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-La structure d'un article, doit être conforme aux règles de rédaction scientifique, selon que l'article est une contribution théorique ou résulte d'une recherche de terrain.

-La structure d'un article scientifique en lettres et sciences humaines se présente comme suit :

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Introduction (justification du sujet, problématique, hypothèses/objectifs scientifiques, approche), Développement articulé, Conclusion, Bibliographie.

- Pour un article qui résulte d'une recherche de terrain :

Titre,
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Résumé en français. Mots-clés, Abstract, Keywords,
Introduction, Méthodologie, Résultats et Discussion, Conclusion, Bibliographie.
Par exemple : Les articles conformes aux normes de présentation, doivent contenir les rubriques suivantes : introduction, problématique de l'étude, méthodologie adoptée, résultats de la recherche, perspectives pour recherche, conclusions, références bibliographiques.

Tout l'article ne doit dépasser 17 pages,

Police Times new roman, taille 12 et interligne 1,5 (maximum 30 000 mots). La revue *Particip'Action* permet l'usage de notes de bas de page pour ajouter des précisions au texte. Mais afin de ne pas alourdir la lecture et d'aller à l'essentiel, il est recommandé de **faire le moins possible usage des notes (10 notes de bas de page au maximum par article).**

- A l'exception de l'introduction, de la conclusion, de la bibliographie, les articulations d'un article doivent être titrées, et numérotées par des chiffres **(exemples : 1. ; 1.1.; 1.2; 2. ; 2.2. ; 2.2.1 ; 2.2.2. ; 3. ; etc.).**

Les passages cités sont présentés en romain et entre guillemets. Lorsque la phrase citant et la citation dépassent trois lignes, il faut aller à la ligne, pour présenter la citation (interligne 1) en romain et en retrait, en diminuant la taille de police d'un point. Insérer la pagination et ne pas insérer d'information autre que le numéro de page dans l'en-tête et éviter les pieds de page.

Les figures et les tableaux doivent être intégrés au texte et présentés avec des marges d'au moins six centimètres à droite et à gauche. Les caractères dans ces figures et tableaux doivent aussi être en Times 12. Figures et tableaux doivent avoir chacun(e) un titre.

Les citations dans le corps du texte doivent être indiquées par un retrait avec tabulation 1 cm et le texte mis en taille 11.
Les références de citations sont intégrées au texte citant, selon les cas, de la façon suivante :

- (Initiale (s) du Prénom ou des Prénoms de l'auteur. Nom de l'Auteur, année de publication, pages citées) ; - Initiale (s) du Prénom ou des Prénoms de l'auteur. Nom de l'Auteur (année de publication, pages citées). Exemples :

- En effet, le but poursuivi par **M. Ascher (1998, p. 223),** est « d'élargir l'histoire des mathématiques de telle sorte qu'elle acquière une perspective multiculturelle et globale (…), d'accroitre le domaine des mathématiques : alors qu'elle s'est pour l'essentiel occupée du groupe professionnel occidental que l'on appelle les mathématiciens (…) ».

- Pour dire plus amplement ce qu'est cette capacité de la société civile, qui dans son déploiement effectif, atteste qu'elle peut porter le développement et l'histoire, S. B. Diagne (1991, p. 2) écrit :

Qu'on ne s'y trompe pas : de toute manière, les populations ont toujours su opposer à la philosophie de l'encadrement et à son volontarisme leurs propres stratégies de contournements. Celles-là, par exemple, sont lisibles dans le dynamisme, ou à tout le moins, dans la créativité dont sait preuve ce que l'on désigne sous le nom de secteur informel et à qui il faudra donner l'appellation positive d'économie populaire.

- Le philosophe ivoirien a raison, dans une certaine mesure, de lire, dans ce choc déstabilisateur, le processus du sous-développement. Ainsi qu'il le dit :

le processus du sous-développement résultant de ce choc est vécu concrètement par les populations concernées comme une crise globale : crise socio-économique (exploitation brutale, chômage permanent, exode accéléré et douloureux), mais aussi crise socio-culturelle et de civilisation traduisant une impréparation sociohistorique et une inadaptation des cultures et des comportements humains aux formes de vie imposées par les technologies étrangères. (S. Diakité, 1985, p. 105).

Pour les articles de deux ou trois auteurs, noter les initiales des prénoms, les noms et suivis de l'année (J. Batee et D. Maate, 2004 ou K. Moote, A. Pooul et E. Polim, 2000). Pour les articles ou ouvrages collectifs de plus de trois auteurs noter les initiales des prénoms, le nom du premier auteur et la mention ''et al'' (F. Loom et al, 2003). Lorsque plusieurs références sont utilisées pour la même information, celles-ci doivent être mises en ordre chronologique (R. Gool, 1998 et M. Goti, 2006).

Les sources historiques, les références d'informations orales et les notes explicatives sont numérotées en série continue et présentées en bas de page.

Références bibliographiques (obligatoire)

Les divers éléments d'une référence bibliographique sont présentés comme suit : NOM et Prénom (s) de l'auteur, Année de publication, Zone titre, Lieu de publication, Zone Editeur, pages (p.) occupées par l'article dans la revue ou l'ouvrage collectif.

Dans la zone titre, le titre d'un article est présenté en romain et entre guillemets, celui d'un ouvrage, d'un mémoire ou d'une thèse, d'un rapport, d'une revue ou d'un journal est présenté en italique. Dans la zone Editeur, on indique la Maison d'édition (pour un ouvrage), le Nom et le numéro/volume de la revue (pour un article). Au cas où un ouvrage est une traduction et/ou une réédition, il faut préciser après le titre le nom du traducteur et/ou l'édition (ex : 2nde éd.).

