Journal Homepage: - www.journalijar.com
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)
Article DOI: 10.21474/IJAR01/2896
DOI URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/2896
ISSN NO. 2320-5407

RESEARCH ARTICLE

"THERE IS MORE TO THE WORLD THAN ONE PLUS ONE": EXPLORING THE PROCESS OF SELF-ACTUALIZATION IN WALTER MOSLEY'S *THE MAN IN MY BASEMENT.*

N'guessan Koffi Eugene.
Alassane Ouattara University.

Manuscript Info

Manuscript History

Received: 23 November 2016
Final Accepted: 25 December 2016
Published: January 2017

Key words:-
Self, identity, distortion, mask, syndrome of invisibility, imprisonment, self-discovery, cultural heritage.

Abstract

In The Man in My Basement, Walter Mosley attempts to analyze the depths of the psychodynamic consequences of prejudice. The novel symbolizes the troubled self of the individual black American, who has to reject the given masks imposed on him by whites and see himself as an autonomous individual.With the tropes of masking (concealment) and unmasking (revelation), this paper discusses the cultural and identity distortion of the African American and focuses on the process of his self-actualization through an operation for a cultural amendment in order to secure his subjectivity. The itinerary of this emerging self or regeneration constitutes the kernel of this paper.

Copy Right, IJAR, 2016,. All rights reserved.

Introduction:-

The history of African Americans is the history of a marginalized people with fragmented identities. The contemporary writing perspectives by African Americans are imbued with counter discourses that strategically reverse sail in order to bring an amendment to history. Walter Mosley's *The Man in My Basement* is no exception. It specifically focuses on cultural amendment in the African American individual character as a step towards self-actualization.

In *The Man in My Basement*, Walter Mosley explores race and identity, and attempts to rewrite black identity into existence. Through a personal crusade, which highly articulates the "two-ness" of African Americans, the author first poses a black identity that hides behind the mask (the liar), and then proposes to "find ourselves" by "wearing the mask." Thus, the novel examines the African American conflict between his desire for a private individual and his social responsibility, his inner struggle and tensions for a subjective self.

The major concern of this paper is to explore African American identity, focusing on the dialectic of the mask: between self-concealment and self-revelation. More specifically, I explore the process of self-actualization; first by articulating the existential and fragmented experience of the "man in the basement" focusing on the syndrome of invisibility, and then by framing the way the novel deconstructs this invisibility syndrome for an autonomous and authentic identity. The two sequences above constitute the framework of this paper.

External and Internalized Racism: Distortion of Identity:-

As Anderson Franklin and Nancy Boyd-Franklin (2000) point out, "Racial identity is a central facet in the African Americans' development of their worldview." (34) In *The Man in My Basement*, Walter Mosley uses the mask to reveal the difficulty in fully articulating a black self . In both a literal and an abstract sense, the mask plays a

Corresponding Author:- N'guessan Koffi Eugene.
Address:- Alassane Ouattara University.

significant role within the narrative. It is a social mask, which corresponds to conscious knowledge. What it hides is the true self, the unconscious self that is hidden behind the mask. Black people indeed, become recognizable only when they suppress their real self and conform to emasculating parodies of the white man's self-contradictory image of them.

Positing the mask as an important trope of African American identity, the concept of self-projection and perception by the others, we can hypothesize that Charles Blakey, the main character epitomizes African American dual self, an incomplete self-seeking integration into the social fabric. In order to understand this existential individual, it is pertinent that we see this being from the dual perspective of the mask: concealment and revelation. Put otherwise, what does it hide? What does it reveal?

The first use of the mask image is the expression of concealment as experienced by Charles Blakey. From this standpoint, Blakey is constructed as a character seized by psychological tension, struggling with self-definition and perspective, oscillating between a first self and a second self. As a matter of fact, whites' dominance over blacks is a combination of material as well as symbolic containment of blacks; they have been socialized and institutionalized to act and behave. Blakey, who lives in "a secluded colored neighborhood way back from the highway," (3) is burdened with a marginal identity. He develops a sense of worthlessness which is the result of his internalization of inferiority.

