

## **Existential Dilemma of Identity Exploration in James Baldwin's Selected Novels**

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**Abstract:** The present research investigates existential dilemma of identity exploration of the African- Americans in James Baldwin's selected works. It studies freedom, menace, and responsibility as three features characterizing Baldwin's existential dilemma of exploring identity. Its scope of the study is Baldwin's novels. It mainly concludes that Baldwin's works epitomize discovery of an authentic African- American identity in the writer's subjective perspective.

Keywords: African-American, Baldwin, Existential, Identity.

### **المحنة الوجودية لاستكشاف الهوية في روايات جيمس بالدوين المختار**

**الملخص:** يقتصر البحث الحالي على دراسة المحنة الوجودية في الاعمال المختارة لجيمس بلدوين . فهو يدرس الحرية والخوف والمسؤولية كثلاث خصائص مميزة لمحنة بلدوين الوجودية فيما يتعلق باكتشاف الهوية ومنظور الدراسة هي روايات بلدوين . ويستنتج البحث بصورة رئيسية ان اعمال بلدوين تحمل في جوهرها اكتشاف الذات لهوية الافروامريكية في المنظور الذاتي للكاتب .

The African- American culture scene has witnessed an intellectual action concerning the African – American identity itself. It has endeavored to explore authentic African-American identity. James Baldwin has come to be one of the intellectualists who contributed to intellectual action in 1960's. French existentialism has influenced Baldwin's postulate at that period. Henceforth, the importance of this research lies in its tacklement of this intellectual action that overwhelmed the cultural climate in the America life since 1960's.

Europe has witnessed in 1940's sceptic postulates of the values and ethics that helped to shape a new consciousness to discover freedom, responsibility and individualism in man's existence. These postulates attempted at finding out a modern tendency to the dilemma of the meaninglessness and purposelessness that predominated the cultural, social, and intellectual

scenes after the Second World War. They called for redefining reality in the post-war stage.

The present research aims at investigating the writer's attitude to the issue of the identity of the African-Americans. It attempts at discussing the writer's efforts on exploring an authentic identity of the African-American through exposing the African-American characters in his novels. The discussion of the research is confined to the exploration of the authentic African-American identity on the part of the African-American central characters.

Existentialism is a humanistically-oriented philosophy. It demonstrates a body of literary and philosophical responses to the experience of nothingness and absurdity which endeavors to find meaning in and through this experience. (Roger Fowler, 1987) It is a philosophy of the subject rather than the

object. For the existentialist, the issue is existent in the whole range of his or her existing. He or she is not only a thinking subject but an initiator of action and a centre of feeling. It is this whole spectrum of existence, known directly and concretely in the very act of existing, that existentialism tries to express.

Existentialism does not begin from the human person, but from the person as an existent, rather than as a thinking subject. In stressing existence, it also implies that one could not posit a 'nature' or 'essence' of the person, and then go on to make deductions about him or her. Most existentialist philosophers venture on assertions of an ontological or metaphysical kind, though they repudiate traditional spiritual systems. However, there is no standard body of doctrine to which existentialists subscribe, comparable to central tenets that hold together idealists or

materialists in their respective schools. Existentialism has been described not as a philosophy, but as a style of "philosophising [that] begins from man rather than from nature".(Macquarrie,1972).

There are striking similarities among existentialists in the way they 'do philosophy,' in spite of the difference in their outlook. The most fundamental characteristics of existentialism are menace, anxiety, freedom, commitment, and responsibility which are prominent in all existentialist trends. These matters constitute the core of personal being. For the existentialists, the exercise of freedom and the ability to shape the future is a distinctive feature of the human individual. It is through free and responsible decisions that a person becomes himself or herself authentically.

Soren Kierkegaard, the founder of existentialism, confirms the necessity of the individual's

responsibility to his free will of choice in life. He argues that “What I need is to get clear about what I must do, not what I must know.... What matters is to find a purpose, to see what it is that God wills that I shall do; the crucial thing is to find a truth which is truth for me, to find the idea for which I am willing to live and die.” (Kierkegaard Journal, Aug 1, 1835).

On the other hand, the theistic existentialist Nicolai Berdyaev negates the existence of objective reality. Instead, he views it as an objectification illusion of consciousness. He celebrates creativity, freedom, personality, subject and spirit; he states that these things represent the origin of life, not nature or object. Berdyaev comments: There is no objective reality. But there is only an illusion of consciousness, there is just an objectification of truth, which was created by the spirit. The origin of

life is creativity, freedom; and the personality, subject, and spirit are the representatives of that origin, but not nature, not the object.(Berdyaev,1949)

As for Sartre, he attempts at developing an ontological account of what it is to be human. The main features of this ontology are the groundlessness and radical freedom which characterise the human condition. These are contrasting with the unproblematic being of the world of things. According to Sartre, a person's existence precedes its essence. He explains: man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world and defines himself afterwards If man, as the existentialist sees him, is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself(*Sartre,1946*).

