Jack." "I want to get at that ginger-coloured nigger. Tear him limb from limb," the first voice yelled. I stood against the ropes, trembling. (Ellison,p.21)

Speech and language shape identity, which is why white people's harsh and racial discriminatory speeches ingrained in the minds of black Africans the belief that they were different and inferior to them. That's why they use the words nigger and black when he says, "The men kept yelling, "Slug him, black boy! Knock his guts out!" "Uppercut him! Kill him! Kill that big boy!" (p.23) These speeches reveal the white man's dominance, his cunning tactics to subjugate and pursue the black man, and their

belief that they don't deserve to exist or be visible. This leads to the use of harmful language, signifying racial segregation and perpetuating their ongoing internal strife.

b2.4.4 Resistance through Language

The protagonist of the novel navigates the expectations and standards of both the black community and the dominant white society. Through the narrator's experiences and the marginalisation, he faced, his sense of self is significantly affected. The author highlights how the dominant white culture silences African Americans and prevents them from expressing themselves. The narrator struggles internally with ideas he wants to voice, facing the challenge of how to communicate them to those in power. The systematic oppression of the black community complicates this process of resistance. The narrator is acutely aware of the need to combat white supremacy and assert the rights of African Americans. However, he also realises that speaking out could lead to increased violence, injustice, and marginalization. This internal conflict illustrates the complexity of resistance against oppressive forces. (Post Colonial Criticism of *Battle Royal*, 2023)

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has explored the themes of invisibility and identity, both physically and metaphorically, as experienced by black individuals, who often remain unaware of these forces. Ralph Ellison's presentation of the "Battle Royal" serves as a powerful metaphor for the domination, injustice, marginalisation, and racial segregation faced by African American communities. This analysis focused on the hidden protagonist's journey in *the* "Battle Royal", his suffering, and his quest to discover his identity and challenge the inferiority imposed by both white Americans and the black community. The protagonist's growing awareness of the necessity to resist injustice and assert his identity is central to the narrative. Additionally, the use of language and metaphor in the novel effectively conveys the harsh and complex realities of these struggles. Ellison's work underscores the ongoing struggle for visibility and recognition in a society that often refuses to see African Americans.

General Conclusion

This dissertation explored the complex connections among invisibility, identity, and language in the African American story. This study aimed to illuminate the significant influence of “Battle Royal” in the field of literature and its broader implications for American society. It does so by examining historical challenges, cultural resilience, and literary representations. Additionally, the study explores how the narrative of the “Battle Royal” challenges and transforms perceptions of race identity and social justice.

The research methodology used in this dissertation is qualitative. As a result, the primary techniques used are textual analysis and postcolonial theory. The first chapter served as a theoretical background for the beginning of African American history, from the time of the diaspora up to now, where racism and slavery are still factors in their lives. It also explored and analysed how African Americans, through their cultural and artistic performances during their struggles, stood, resisted, and affirmed themselves. and they have been produced as a response, an affirmation of one’s presence, and an affirmation of one’s living. Chapter two will involve an examination of Ralph Ellison’s “Battle Royal” in closer detail as a poignant example of dehumanisation and black marginalization. This research seeks to identify the linguistic, symbolic, and metaphorical signs of identity and invisibility in the scene through a critical analytic evaluation of the “Battle Royal.”

Thus, the findings of this dissertation confirm that invisibility is not only about the lack of physical presence but a complex social construct that excludes the voices, cultural background, and agency of people of colour. The findings show that language could be used as a domination or subversion instrument in the construction of race and self-identity. Examining the “Battle

Royal” shows how prejudice and prejudice of African Americans and the discriminative nature of society contribute to creating feelings of invisibility and isolation among people of colour.

The findings of this study help fill knowledge gaps regarding the African American experience and its discussions in present-day society. Interrogating the rhetorical construction of invisibility and identity in history and literature, this dissertation subverts hegemonic discourses and opens up areas for analysis of spatial politics from the margins. The study also highlights the significance of developing meaningful ways of acknowledging and embracing the experiences and insights of oppressed groups.

The psychological effects of invisibility should be studied comprehensively in the future, and the manner in which language and discourse influence the understanding of race and identity in modern society should be examined. Additionally, qualitative studies can explore how different marginalized groups, such as immigrants and refugees, navigate and resist social exclusion.

Thus, by continuing the research based on the findings of this dissertation, it will be possible to advance the knowledge of the multi-layered relations between invisibility, identity, and language in the context of African Americans

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ملخص

تستكشف الدراسة الحالية موضوع اختفاء هوية الأمريكيين من أصل أفريقي في المجتمع الأمريكي من خلال التحليل النقدي لكتاب رالف إليسون "المعركة الملكية". تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقديم معلومات قيمة عن النضالات التي يواجهها الأمريكيون الأفارقة السود داخل المجتمع الأمريكي العنصري . وهي تبحث في مفهوم الخفاء والهوية الذاتية من خلال توظيف التحليل النقدي للتدقيق في الهياكل العنصرية المنهجية وتصويرها في الرواية، والتي تشكل تجارب التهميش العنصري للأميركيين الأفارقة السود. يتعمق التحليل في تأثير الحركات الثقافية على سرد الرواية وموضوعاتها، كما يتضح من رحلة بطل الرواية الذي لم يذكر اسمه عبر التجارب العنصرية الاجتماعية والتهميش والتجريد من الإنسانية. استخدمت الدراسة نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار للكشف عن التحديات التي يواجهها الأمريكيون الأفارقة، موضحة تجاربهم ونضالاتهم الاجتماعية من خلال التركيز على موضوعات مثل الذات والغيرية، والخفاء، والهوية، وكذلك الرموز والصور والبنى الاجتماعية لقوة اللغة في المعركة الملكية.

تكشف الدراسة ان المعركة الملكية كانت تمثل معضلة الأمريكيين من اصل افريقي حيث تشدد على تعقيدات الهوية الامريكية الافريقية كما ان تأثير عدم المساواة العرقية يتردد صداه مع الجهود المستمرة لتحقيق المساواة الحقيقية والاعتراف.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الخفاء؛ المعركة الملكية؛ التهميش العنصري؛ نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار. التجريد من الإنسانية.