Ne sont présentées dans les références bibliographiques que les références des documents cités. Les références bibliographiques sont présentées par ordre alphabétique des noms d'auteur. Il convient de prêter une attention particulière à la qualité de l'expression. Le Comité scientifique de la revue se réserve le droit de réviser les textes, de demander des modifications (mineures ou majeures) ou de rejeter l'article de manière définitive ou provisoire (si des corrections majeures doivent préalablement y être apportées). L'auteur est consulté préalablement à la diffusion de son article lorsque le Comité scientifique apporte des modifications. Si les corrections ne sont pas prises en compte par l'auteur, la direction de la revue *Particip'Action* se donne le droit de ne pas publier l'article.

AMIN Samir, 1996, *Les défis de la mondialisation*, Paris, Le Harmattan.

AUDARD Cathérine, 2009, *Qu'est-ce que le libéralisme* ? *Ethique, politique, société,* Paris, Gallimard.

BERGER Gaston, 1967, *L'homme moderne et son éducation*, Paris, PUF.

DIAGNE Souleymane Bachir, 2003, « Islam et philosophie. Leçons d'une rencontre », *Diogène*, 202, p. 145-151.

DIAKITE Sidiki, 1985, *Violence technologique et développement. La question africaine du développement*, Paris, Le Harmattan.

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NB2 : La quête philosophique centrale de la revue ***Particip'Action*** reste : **Fluidité identitaire et construction du changement : approches pluri-et/ou transdisciplinaires**.

Les auteurs qui souhaitent se faire publier dans nos colonnes sont priés d'avoir cette philosophie comme fil directeur de leur réflexion.

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RETHINKING THE AFRICAN AMERICAN ANTI-RACISM STRUGGLE IN THE LIGHT OF RALPH ELLISON'S *INVISIBLE MAN*

Michel PODA[♣]
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Kodjo AFAGLA [♣]

Abstract

This study investigates the pivotal and heart-breaking issue of racism and racial relations in the United States, mainly opposing the white and black components of the nation. It shows that despite the good principles of freedom, equality and justice for which the country praises itself, on the one hand, and the long and multiform struggle against racism, on the other hand, a post-racial U.S. is nothing but a dream, as voiced Martin Luther King, Jr. in his 1963 speech in Washington (2014). This undeniably poses a challenge that this work aims to take up, relying on Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. It shows how the novel, intended as a protest novel of another kind, vividly illustrates the African American struggle for a society free of racial prejudice. Marked by many a setback constituting after all a ground for maturity and enlightenment, the story of the novel's hero offers insights for making the fight against racism effective. The subject matter being historical and sociological, the study is supported respectively by historical facts and a theoretical framework constituted of the critical race theory (CRT) and the theory of critical consciousness (CC).

Keywords: Racism, African American, prejudice, setbacks, enlightenment, Black Lives Matter Movement.

Résumé

Cette étude explore le problème crucial et poignant du racisme et relations raciales aux Etats-Unis, opposant principalement les composantes noires et blanches de la nation. Elle montre que malgré les beaux principes de liberté, d'égalité et de justice dont le pays se vante, d'une part, ainsi que

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la longue et multiforme lutte contre le racisme, d'autre part, une Amérique post-raciale demeure un rêve tel qu'exprimé par Martin Luther King Jr., dans son discours de 1963 à Washington (2014). Cela constitue incontestablement un défi que ce travail vise à relever en s'appuyant sur *Invisible Man* de Ralph Ellison. Il montre comment le roman, voulu comme un roman de protestation d'un autre genre, illustre avec force la lutte des Africains-Américains pour une société sans injustice basée sur la race. Emaillée de maints revers qui s'avèrent être un lieu de maturité et d'illumination, l'histoire du héros du roman offre des enseignements pour rendre efficace la lutte contre le racisme. Au regard de la portée historique et sociologique de la question à l'étude ici, l'étude s'appuie respectivement sur des faits historiques et sur un cadre théorique constitué de la théorie critique de la race et la conscience critique.

Mots-clés : racisme, Africain Américain, injustice, revers, illumination, Mouvement Black Lives Matter.

Introduction

Well known as a melting-pot for its diverse populations and as the founding and leading country of modern democracy, the U.S. has been wrestling across ages with the crucial issue of race relations between its white and black populations. Racism is so entrenched that it has endured through the present times despite the abolition of slavery in 1865. It outlived the Reconstruction policy, the 13th amendment, the different anti-segregation court decisions, the achievements of the Civil Rights Movement as well as those of the Black Power movement and other black protest organizations (Hall, 2005). It has persisted despite the principles of equality and human rights inscribed in the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution. Even the election of Barack Obama to the US presidency has not brought about the advent of a post-racial society. Racism has endured too long to continue plaguing the American nation and, by and large, the rest of the world.

Today, with the struggle being taken up through the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLMM) and characterized by direct actions against unending police killings, no coherent principles and slow results, it is worth asking whether the current organization will finally be more successful than the past organizations in remedying the US racial illness. Nothing is sure in this respect with violent mass protests and counter-protests occurring repetitively. Then, what principles can help provide guidance to the struggle? American fiction, through its handling of the race issue, can provide answers to this question. Black writers throughout US history have made their contribution in dealing with the phenomenon of racism. Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison are representative of writers who have extensively and strongly pictured their society grappling with racism. Ellison's masterpiece, *Invisible Man*, which depicts the invisibility of the African American in various aspects, serves here as a reference work containing lessons likely to bear relevance for today's anti-racism fighters.