As Anderson Franklin and Nancy Boyd-Franklin (2000) write, in a racialized context, individuals are likely to "believe that their true personality and unique abilities are hidden by a cloak of psychological invisibility woven by attitudes of prejudice and discrimination on the part of others." (34) They conceptualize it as the "invisibility syndrome." This subjective sense of psychological invisibility, as they point out, "takes the form of a struggle with inner feelings and beliefs that personal talents, abilities, and character are not acknowledged or valued by others, nor by the larger society, because of racial prejudice." (33)

It is this invisibility which is experienced by Ralph Ellison's invisible man. It is as though he were surrounded by "mirrors of hard, distorting glass." People see only his "surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination," except him. (*Invisible Man*, 1952, 7) In the same fashion, Blakey connects his experience to the collective unconscious about the legacy of depersonalization and dehumanization associated with African American history. It is toward the end of the narrative, that he became aware of his invisibility, his invisible presence.

> Before Anniston Bennet had come into my life, I was invisible, moving silently among the people of the Harbor. No one wondered about me; no one questioned me. Even my best friends simply accepted what they saw. The card player with a sharp tongue who couldn't back up half the things he said. The petty thief, the man across the street, dead Samuel's son. I might as well have been a tree at the end of the block. People saw me well enough to walk around, but that was just about it. And for my part I treated everything and everyone around me in the same way. (207)

Confronted with prejudice and discrimination, Blakey develops a psychological struggle for acceptance. People around Blakey do not pay attention to his inner existence. They visualize him only as a symbol, an abstraction. Blakey appears as a split subject, a victim of the dialectic between the private and the public, between the inside and the outside. As a matter of fact, he appears as a ghost, a shadow of himself. Under some gazes, Blakey appears as an invisible person; for he wears the mask of invisibility.

To some extent, racism blinds blacks to reality, and generates internal conflicts from the choices it demands. As a result, blacks' life is a simulation; that is the acceptance of artifice, of role playing, or the assumption of disguise as a way toward moral truth. This moral truth consists in wearing a mask to hide one's true image from their oppressors in order to stay alive, as the dying grandfather in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* has recommended the protagonist's father: "Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em them to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open.'" (17)

This duplicity is a survival strategy which impacts on blacks' lives. It takes them aloof from reality, above ground or on the surface. In the process, what is authentic or real stays underground, hidden in a secret sanctuary. As Traise Yamamoto (1999) writes, "While masking can be used against self, used by others to deny singularity and subjectivity, its function as concealment points to its potential doubleness." (117) Concerning Charles Blakey, the

mask has completely obscured his identity and the symptoms of this invisibility syndrome operate in a number of ways. Basically, he sees himself and behaves according to what is expected from him by the others. With the feeling that his own worth is not valued or recognized because of prejudice and racism, his personal identity and ability are undermined.

He goes through that experience when Mr. Anniston Bennet came to him in his basement and told him: "I can make it very much worth your while." (5) For Blakey, this is a racist affront, a racial slur which creates and confirms within him the feeling of not being seen as a person of worth. It is this implicit assumption that Blakey tries to articulate in the following: "It was his tone that cut me off. Suddenly he was one of those nonsense-white-men in charge. What he seemed to be saying was 'I know something that you had better listen to, fool. Here you think you know what's going on when really you don't have a clue.' (5)

Of course, these kinds of racial slurs are disorienting, distorting. They breed confusion and disillusionment. According to Anderson Franklin and Nancy Boyd-Franklin (2000), the outcome of "everyday racism becomes a part of the individual's intrapsychic structure; it is a catalyst for feelings of invisibility, which incline one toward alternative roles that appear able to resolve conflicted identity and provide acceptance." (37) Blakey sees himself through Bennet's eyes, and he lives in a zone of invisibility, an imaginary or assumptive world. In his daily life, Blakey strives to adapt to this experience of racism, this subjective experience of invisibility, which shows his superficial being instead of his authentic or intimate nature.