In John Macmurray's language, the self as agent' provides the central theme for existentialism, whereas traditional Western philosophy, especially since the time of Descartes, has concentrated on the 'person as subject, and by subject is understood as "thinking subject".(Macmurray,1957). One cannot speak in any effortless way of pessimism or optimism. Some existentialists acknowledge themselves to be pessimists; others talk about confidence or at least of hope. All of them seem to be aware of the tragic elements in human existence.

However, Existentialist writers and thinkers do not share a common understanding and metaphysical conclusions from the existence of this propensity to existentialism. Sartre, the atheistic existentialist, equates it with the human will and responsibility only to itself. Camus locates it in the spontaneous

potential of the personality, pointing to it through metaphorical statements. Kierkegaard, an avowed Christianexistentialist philosopher, identifies this propensity with the soul. For Buber, the theistic existentialist, it refers to the possible attunement and existence according to the timeless moments which is concurrent with the breaking of the 'eternal Thou' into time through the 'human Thou' (Roger Fowler, 1987)

James Baldwin has devoted most of his works to explore the existential dilemmas of the African-Americans in an oppressive white-dominated society. He is very subjective in his treatment of the problems faced by the African-America. He repeatedly shows how difficult it is for African-American to achieve authentic existence, to make choices for their lives when freedom is taken away from them by the white Americans. Most of his works may be summed up as a quest

to an authentic existence by an African-American person, more specifically an African-American homosexual in the American society. His works explore the bleak and gloomy existence colored Americans and show how the innocence and hypocrisy of white Americans come in the way of changing the course of their lives. While exploring the desperately hopeless situation of African-American, he shows how doubly suffocating the society is for the African-American homosexual man.

In his interview with Francois Bondy, Baldwin claims that one must mainly avoid believing that things are African-American or white. He suggests that the terms in which people speak about the 'Negro problem' have nothing to do with human beings. It is the extraordinary assumption on the part of many people in America that Negroes are either saints or devils,

that the word 'Negro' describes something (Baldwin and Bondy, 1997).

Baldwin believes that language is the tool used by the whites to make their identity in creating the category of the African-American. In his dialogue with Nikki Giovanni, Baldwin states: People invent categories to feel safe. White people invented African-American people to give white people identity...straight cats invented faggots so they can sleep with them without becoming faggots themselves (Baldwin and Nikki, 1975).

This disarmingly candid assertion contains one of the central aspects of Baldwin's vision of otherness and community. For Baldwin, personal as well as collective failures stem from the inability of individuals to confront the "darker" sides of their nature. Out of this failure comes the mechanism of scapegoating: racial

and sexual minorities become visible symbols of the "darker" side—the buried repressions, severe anxieties, and hidden pathologies of white Americans. This failure to face, deal with and accept darker impulses of one's soul are dramatically portrayed in Baldwin's play *Blues for Mister Charlie* in which the white town and white chorus witnesses are standing in angry opposition to African-American town and African-American chorus, thus representing a gloomy image of divided humanity and divided self with two immediate implications: "First, such a denial of an aspect of one's human nature amounts to a denial of part of one's humanity, and it robs that individual of any genuine sense of identity. Secondly, it undermines that individual from fruitful and fulfilling interpersonal and communal experience. Hence Baldwin's vision of otherness and community is closely related to and

dependent on his vision of self"(Bieganowski,1981).

Sartre's striking investigation of the problem of "the other" is relevant in examining the relationship between the African-American and white Americans, and all the assumptions about the "Negro problem." He conceives the relation among persons to be essentially an affair of disconnection and conflict, and he proposes that its central reality is what he calls the 'look' or the "gaze". He asserts that "Hell is—other people!". Both the African-American and white Americans begin to exist for each other or come into the field of attention of both only as soon as one looks at the other. But when the white American gazes at the African-American, the former immediately makes the latter "the other". Reducing him or her to the status of an object, and diminishes his or her freedom; because when the African-

American person begins to exist only through the white person's gaze, he or she begins to be at the mercy of liberty which is not chosen by his or her will. As soon as the African-American looked at as an object, he/she becomes a slave; when the white American reduces the American to an object, the latter's reality through the gaze. The African-American begins to depend not on his/her freedom but the former's. It is what Sartre takes the interpersonal situation to be a situation in which the chief components are a threat, uneasiness, tension and struggle(Scott,1978).

Baldwin feels that America is at the beginning of a profound revolution that will change not only Negro community, but the whole country. There is no prospect of setting Negroes free unless one is prepared to set white people in America free-free from their terrors, free from their ignorance, free from their

prejudices, and, ultimately, free from the right to do wrong when it is known that it is wrong. In Baldwin's perspective, Americans are not behind Europeans but rather in advance because Americans have lived with the colour problem for so long, and, therefore, know more about it than the Europeans.

But the advantage of America can happen only through an investigation of its history which America has never been willing to do. If America could admit the truth about what happened to the Indians and the African and could tell the truth about its real relationship to foreign countries, as Baldwin believes, it might give a tremendous potential to save the world(Baldwin and Franceois,1997).