With regard to the theoretical framework, this study is oriented toward an integrative or interdisciplinary approach allying American literature and American history (W. M. Davies & M. Devlin, 2010). This is due to the permeated nature of the boundary between the two as they influence each other or are two sides of the same coin: the US culture, otherwise called American studies in the academia. With its multiple facets this domain is such a fascinatingly broad area of interest that an efficient investigation requires an integrative approach. In this respect, Maddox (1999, p. vii) argues that American studies is "an academic enterprise devoted to the interdisciplinary study of American history and culture." This view is amply shared by other Americanists such as Smith (1957), Wise (1979) and Rowe (2002), to name but a few. In these forerunners' trail, Afagla and Poda (2024) have voiced for moving out of the perpetuation of

multidisciplinary or separate approach in favor of interdisciplinarity, viewed by Klein (1990, p. 95) as a "'catalyst' for moving past bias, distortion and insularity". In the same vein, it is worth noting that the topic of the present discussion does not allow any other choice but the integrative approach, given that many of the fictional characters and events are reflections of historical figures or facts. Besides, as remarks Baldwin (1955, p. xvii), "I don't think that the Negro problem in America can be even discussed coherently without bearing in mind its context; its context being the history, traditions, customs, the moral assumptions and preoccupations of the country; in short, the general social fabric".

On the other hand, for a deep understanding of the phenomenon of racism in the United States, necessary for working out an effective strategy, this discussion, in addition to drawing on insights from the novel, relies on critical tools such as critical race theory (CRT) and critical consciousness (CC). CRT closely examines the concepts of race and racism, thus showing that they are fundamentally based on subjectivism, misjudgments and unjustified considerations, in which race stands as a social construct, to trust Macklin (July 2021, n. p.):

> CRT is a practice of interrogating race and racism in society and the ways in which it impacts people. CRT emphasizes race as a social construct (a classification system developed by society that can change over time, rather than fixed biological categories) with social significance, not a biological reality. It acknowledges that racism is embedded within systems and institutions that replicate racial inequality — codified in law, embedded in structures, and woven into public policy.

In the same vein, Critical Consciousness (CC) which emanates from Freire's work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, holds that the exploitative and oppressive marginalization of a social category by another dehumanizes man, not only the oppressed but also the oppressor. It therefore promotes critical thinking so as to get a clear understanding of the situation of oppression of which one is victim, and subsequently invites one to take up

their responsibility in favor of a critical engagement to humanize society. In Freire's (1993, p. 40) words, this impels to create "a world in which it will be easier to love". In other words, as explicates Shaull (1993, p. 32), CC assigns man the ontological vocation "to be a Subject who acts upon and transforms his world [rather than being an Object], and in so doing moves toward ever new possibilities of fuller and richer life individually and collectively".

The discussion firstly shows how Ellison's novel is a fictional echo of the historical struggle, then investigates, in a second section, the insights from the novel for providing guidance to today's struggle. This section which constitutes the central interest of the discussion is divided into three subsections, dealing with the need for a change in strategy, the need for enlightenment and the need for a critical action.

1. *Invisible Man* as a Fictional Echo of Black Struggle against Racism

Invisible Man is undeniably in the vein of the Black struggle for a society rid of anti-black racism, a long struggle which dates back to the days of slavery. This novel belongs to the category of protest novel in African American literature, as testifies Vogler's article "*Invisible Man*: Somebody's Protest Novel". However, its author claims to intend it somehow different from the previous trend. This will be discussed in the second section.

The novel navigates from backward South to urban North, from slavery to the days of post-war black militantism, epitomized by the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) from the 1930s or 1950s to the 1970s[5] via the Black Freedom Struggle (BFS) during and after the Reconstruction period,

[5] Traditionally, the historiography of the Black Fight Movement (BFM) treats the CRM and the Black Power (BP) as separate eras, whereas some scholars, such as Hall (2003), are stressing a long CRM theory. They claim that scholars should regard the CRM as an uninterrupted movement stretching from the 1930s to the 1970s.

from school to work area, revealing the different facts of the African American condition (J. D. Hall, 2005, pp. 1233-1263). It features a promising young hero who introduces himself as an invisible man, due to people's refusal to see him or their failure to see him because of "a peculiar disposition of their [inner] eyes" (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 3). He is endowed with striking intellectual potential as well as physical and mental strength for taking up challenges in his way.

Born in the South of the United States, some years after the Reconstruction attempt, and therefore a descendant of former slaves, he is driven by a legitimate dream to change his destiny so as to be a full American citizen, and by rising up, to bring about for the advancement of the entire black race. In this perspective, he quickly begins to make history as early as in his teenage, at secondary school. He is introduced in the opening chapter as a remarkably eloquent apprentice spokesman who "knows more big words than a pocket-sized dictionary" (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 29). In addition, he appears as someone with an extraordinary fighting spirit which makes him come up second in the fierce battle royal he is forced into, and, at the close of which, he shows infallible perseverance to deliver his speech despite physical and moral discomfort (R. Ellison, 1947, pp. 29-31). His combative nature is more moral than physical, though. His driving force, beyond the possibility of obtaining a scholarship to college on the occasion, is undoubtedly constituted by the objective to uplift himself and his race which has come out of slavery and still keeps traces of marginalization and inferiority in comparison with the white race. In this respect, he takes the 19th-century successful black leader who marked the Reconstruction period, Booker T. Washington, as his role model: "I visualized myself as a potential Booker T. Washington" (R. Ellison, 1947, pp. 17-18). Adhering to his model's vision which after all is portrayed as naïve and despicable, at the service of personal interest merged with the

dominating white man's (Dubois, 1903a, Fischer, 1974, p. 349), he considers black humility to be "the secret, indeed, the very essence of progress" for the black race (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 17).