Moreover, Blakey remains affected by the syndrome of invisibility even in his relations with the members of his racial group. Oscillating between the invisible and the visible, Blakey struggles for a psychological visibility, perhaps to compensate for the indignities of racism. Telling lies is, for instance, one manifestation of his invisibility syndrome. As he puts it,

> I've lied all my life. To my parents and teachers and friends at school. I lied about being sick and not coming in to work, about romantic conquests, my salary, my father's job. I've lied about where I was last night and where I was right then if I was on the phone and no one could see me. I have lied and been called a liar and then lied again to cover other falsehoods. Sometimes I pretend to know things that I don't know. Sometimes I lie to tell people what I think they want to hear. (51)

In order to gain the acknowledgement and the validation of the members of his group, Blakey becomes a ghost, a shadow of himself. He has become a constant liar; his life is made of facticity, falsehood, and irresponsibility, which are the ways he adapts to the contours of racism and people's expectations. As he notes,

> The only chance I had at intimacy was with Clarance and Cat, but 90 percent of my time with them was spent under the influence of alcohol (...) Nobody saw me (...) Bethany and Narciss saw something that was like me — an image of what I thought I wanted to be — but they had no idea what was on my mind. (207-208).

Close to telling lies, Blakey is also a thief, another symptom of his invisibility syndrome. Stealing derives from his willingness to conform to social constraints and norms. An exemplary instance is when he got fired as a bank teller from Harbor Savings because he has stolen money in order to satisfy his girlfriend's desires: "My account was empty because I had paid for an electric food processor and China wanted to be taken out." (28)

This marginal social status due to racism is reinforced by the haunting memory of his uncle Brent that dominates Blakey's behavior. Actually, though racism is an absent cause in the narrative, Blakey's attitude is deeply affected by racial prejudice and discrimination. Early in the story, he makes a link between Bennet and his own uncle, Brent, a detail that resurfaces at various points in the novel. This connection or association holds from the fact that Brent unconsciously perpetrates white racism on him. Uncle Brent has internalized white racism, and behaves exactly like an Uncle Tom, a black who perpetrates whites' absurd racial myths. He blames the black race, and it is that self-blame that he projects onto Blakey whom he sees as a failure. "My uncle Brent used to say that I was lazy and worthless. He said it whenever my mother was out. 'I'm surprised that a boy like you don't starve 'cause he too lazy to lift the fork to his lips.'" (69)

For Uncle Brent, Blakey's life is doomed to failure, and this has something to do with his skin color. "Ricky was darker than his cousin but not nearly my color. When my uncle Brent used to see us coming, he'd say, 'If it ain't the three shit-colored patches on a tatty brown quilt.'" (9) White racism is relayed by him and his comments and judgments reflect whites' ideological fantasies about blacks, which affect Blakey's behavior. Blakey actually inherits the burdens, the expectations of his uncle, and his personal life and development are deeply impacted by stereotyped assumptions.

Influenced by the dominant white cultural values, Brent contributes to the distortion, the marginalization of the black race. For him, as Blakey reports, "'Negro so poor, that he'd sell his shadow just to stand in your shade.'" (21) In addition, he used to hold a contradictory and debasing view about the Blakeys. Charles Blakey says that he used to steal money from Brent because

> My father's family had come directly from Africa, but Brent said that my father really didn't know our roots. He said that we were like all other American blacks, that we came from 'slave-caliber Negroes who were defeated in war and sold into slavery because they didn't have the guts to die in battle.' He said that there was no such thing as free Africans who had 'chosen to come over and sell their labor in indentured servitude' and that American Negro citizens never existed before 1865, as my father claimed. (30)

Assigned to a zone of negation, Blakey has definitely succumbed to the distorted images ascribed on him by his uncle. "I was everything that my uncle Brent said that I was, and less. Nothing ever changed and I never got any better or worse." (104) For these reasons, Blakey despises him, holding him as responsible of his failure. "I blamed Brent for everything that ever befell me. My father's death, my mother's, the feeling I had that I couldn't tie my shoes right – all of that I blamed Brent for." (70)

On the whole, Blakey is the victim of an assumptive blackness which signifies absence, failure, meaninglessness and worthlessness. Confined in social expectations, definitions, norms and categorizations that negate the black self, Blakey's worldview is reduced to superficiality. His own self is blinded by the reductive and demeaning gazes projected onto him out of racism. Thus, locked in social conventions, stereotyped assumptions, his knowledge of the world is always biased. That bias is here rendered by his incapacity to appreciate a painting:

> If I think a painting is ugly, somebody just tells me that I don't understand. If I think a painting is good, they tell me the same thing. It's like artists see a different place, a higher place, whereas I'm on the level of some stray dog who only knows how to hunt for pussy and food in a world that's black and white. (92)

Within imposed definitions of reality, what people see in him is not his true self, but what he has to pretend to be according to social constraints and norms. He wears an existential mask, a mask for a meaningful existence, which hides his demented world. His interactions with the people evolve from superficial rather than authentic and intimate relations. He has learned to repress not only his emotions, but his humanity. Alienation and psychological distress or paralysis, are among others the disorienting effects of his psychological invisibility. Ultimately, he sinks ineluctably and metaphorically underground:

> I went back into the kitchen as if I were descending into a pit. Every step brought me lower. And all it was was just that double d; a stuttering skip and my fingers were tingling, the light in the room refused to illuminate. I didn't feel hungry; I didn't want a drink. My months of unemployment, my loneliness, my drunken poverty all came to the surface then. I would have liked to cry but I couldn't. The prince in my novel was reduced to a mass of unreadable words. (95)

Blakey's whole life is conditioned by white racism: an actualization of the white man's fantasy. All his experience brings to light the fact that he has been living in a world of illusion, imprisoned in his double consciousness: the mask which oscillates between the lens of the others and his perception of his existence. Locked in the conflicting cages of identity (who he should be and who he is), his self is cloaked within the imaginary realm of the mask. The source of his self-actualization, as the novel suggests, resides in the mask as the symbolic mandate for a recovery of the self, the overcoming of identity distortion.

The Rehabilitation Process: Resurrection of the Black Self:-

The Man in My Basement deconstructs the experience or the syndrome of African American invisibility. In the perspective of recasting a new black identity, the novel functions as a conversion narrative, which implies a movement from inside to outside for an emerging sense of self-discovery. As Sean Homer (2005) writes, Hegel elaborates that "For the human subject to emerge it must not simply be conscious of its own distinctiveness but must be recognized as a human subject by another." (23) Self-hood therefore emerges through a process of developing self-consciousness triggered by a self-reflection activity. Self-consciousness in the novel is symbolized by protagonist's assimilation with the cultural heritage and materialized by his ancestors' relics which have been stored and forgotten in the basement of the familial house. Among those ancestral objects, the prime are three masks, three "passport masks" whose story or cultural significance help Blakey recover the truth about his identity. The masks here are no more figurative, but literal and they are no longer playing self-concealment role; but rather operate in the realm of self-revelation.

Thus, in order to come to self-consciousness, and overcome his invisibility, Blakey metaphorically travels inward to look inside himself with his own eyes, not from the eyes of others to discover his true self. In this perspective, "the man in his basement" stands as a metaphor of himself, his truer self that needs to be discovered for self-recovery. *The Man in My Basement* is therefore a quest for the self; and the development of Blakey's personal identity is a dynamic process of auto-revelation for self-realization, which evolves over the course of the novel, following a reversing sail trajectory.

It is a metaphorical quest into Blakey's black psychology, materialized by a self incarceration, an isolation or confinement into his basement, during which he receives help, guidance and lessons from two pivotal characters: Anniston Bennet and Narciss Gulli. The basement where he works as Bennet's warden, is described as "a large, dark room crowded with stuff from the Dodd and Blakey families. A little something was there from every generation. I had one great-auntie, Blythe, who considered herself a painter…" (39) This basement, according to Blakey is "more like a crypt." (37) But unlike the traditional aim of the prison for the African American: a system whose purpose is to define, confine, and control black Americans; Blakey's self-incarceration is a psychological prison which helps him reshape his identity from negative self-image to new positive self-image. In other words, it is an imprisonment that helps him break the iron bars of the white physical imposed prison.