But after this first achievement, the remarkable completion of secondary education, which distinguished him to the public, it does not take long for him to meet with setbacks. His passage to college is suddenly interrupted in its third year by the severity of his college's president, Dr. Bledsoe, who punishes him for an "unpardonable fault." In fact, he just followed the instruction of one of the school's white trustees, Mr. Norton, whom he was asked to take on sightseeing, and he drove him to a black neighborhood of ill-repute. The tour happened to be stained with the discovery of a case of incest in a poor sharecropper's family, and that of an infamous tavern, ironically called Golden Day, where the trustee was unfriendly treated. Fearing that such incidents should damage the image that he wants for the college, Dr. Bledsoe decides to expel him.

Confronted to the unjust punishment, and mostly the president's hidden nastiness, he stands straight against him, threatening to disclose his despicable personality. With this case, he reveals his readiness to fight against the injustice he is being victim of and the duplicity that his victimizing college president embodies. But the latter outwits him with false promises to help him get a job in New York with letters of recommendation by him addressed to the college's trustees in this city. Thus, the hero flatters himself that with the savings from the job that he will be offered, he will be allowed to return to the college to resume his studies.

Moving out of his native South to New York is metaphorically presented as jumping "out the fire into the melting pot" (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 150), according to a remark made by an allegedly psychologically-disturbed war veteran to the hero. No sooner has he arrived in New York than he discovers that the so-called recommendation letters instruct the addressees

"to help him continue in the direction of that promise [of being re-admitted to the college], which like the horizon, recedes ever brightly and distantly beyond the hopeful traveler" (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 187). This message resonates with the deceitful scheme he was warned against in a dream following the awarding of the scholarship previously: "Keep this Nigger-Boy Running" (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 33). Crushed down at that discovery, he therefore resolves to take vengeance over this "crude joke" against Dr. Bledsoe and his associates in the system of oppression. Thus, like the black activists of the past and the present, he positions himself as an intrepid and vengeful fighter against prejudice of all kinds likely to block his progress or that of his race. But does he have the means for his vengeance? In fact, he is heading to further delusions.

The harsh reality of the system still prevails in his way. Faced with financial difficulties, he has no alternative but accept a job offer in a paint factory called "Liberty Paints", owned by one such associate, Mr. Emerson. As from his first day of work there, he meets with the hard facts of the industrial world, under the dominance of the white man, and ends up entering in a brawl with Mr. Brockway, an experienced yet lowly educated black laborer, blindly dedicated to the prosperity of the white firm, who is prejudiced against educated workers and trade unionists in whom he sees potential threats to his job. Being wrongly accused and attacked by Mr. Brockway for attending a meeting held by the factory union, the hero clashes with him regardless of the consideration that he deserves, owing to his age, his position as coach, and regardless of the race bond. An explosion of a boiler during the brawl brutally terminates his dream to find a way out in the urban industrial field. Still worse, the accident provides an opportunity to the white doctors in charge of him at the factory hospital to attempt shaping his mind or identity according to their racial stereotypes.

Not having fully recovered from the traumatizing experience at "Liberty Paints", he finds himself on another ground of the combat. Coming across a pitiful case of eviction of an elderly black couple from their apartment in winter, the invisible man realizes that he has a historical role to play in this situation of racial prejudice. He spontaneously becomes the spokesperson among the outraged crowd to meet the need of a leader, a role that he has dreamt about since school, as pointed out above. Upon his address stressing the dispossession of the black race, the crowd put the couple's belongings back into the apartment and go further to envision a protest march. But their daring action is immediately interrupted by a police intervention, and the hero has to manage to escape.

Again, if the hero's attempt to make history does not go far, he nevertheless appears as a quite noticeable character to the extent of drawing the admiration of two seemingly friendly white people, a woman and her companion Jack, the leader of a mixed militant organization named "the Brotherhood, which is the embodiment of the American Communist Party, of which Ellison himself as well as W.E.B. Dubois were members, according to Fischer (1974, p.359). "History has been born in your brain" (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 285), Jack draws his attention. In view of his capacity to transform individual indignations into an organized one, and violation of the law into political action (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 287), the leader of "the Brotherhood" is immediately interested in having him as a speaker in his organization, which pretends to fight for the cause of the underprivileged, and to that respect needs "Someone who can articulate the grievances of the people" (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 285). Hired as the organization's spokesperson in charge of the district of Harlem, then of the "Woman question", he ends up adhering fully to the Brotherhood's alleged philosophy, with the conviction that it is the ideal place to be to bring about a change in the course of history. Consequently, he invests his talent and energy, as a reborn

man, to make the organization win success after success. But his last and top case of disillusioning racial prejudice soon occurs. The efficiency of his actions incurs him the jealousy of some of the white leaders driven by hidden motives, on the one hand, and the hostility of a rival all-black organization headed by an uncompromising leader called Ras, on the other hand. Actually, Fischer (1974, p. 363) views Ras as the embodiment of Marcus Garvey. Indeed, like the latter, he is originally from the West Indies and distinguishes himself as an avant-gardist fighter of the US racism. The situation thus depicted is in resonance with the rivalries, dissentions over strategies which have marked the anti-racist struggle. An incomprehensible change in the policy of the Brotherhood, revealing its disinterest toward the black Harlemites' conditions, brings about its members' demoralization. In other words, the Brotherhood's leaders have come to show another face of the organization, which now appears, in the name of some pseudo-scientific principles, to be bent on betraying its Harlem members who still believe in their rhetoric. At the same time, the invisible man realizes that he is being used as a pawn by the organization whose white leaders are maneuvering to keep him away from the ruling committee.

Thus, betrayed by the Brotherhood's staff, he still finds energy in his unswerving commitment to racial equality to organize alone the funerals of a former member of the Brotherhood, who was probably driven by disappointment to quit the organization and took to selling anti-Negro dolls, which incurred his rejection as a traitor by the Brotherhood leaders. His killing by a white policeman did not move them at all as a case of racism-tainted police brutality worth the concern, or as if his life as a human being's didn't matter, for "he died like any dog in a road" (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 446). It goes without saying that this point resonates with what is at the center of the BLMM: police brutality against Blacks.