When Bennet asks permission to inhabit Blakey's basement, he is asking to enter Blakey's inner world, his interior world, which will later reveal that which is hidden in Blakey. In accepting Bennet in the basement of his house, Blakey is begrudgingly accepting to uncover accidentally and make alive his past through the cultural objects of his ancestors. It is a confrontation with his past, his culture, a confrontation with himself. It is a self deeply anchored and abandoned in the basement of the house. Therefore, in opening his basement for Bennet, Blakey is unknowingly venturing upon a journey towards selfhood, that is a journey to meet himself, "the man in his basement." Among other things, the basement stands for the individual's interiority, or intimacy, the individual's consciousness. As Blakey argues, it is not for money, but because of knowledge and intimacy, that he has agreed to give in his basement to Bennet:

> Anniston Bennet knew more about me than any other person – and he was still willing to enter this business deal. Those shocking blue eyes looked right into mine and knew what they were seeing. Not like Bethany and not like Clarance. Unlike Uncle Brent, Bennet made no judgments. If he felt he was better than me, it was only because he felt better than everyone, and that, in some strange whiskey-soaked way, made an equal in the world – at least in the world as seen through his eyes. 124

Blakey and Bennet become associates, collaborators; and the primary lesson or principle Blakey learns from Bennet is that lies can destroy and be fatal instead of guaranteeing one's life. In other words, Bennet encourages Blakey into throwing off his mask, his invisibility syndrome. "In my experience, Mr. Blakey, people rarely renege on their promises. It's always easier to keep your word than to enter into lies or intrigue." (74) This requirement is supposed to jar Blakey into an awareness of his true nature, and activate the process of his self-recovery. Upon Bennet's requirement, Blakey is first a bit hesitant. He muses:

> Looking back on it I should have been scared by his words, but instead I was confused. I wondered what point of view could see honesty as the stronger virtue in a world I knew was full of cheating and lies. Didn't they lie in commercials on TV and ads in newspapers? Didn't politicians lie about what they've done and what they're about to do? Clarance lied all the time to his wife, and he had more girlfriends than I did. (75)

When he accepts this principle, which is inscribed against the syndrome of invisibility imposed by the social norms and expectations, Blakey simultaneously accepts to re-envision reality. One reality he has become aware of thanks to Bennet is his visibility. Indeed, by spotting Blakey down in that black neighbourhood, and asking to use his basement, Bennet is contradicting Blakey's invisibility. It is a fact that contributes to arouse the fiber of visibility in Blakey, which eventually helps him connect with his deep self. Later, his closeness with Bennet makes him realize that there was no significant difference between him and Bennet. Though both men are racially different (Bennet is white and Blakey is black), the novel works to melt away or cleanse this human characteristic or categorization toward the end. The novel reveals no particular difference between Bennet and Blakey; they are just symbols of human identity, and both men experience self-imprisonment for self-rehabilitation.

Sharing almost the same experience with Anniston Bennet, Blakey engages into self-discovery. As a result, he confesses: "It was then that I realized what had happened to me. Really, what had happened to the world around me. Before Anniston Bennet had come into my life, I was invisible….And for my part I treated everything and everyone around me in the same way." (207) What Blakey realizes here is the permeability of the mask he has been wearing. Bennet knew everything about Blakey before both men met for the first time; this fact is a testimony of the superficiality of the mask. Before meeting Bennet, the use of this mask has allowed Blakey to shy away from his interlocutors.

When he asserts: "But now everything was different – half different, really," (207) it is like he has torn the quilt, the veil that has blinded him so far. He elaborates on the change as he states:

> What had changed was that I saw. It was as if everybody had become like a mirror, and I saw reflections of what they saw instead of what it was they were trying to show me or tell me. Narciss had become a mirror and an echo chamber, giving me back every word uttered and gesture made. And when I saw or heard something I didn't like, I had the chance to alter my behavior. (208)

Moreover, Bennet teaches him that there is so much more to learn about the world, and nothing can be judged on absolute terms, because it is a multi-dimensional world based on simulation. The world is fluid and shifting; and sometimes reality merges into the unreal. As he summarizes, "There is more to the world than one plus one." (134) Bennet illustrates this lesson using the relationship between good and evil. According to Bennet, there is a dualistic conflict between good and evil. Evil is much more integral to the system of Good. Good turns into its opposite, that is, absolute Evil. Evil is just a mask that we contrast with Good that we are supposed to defend.

Blakey benefits from Bennet's philosophical knowledge and experience of the human nature to acquire a new vision of himself. However, Bennet is not the only agent who actually helps Blakey accomplish his self-actualization. Narciss Gulli, the curator plays a substantial role in Blakey's spiritual and cultural voyage for self-recovery. She is the one who teaches Blakey the function of the literal mask. For her, and as a specialist in anthropology, the masks found in the basement, are an art of individual assertion within and against the group. The acceptance of the masks is a metaphor of Blakey's reunion with black pride and African American culture. It is the manifestation of a rather positive meaning of blackness, a therapeutic intervention, which opens a space for possible transformation.