Although the funerals are marked by the mobilization of a huge crowd of mourners, the Brotherhood does not seize this opportunity to reconcile with its Harlem branch nor acknowledge that once again history is made thanks to its spokesperson, the invisible man. Instead, it shows anger and disapproval against the latter.

In his attempt to reason the leaders, the invisible man is clearly told that he is hired to speak and not think about what is right for the organization to do (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 458). Thus, it becomes evident to him that the leader Jack and other white collaborators personify white paternalism or supremacy. Simultaneously, he discovers that Jack is ironically a one-eyed man. This being the case, he sees his hard work annihilated and his dream of securing racial equality in his society vanishes, as Harlem is turned into chaos under the influence of Ras, the leader of the all-black organization, an embodiment of Black Power of the 1960s-1970s. An event which is reminiscent of the Harlem riots of March 1935 and August 1943 as is recorded by Fischer (1974, p. 365).

In sum, for the hero of *Invisible Man,* making history turns out to be a rather complex task, involving personal and collective cases of racial prejudice, overt and hidden ones. After being impeded by many setbacks to reach the goal to which he commits himself out of conviction and sensitivity, he experiences with the Brotherhood a topmost disillusionment. Likewise, to this day, despite the determination of the BLMM to carry on the anti-racism struggle for changing the course of history in the United States, the result is below expectation, with history keeping repeating itself with setbacks and disillusionments.

2. Insights from the Invisible Man for Today's Struggle against Racism

Given the documentary-like portrayal of the invisible man's struggle, some insights can be drawn from the novel to guide today's fight against

racism, spearheaded by the BLMM. With the repetitive adverse turn of affairs having harshly tested the hero up to bringing him to maturity and clairvoyance, it follows that today's anti-racism fighters must benefit from the lessons that the novel offers, which constitute the substance of the following sub-sections.

2.1. The Need for a New Strategy

If *Invisible Man* can be ranked in the category of protest novel, it is intended to differ from the then trend. By the author's own admission, he tried his best "to avoid writing what might turn out to be nothing more than another novel of racial protest instead of *the dramatic study in comparative humanity* which I felt any worthwhile novel should be" (R. Ellison, 1947, p. xv, our italics). In other words, the novel is intended to make up for the limitations either in the application of the US democracy or in the past struggle experiences, and in so doing the novelist envisions the future with new possibilities likely to give the ideal of racial equality a chance of becoming a reality. In sum, it is a matter of keeping the multiracial nation afloat, as inspired by the image of Mark Twain's Huck and Jim on their raft that Ellison cites (R. Ellison, 1947, p. xvii).

Therefore, in the wake of the author and relying on the clues provided in the story, this discussion intends to go beyond subjectivism, bias and passion to explore the possibilities of articulating the difficult inter-racial relations in the United States.

Having met with resounding setbacks and being eventually shut up in a manhole symbolizing his marginalization, the invisible man clearly realizes the limitation confronted by his ambition to change the *status quo* in the US racial relations. But he does not definitely give up the struggle, though. Being confined in the hole, he avails himself a time of reflection, drawing lessons from his failed experiences and envisioning how the

struggle must be continued. In this respect, the prologue and epilogue, which function in continuum, contain, in a great part, insights to enlighten the BLMM and the whole African American community in their struggle.

First of all, the unnamed hero, in the light of his experience, has come to realize that spontaneous retaliation to racial prejudice out of outrage and hatred is not only unproductive but also carries uncontrollable consequences. Although a logical and ordinary reaction, he contends that it needs to be reconsidered:

> It's when you feel like [your existence is denied or you are reduced to a ghost], out of resentment, you begin to bump people back. […]. You ache with the need to convince yourself that you do exist in the real world, that you're a part of all the sound and anguish, and you strike out with your fist, you curse and you swear to make them recognize you. And, alas, it's seldom successful (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 4).

Passionate protest is seldom successful because racism is so rooted in white consciousness and in the entire national system that Whites do not realize any wrongdoing in their negative attitude toward Blacks. Thus, despite severe beatings of and threats to the white man who bumped into him, the invisible man in the Prologue absolutely fails to obtain any apology from him. He fails because, as observe Delgado and Stefancic (2001, p. 7), "[the] system of white-over-color ascendency serves important purposes, both psychic and material", which makes racism "difficult to cure or address". In other words, the white supremacy over Blacks, as stresses Bhopal (2023), is a privilege that Whites can never give up.

Furthermore, if racism seems to have receded, it is only in its overt and blatant forms, but continues to prevail in subtle forms, and policy-making is no other than whitewashing, as comments Bhopal (2023, p. 116): "In reality, policy making gives the illusion that inequalities have been addressed, but racism continues with such policies having little or no effect". In this situation, racism appears as a granite block unlikely to be

affected by violent protest. Congruent with this, the invisible man in his itinerary avoids physical retaliation: "Most of the time […] I am not so overtly violent" (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 5), he reassures, thus calling for restraint and sensibility. This call is echoed by Frank (2011) in his article entitled "James Baldwin's *Everybody's Protest Novel*: Educating our Responses to Racism".

Viewed as dangerous sleepwalkers by the invisible man (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 5), white racists' reaction can be disproportionate to any threat, causing a destructive escalation of violence, or they can manipulate information in such a way as to reverse the blame or the culpability on their victims. That is the very thing which has been happening to the BLM activists or the CRT ones. When victims of police brutality, they are currently presented as the criminals while their white murderers are cleared of any offense. Likewise, these black activists are accused of practicing anti-white racism. In this way, their combat for racial equality is thwarted with bans, imprisonments, fines and killings. In "Violence against Black Lives Matter: a Review", Chaudhary and Richardson Jr (2022, p. 96) observe that "The use of force manifested by police and right-wing groups against BLM protestors resulted in significant injury and mortality."

With the realization that violent protest leads to little progress in the struggle for a humanized American society, the invisible man has come to opt for a new strategy. He takes the time to delve into the phenomenon of racism and its subsequent effect of black invisibility at issue in the novel, for a better understanding of the case.

2.2. Need for Enlightening the Invisibility of the African American

Shedding light on the invisibility of the African American is central for a well-thought contribution to the struggle. The hero, as a representative of the African American, is corned and secluded in an abandoned basement

at the outskirts of Harlem, which consecrates his invisibility in the American society. Only after his painful experiences does he discover that invisibility, though. This metaphorical setting provides the contours of the story, definitely tying its beginning and its end altogether, namely in the forms of prologue and epilogue. In the underground dwelling where he is shut up, his reaction consists in illuminating the darkness of his invisibility by burning the objects of his past disillusions that he carries in his briefcase: the high school diploma, the Sambo doll, the envelop containing his Brotherhood name, Jack's anonymous letter (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 555). Referred to as "clues of his identity or Ego" (Vogler, 1970, p. 65), all of these acts brought the invisible man to attain "an understanding of his condition only by confronting and casting aside the illusions of his past," according to Fischer (1974, p. 367). This being done, he goes into what he calls "hibernation", which is, in fact, a time for pondering over the ontological questions he faces, in preparation of an adequate action, with the conviction that "there's nothing like isolating a man to make him think" (R. Ellison, p. 548). Having derived from this experience a full awareness of his invisibility, the hero is engaged in a discrete fight against the Monopolated Light and Power Company whose oppression he has suffered from for so long. This act, which consists in tapping current into his dwelling, is regarded as a subversive act of resistance against the oppressive system guaranteeing the privileged status to white Americans. The aim attuned to this act of resistance is naturally to explore a possibility of liberation from the oppressive system. This power company clearly emphasizes whiteness and the supremacy associated with it: White is both light and power. It is a whole ideology so well kept in control, from which Blacks have been kept away. This ideology is relayed by the mottos of Liberty Paints, such as "keep America pure with Liberty paints" (R. Ellison, 1947, p.192), or "If It's Optic White, It is the Right White" (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 213), the capitalization stressing the supremacy attributed to the white race. By this

act of resistance, the hero refuses to be indefinitely relegated to darkness or "the heart of darkness" (1899/2010), as Conrad views it. Therefore, he undertakes to illuminate his invisibility and naturally the system at the basis of it, using his own ways or intelligence.

It so works that the investigation or experience of blackness is here a source of light and empowerment, not only for him but for others too. This assertion is reinforced by Mills's (2013, p. 32) "An Illuminating Blackness":

> In the prologue to Ellison's novel, the nameless black narrator […] tells us: "I've illuminated the blackness of my visibility and vice versa." But the illumination that he has attained over the novel's quest […] has been achieved despite, not with the help of the Jim Crowed white power source, represented by Monopolated [Light and Power] and its attempted totalitarian control of his vision. Whiteness is constructed not by inclusion of other colors but by their official exclusion, "an Optic White" for "Keeping America Pure," even if an unacknowledged black base lies at the heart of its purity.

The ideology of White supremacy with its corollary of racial prejudice which makes the black man invisible by denying "the black base […] at the heart of its purity" needs to be tapped into and its certainties deconstructed. This is quite in line with Dubois's ideology of the Talented Tenth, translating Dubois's belief in the power of higher education to generate a critical number of African American intellectuals (ten per cent) likely to challenge the foundations of the race-based system (Dubois, 1903b). In this regard, the hero shows an acute thirst for acquiring as much knowledge as possible (as testify the 1639 light bulbs used for the lightening of his hole) and he develops ingenuity in constructing his own epistemological patterns. Thus, with the help of set sound systems that enable him to plunge into the universe of jazz music and by this way into his past to appropriate what makes up his identity and that of his community, namely the black skin color and the destiny associated with it, the dark history which has its roots in slavery. He has come to the realization that only through enlightenment

can he give form to his invisibility: "Light confirms my reality, gives birth to my form" (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 6). In the same vein of immersion in his past stock, he gets to learn about unfulfilled promises of freedom made by the slave-owner (or simply the white man) who holds the reins of the socio-political system. Such unfulfilled promises of the remote past, relayed by those of the US democracy, account for an ambiguous nature of freedom in the US context, which fosters confusing race relations or permanent tensions between Blacks and Whites. This is vividly illustrated in the episode of the hero's virtual encounter with a mulatto slave family through the effect of jazz and drug. In this episode, the children boil with hatred against their white father whereas their naïve mother is torn between love and hatred toward her children's father whose promise of liberty never comes true.

Enlightened in a harsh manner by the setbacks encountered in his itinerary together with the process of the hibernation-produced enlightenment about his invisibility and the baffling US social environment, the invisible man realizes that he has a historical role to play in the sense of finding a way out of the racial plight. This is quite in congruence with what his community expects from him, as illustrates Mary: "Mary reminded me constantly that something was expected of me, some act of leadership, some newsworthy achievement" (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 252). Thus, he embodies a "thinker-tinker" (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 7), that is, someone who is devoted to putting his intelligence and energy on exploring possible ways to the complex and absurd reality that he faces. A way out of the dehumanizing system must be found and implemented appropriately.