At the outset of their discovery, Blakey actually does not highly rate the objects in his basement. For him, they are useless, just "a pile of refuse that, if it weren't for her concern, I would have used to make a bonfire in the backyard." (57) Inside that pile, "there were three hand-carved masks, rust to dark brown, ivory I was sure." (62) For Narciss, these masks are the repository of Blakey's family history, his ancestors' soul, their identity, as she states: "It's the history of your history," (63) or, "the spirit of your heritage." (64)

In Narciss's lessons to Blakey, the salient perspective is the following: "Everything I know about antiques comes from the inside out. It's more than a business with me; it's a way to see our history." (65) It is this anthropological principle, which reverses the angle of vision: from the inside out but not from outside in. This strategy operates

Blakey's transformation. This principle poses the self, not as the objectified being, but the subject that perceives. In other terms, instead of being seen through the lens of the others, one has to see oneself through one's own self-defined perspective.

Blakey now assimilates himself with his ancestor's culture. The attachment with the masks is an effective way of reversing cultural hegemony and reviving African American culture. Like the nameless hero in Ralph Ellison' *Invisible Man*, Blakey has been looking for himself. When he finds out about the masks, he comes to the realization that his cultural heritage defines him. He has just discovered that he has been an invisible man.

> 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. (Ralph Ellison, 1952: 17)

By accepting the masks of his ancestors, Blakey breaks down the psychological barrier between the figurative mask and the literal mask, and thereby makes the mask as an element of superficial identity into a real and substantial object of identity. The mask, in its figurative sense (superficiality), has completely obscured Blakey's identity. With Bennet and Narciss, Blakey has realized the superficiality of his invisibility made possible by the mask. This realization is a significant stage in the self-discovery. Blakey's re-connection with the masks liberates him from his dualistic relationships for a better knowledge and understanding with his fellows. Thus, as Zizek (2001) points out,

> 'Role-playing and disguise can lead to a liberation and realization of the self.' "The dialectic at work here is that of symbolic identification, of assuming a symbolic mandate: insisting on a false mask brings us nearer to a true, authentic subjective position than throwing off the mask and displaying our 'true face.' (38)

The mask is the seat of one's personality, and research done by Narciss, the anthropologist reveals that Blakey's ancestral masks were used as passport.

> That's what this is and it's also what we found in that box. They were used as identification but also as a way of bringing home along with you when you were away on a long journey. It's hard to say, but the masks you have could represent a family, maybe three brothers or friends who set sail for America as indentured servants. The majority of passport masks are made of wood, so the fact that these are ivory might have special significance. (96)

Thus, instead of concealment, the masks here are self-revelatory, passport for self-recovery or symbolic mandate for self-identification. What they reveal is contradictory to what Uncle Brent used to deny. The masks "were used for tribal identification, but they also were to remind their owner of their home and family – their people." (141) Through them, Blakey learns that his ancestors were indentured servants instead of slaves, and that his family "might descend from a direct bloodline of kings." (96)

The masks represent an important tool to fight back the invisibility and marginalization of the black experience. They are a source of a new life, and Blakey identifies with them. He bears a new meaning to them, celebrates them, and finds pride in them: "Every night I sat up late with my ancestors, Leonard, the geeky-looking one, Jojo, the warrior, and Singer, the mask with his lips set into an O. I named them and thought about them. I had made up their characters and histories, but they were real to me." (232) Blakey is now acutely conscious of the masks, his cultural heritage, and to some extent, his self-realization and assimilation with the masks entail self-consciousness. As he states, "I realized that my feeling of invisibility was false. People did see me. They knew when I passed in the street. My actions were noted no matter how small I thought I was." (223)

The masks have the potential to contribute to heightening the consciousness of black people about their identity; they are a source of his self-recovery, his self-empowerment that defies his invisibility. As Anderson Franklin and Nancy Boyd-Franklin (2000) argue,