2.3. The need for critical action

The hero of *Invisible Man* puts in action critical thinking not only to attain the consciousness of his invisibility but also to figure out the implied action to follow. In this respect, he acts as a perfect precursor of Freire's

(1993) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which emphasizes this procedure. As expounded in the epilogue which is a continuation of the prologue, itself a postscript, critical thinking has enabled the invisible man to come up with vibrant observations to streamline the action for change. Such observations bear undeniable relevance for today's anti-racism struggle led by the BLMM whose demonstrations, though drawing attention about the US racial inequalities, show little concern for having critical reflection or ideology precede action, due to their spontaneous and conglomerate nature associated with mass effect.

Violent protest is absurd with its only effect being escalation of destructive violence with the winner, if there is any, gaining nothing at the end. Worse, and it is unfortunately what is commonplace in this kind of confrontation, as observes the invisible man: "It's 'the winner take [sic] nothing' which is the great truth of our country and any country" (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 564). An apt example of this absurdity of the violent approach is demonstrated in chapter 25 through the riot spurred on by Ras. As such, it is far from offering solution to dehumanization, a view which is in line with Freire's perception. For Freire (1993, p. 45), the struggle for liberation from oppression being a fight against dehumanization, the oppressed like the African Americans must refrain the impulse to strike back out of hatred and become in turn oppressors, perpetuating the process of dehumanization. With their purpose being the humanization of society and being prepared for critical action through critical awareness, the oppressed Blacks are expected to enter history as responsible subjects, devoid of any fanaticism. Freire (1993, p. 36) makes it clear in his Preface: "In fact, however, *concientizaçao* [another term for Critical consciousness] does not lead people to 'destructive fanaticism'. On the contrary, by making it possible for people to enter the historical process as responsible Subjects,

concientizaçao enrolls them in search of self-affirmation and thus avoids fanaticism."

In accordance with this attitude, the invisible man rejects Ras's fanatical perspective and witnesses with dismay the destructive riot organized under Ras's instigation against those whose cause he pretends to defend. Thus manipulated, the rioters set fire to their own flats to protest against housing discrimination. This is certainly a metaphor about the adverse effect of what is termed anti-white racism, which cannot but make things worse for Blacks.

In keeping with this philosophy, his critical thinking brings him back to his grandfather's deathbed will appealing to carrying on the struggle by "yessing" the white enemy to destruction. After viewing it as a riddle or a curse which haunted him for long, he finally deciphers it during his hibernation in the underground, arguing that the advice calls for something else than mere destructive violence. For him, "agree'em to death" cannot be taken at surface value, but rather deeply. Rather than a call for vindication against, or subservience to the oppressors, it is very likely an appeal for attachment to the principle that binds Americans in one nation, one humanity: "[…] hell, he *must* have meant the principle, that we were to affirm, on which the country was built and not the men, or at least not the men who did violence (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 561, italics in original).

By this interpretation, he implies that the attachment to the principle of democracy held in favor of the revolution against the oppressive colonizer and laid down in the Constitution represents the chance for avoiding the absurdity of a systematic destruction of all. Is democracy not said to be the least bad of all the existing political systems? With the conviction that the fate of the American nation is to be one in diversity, and that the interest of African Americans is in no other thing than the democratic principle, he presumes that his grandfather's deathbed words

assign his descendants the responsibility of saving the country from chaos: "Or did he mean that we had to take the responsibility for all of it, for the men as well as the principle, […] because we, with the given circumstance of our origin, could only thus find transcendence?" (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 561). The capacity of transcendence by African Americans is, according to him, grounded in this fact: "we are older than they, in the sense of what it took to live in the world with others and because they had exhausted in us, some – not much, but some – of the human greed and smallness, yes and the fear and superstition that had kept them running" (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 561). As a matter of fact, the white oppressors, driven by their greed of owning the world and its possessions, haunted by their fear of the other races, have lost any sense of sociability and are simply dehumanizing themselves and unknowingly bringing their nation to disaster. Therefore, the African American must avoid replicating the white man's manners. He must learn to control his outrage, and thus avoid making things worse rather than remedying them. At the same time, this point calls for vigilance regarding any support to the struggle offered by white allies, whose detachment is not absolute and therefore may consciously or unconsciously betray the struggle, as is the case in the Brotherhood. In this regard, Freire (1993, p. 45) warns against "lovelessness clothed in false generosity".

The vision that the responsibility for bringing about a positive change rests on the oppressed is shared by Freire once more, for the good reason that this category knows better than the other one what oppression is all about, and, consequently, has a clear idea of what the liberation aimed at: "Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation?", rhetorically questions Freire (1993, p. 45)

This being the case, there is no denying that the BLMM, like the previous movements, is assuming its historical responsibility to bring about a change. However, either the insight acquired by the invisible man, or Freire's theory, insists on a responsible struggle, that is, a struggle requiring moral maturity, caution and readiness to acknowledge one's share of the blame. "Freedom is acquired by conquest […] It must be pursued constantly and responsibly", says Freire (1993, p. 47), which echoes this observation in *Invisible Man* (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 562; italics in original):

> I am not blaming anyone […], nor merely crying my *mea culpa*. The fact is that you carry part of your sickness within you, at least I do as an invisible man. I carried my sickness and though for a long time I tried to place it in the outside world, the attempt to write it down shows me that at least half of it lay within me. […] You go along for years knowing something is wrong, then suddenly you discover that you're transparent as air. At first you tell yourself that it's all a dirty joke, or that it is due to the "political situation". But deep down you come to suspect that you're yourself to blame […] *That* is the real soul sickness […]

This point is very essential in the fight against racism, yet, deplorably enough, it is currently ignored. The persistence of racism undeniably testifies to soul sickness, not only in the white man but also in the black man. Even in our modern time, the white man does not see the black man, not so much because of conscious refusal, but much more because of the way he has been mentally conditioned. As observes the invisible man, it is due to "a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of construction of their inner eyes" (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 3), an observation consistent with the point made earlier in relation to CRT: racism is ordinary and not aberrational to white racists. In addition, he remarks that they are "sleepwalkers" (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 5). In the episode of the night confrontation between the invisible man and his blond bumper narrated in the prologue, while the invisible man was hysterically dealing with his adversary, he is suddenly brought to this fact: "it occurred to me that the man had not seen me, actually; that he, as far as

he knew, was in the midst of a walking nightmare" (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 4). This being the case about the black man's offender, the former is expected to make the difference by showing maturity and better understanding. Otherwise, he belittles himself by failing to act in a responsible manner. That is what the invisible man comes to feel after assaulting his adversary without self-restraint up to nearly killing him: "He lay there, moaning on the asphalt; a man almost killed by a phantom. It unnerved me. I was both disgusted and ashamed. I was like a drunken man myself, wavering about on weakened legs" (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 4).

In addition to that, it is reasonable for the black man to be cautious to avoid useless uncontrollable confrontations, given that the other party is dangerous in their sleepwalking: "Sometimes, it is best not to awaken them; there are few things in the world as dangerous as sleepwalkers" (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 5). Acting in such a way as to arouse their enmity in reproducing racism will definitely make things worse for the black man.

The resounding BLMM protests against deadly police violence and impunity granted to the killers currently take the form of riots and widespread unrest. For instance, Taylor's report on "George Floyd Protests: A Timeline" in the 28th issue of *The New York Times* of November 5, 2021 is telling:

> After the death of George Floyd on May 25, protests and unrest have rocked Minneapolis and other cities. In cities across the United States, tens of thousands of people have swarmed the streets to express their outrage and sorrow during the day. That has descended into nights of unrest, with reports of shootings, looting and vandalism in some cities.

These protests reached the point of being viewed by Minneapolis Mayor as "domestic terrorism", sparking white supremacists' counter-attacks, and, still more, entailing an uncompromising attitude from President Trump who called the protesters "thugs", worth being handled immediately with the

National Guard. In the same vein, according to Gallagher et al. (20 May 2017, n. p.), the BLMM has brought about the emergence of counter-protest hashtags such as # AllLivesMatter, #PoliceLivesmatter or #BlueLives Matter.

This comes to arguing that African Americans cannot forcibly change the racist white man, but they can positively change their attitude toward the latter, by being careful about their own deeds. They cannot make the white man change, for there is ample evidence showing that despite changes in the laws and institutions, racism continues to prevail in a subtle form, known as micro-racism. In this regard, Bivens (2005, p. 44) observes:

> Practically speaking, people of color cannot force white people to notice, acknowledge or dismantle racism and the white privilege that results from it. Nor can we continually monitor and check up on their progress. For one thing, a great deal of what happens to hold racism and white privilege in place goes on out of the purview of peoples [sic] of color.

Likewise, black men like Dr Bledsoe or Brockway who embody internalized racism, defined by Bivens (2005, pp. 45-46) as an attitude of closeness with the oppressing white man for personal reward, do nothing else but perpetuate the racist system of which their racial group is victim.

In view of what precedes, the invisible man appeals to laying down one's feeling in writing, viewed as an appropriate action choice, better than street violence and inaction, so as to make a responsible and enduring impact: "Here I've set out to throw my anger into the world's face […] The very act of trying to put it all down has confused me and negated some of the anger and some of the bitterness" (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 566).

It is noteworthy to point out that jazz music is very inspirational to him in the writing down of his feelings in the form of this novel. It can be assumed, then, that the invisible man recommends cultural protest rather than street protest. It is in this line that in the lucid intervals preparing him to the full consciousness of his invisibility, he intervenes to refrain the angry

crowd from assaulting the law enforcement officers during the eviction of the elderly black couple. Likewise, he shuns from confrontation with the black nationalist Ras and his gang to the point of disguising himself. Better still, faced with the apocalyptic night riot ravaging Harlem, headed by Ras, but treacherously planned by the Brotherhood in fact, he tried to warn Ras and his followers against being victims of a trick to "keep blacks running", which is being fueled with in-group destructive hatred. All of this manipulation will benefit but the dehumanizing system instituted by the white man. His warning being ignored and with Ras opting to lynch him as his deadly enemy, he is compelled in the last resort to act in self-defense and in refusal of an absurd death that will bring about no benefit to the black cause. With Ras's own spear which missed him, he pierces Ras's jaws and takes to running to escape his lynching fate (R. Ellison, 1947, p. 547). In so acting he demonstrates shrewdness salutary for an effective continuation of the struggle.

Conclusion

This discussion has revealed the challenging and multidimensional nature of what is termed the "Negro problem" in the US context. Indeed, its persistence constitutes a big challenge and its complex nature is revealing of its broad scope. Therefore, as points out Baldwin (1955, p. 67), one must admit "the essential centrality of the Black problem to any adequate view of American society". It is central across time as testifies the long anti-racist struggle, central in requiring an interdisciplinary approach. In this respect, the discussion has shown that the sections of history or civilization and literature can be associated to appropriately investigate the problem. On the other hand, the discussion has demonstrated that *Invisible Man*, written in mid-twentieth century, is worth interest today in the twenty-first century, for as remarks the invisible man in his last sentence of the Epilogue, "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" (R. Ellison,

1947, p. 568). It is evident that the pronoun *you* potentially includes today's reader. As such, the novel contains insights which can illuminate the American anti-racism struggle spearheaded by the BLMM. Among these insights for effectiveness are the need for a change in strategy, the need for critical thinking and critical action in dealing with the issue. All in all, *Invisible Man*, as holds Vogler (1970, p. 80), offers a chance for avoiding the chaos: "*Invisible Man* is clearly a prelude and a preparation to something like redemption".

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