> The painful encounters with racism move some African Americans to immerse themselves in the ethnic and cultural traditions of African people as a means of attaining a status that provides an intrapsychic structuring for visibility. Achieving racial identity solidifies one's perspective about self in relation to others, and becomes a part of a protective mechanism shielding the individual from the effects of racism. (40)

The process of Blakey's self-realization is the process of his identification with his ancestors' masks. The masks discovered in the basement represent the hope of self-discovery which reconciles Blakey's racial and cultural heritage within the dominant white society. Blakey redefines himself by identifying himself with his ancestors' masks. Narciss Gulli is instrumental in Blakey's transformation, his self-realization. She specializes in anthropology, and she is a curator. Through her teaching about his ancestors' masks excavated in his basement, she leads him to self-discovery, and eventually he reshapes his self-identity, integrating the masks. The masks in question here are physical, they are cultural objects belonging to Charles Blakey's ancestors. The masks are metaphor of his African cultural heritage.

Conclusion:-

The Man in My Basement is an exploration of race and identity. It is an existential and philosophical novel, which symbolizes a divided self or the projection of two selves, the true self and an imposed version of self. African American's life has been essentially led on the surface, hiding the ground where he has been obliged to hide his true self. *The Man in My Basement* is therefore a spiritual and archaeological journey into the African American familial treasure in order to excavate his real self. *The Man in My Basement* is therefore a cultural amendment.

In Walter Mosley's *The Man in My Basement*, the mask functions as a double-sided trope: a strategy of self-concealment to protect the subject and it serves as a metaphor for the construction of the true self, as well. In other words, it helps to hide the true identity, or make oneself invisible and, at the same time, it contributes to reshape the self for dignity, making the self visible. Realizing the devastating and marginalizing impact of racism, Mosley advocates the restoration of African Americans' identity through the celebration of their cultural heritage. My exploration of the individual's self actualization has focused on the trope of the mask first in its imaginary realm and then as a symbolic mandate.

Bibliography:-

1. Baudrillard, Jean. "Toward a Principle of Evil." *Postmodernism. A Reader*. Thomas Docherty. Ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993. Pp. 355-361. Print
2. Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: New American Library, 1969. print
3. Du, Juan. "Exploring the Theme of Self-Actualization in Maya Angelou's Poetry." *English Language and Literature Studies*. Vol. 4 No. 3 2014, Pp. 63-70 Online. Accessed on December 4, 2016.
4. Dubey, Madhu and Elizabeth Swanson Golberg. "New Frontiers, Cross Currents and Convergences: Emerging Cultural Paradigms." *The Cambridge History of African American Literature*. Maryemma Graham and Jerry W. Ward, JR. Ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. 566-617. Print.
5. Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. New York: Penguin Books, 1952. Print
6. Franklin, Anderson J. And Nancy Boyd-Franklin. "Invisibility Syndrome: A Clinical Model of the Effects of Racism on African-American Males." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. Vol. No. 1, January 2000. Pp. 33-41 Accessed November 12, 2016
7. Gordon, Lewis R. "Through the Zone of Nonbeing: A Reading of Black Skin, White Masks in Celebration of Fanon's Eightieth Birthday." *The C.L.R. James Journal* Vol. 11 No. 1 (Summer 2005) Pp.1-43. Online. Accessed on November 12, 2016.
8. Homer, Sean. *Jacques Lacan*. New York: Routledge, 2005. Print Lane, James B. "Underground to Manhood: Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. *Negro American Literature Forum*. Vol. 7 No. 2 1973. Pp. 64-72. Online. Accessed on September 9, 2015.
9. Larson, Jennifer. "Folding and Unfolding History. Identity Fabrication in Suzan-Lori Parks's *Topdog/Underdog*." *Reading Contempory African American Drama. Fragments of History, Fragments of Self*. Trudier Harris. Ed. New York: Peter Lang, 2007. Pp. 183-202. Print
10. Mostley, Walter. *The Man in My Basement*. New York: Back Bay Books, 2004. Print Yamamoto, Traise. *Masking Selves, Making Subjects. Japanese American Women, Identity and the Body*. Ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. Print
11. young, Robert. "Invisibility and Blue Eyes: African American Subjectivity." *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*. No. 39, 1999, Pp. 169-190. Online. Accessed on January 7,2016.
12. Zizek, Slavoj. *Enjoy Your Symptom*. New York: Routledge, 2008. Print