In *Many Thousands Gone*, Baldwin makes use of the Oedipus myth which is a key to Freud's formulation of the psychoanalytic theory. After a discussion of "what it means to be a Negro" in America,



Baldwin concludes: It is a silly error, therefore to believe that the past is dead; it means nothing to say that all is forgotten, that the Negro has ignored it. It is not a question of memory. Oedipus did not remember the thongs that end his feet; nevertheless, the marks they left testified to that doom toward which his feet were leading him (Baldwin,1955).

At one level, Baldwin uses this play to explain the "sentimental error" every American is tempted to make to fit in or belong-a historical or the wish to revise or repress a past that contains evidence of shame, trauma, or signs of unacceptable differences. The allusion to Oedipus introduces a theme that preoccupies much of *Notes of a Native Son*- the African-American man's racial history is 'indivisible from himself forever," whether he remembers, represses, disavows, or distorts it.

America is a place where various people come together to create a

nation. It is an experiment which is still in jeopardy and doubt, because, as Baldwin sees it, Americans find it hard to overcome or face the real past. He recognises the painfulness and difficulties of dealing with the history, but he believes that if Americans begin to examine themselves regarding the account, they would come close to some real sense of identity and be a good deal less menaced by African-American Americans. African-American people represent a personal, emotional, sexual, and psychological threat to an American, which is one of the penalties for the power that the American white person has had over African-American flesh for so long. That kind of a license is brutal; it does terrible things to the object, and it does weird things to the perpetrator(Baldwin and Bondy,1997).

Baldwin believes that an unadmitted fact in American life is that Americans are not prepared to accept what they have done, and take the fact that the people they call 'Negroes' are also their brothers, cousins, uncles and sisters. As well as because the white men who have had sexual relations with Negro women invented the whole concept of keeping African-American men out of white women's bedroom because they are afraid of African-American man's retaliation. White men are not taking care of their wives because while telling them to stay away from African-American men; they are having their share of sexual pleasures with Negro women. In doing so, they unknowingly make a point to their wives that the African-American men are better in bed than they could be.

Baldwin's position is especially interesting because he synthesises

race and gay consciousness during some of the most politically volatile decades of the twentieth century. Moreover, Baldwin's career strongly suggests the influence of feminism on his gay aesthetic, the insights of which he subsequently recontextualized in the struggle for the African-American liberation.

Baldwin's famous reply to Norman Mailer's manifesto of hipster culture. "The White Negro," specifically addresses the sexual mythology that obtains to the African-American men living in America: "I think that know something about the American masculinity which most men of my generation do not know because it has not menaced them in the way that has been." (Baldwin, 1985) Here, Baldwin suggests the straitjacket of African-American virility that he struggled to liberate himself from throughout his career. A legacy of the antebellum South, celebrated by

1920s primitivism and consumer culture, this cultural mythology was perpetuated in the 1960s by the radical African-American left and white liberals like Mailer and Norman Podhoretz. Thus the question "What does it mean to be a man in America?" became Baldwin's primary concern, infecting virtually all of his literary production.

Baldwin resisted an uncritical embrace of African-American Nationalism developing a vision of the homosexual as the chief instrument of cultural renovation instead. Indeed, bodily pleasure between men functions as a paradigm for the body politic two men lying together and spoon-fashion becomes an image of the just society. David Leeming, Baldwin's friend and recent biographer, are suggesting that much of Baldwin's early works can characterise regarding a family

romance. as elaborating a search for an absent, idealised father, as though the restored authority and centrality of the father could redress the history of slavery, an institution enabled by the codification of illegitimacy, defining African-American children as bastards."(Leeming and Baldwin,1994 ) Indeed, for Baldwin, personal and familial redemption is political; but the rhetoric of family and the inherited view of a body politic organised around paternal privilege and masculine autonomy give way to the more egalitarian ideal of brotherhood –of a society founded upon the love between men. Baldwin thus redefines the discourse of family grounded in biology and posits alternative social structures in its place.

Throughout Baldwin's writings, the idea of human togetherness displaces the concept of redemption

through the restored centrality of the father: horizontal equity supplants verticality. Friendship in this instance, however, is not exclusive but all-encompassing, suggesting egalitarian relations between men and women as well. Baldwin begins his enterprise of reimagining the body politic in the mostly autobiographical “*Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1952), and extends it in *Another Country* (1962) and *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (1968), works in which homosexuality acquires an increasingly striking political dimension. He elaborates his position most clearly through the change in his disposition toward homosexuality from *Giovanni's Room* (1956) to *Just Above My Head* (1978).

Baldwin dramatises this shift in orientation iconographically by displacing the autonomous, middle-class, white-male body with the erotic, feminised, African-

American -male body. *Giovanni's Room* invokes the expatriate experience of a white man to make as lesbian as a hero, a possibility foreclosed by the construction of African-American American masculinity. But in *Just Above My Head*, Baldwin confronts the taboo of the African-American homosexuality on his home ground.

Although Cleaver felt he had been racially oppressed, he embraced the hierarchy of traditional heterosexuality, convinced that it was his privilege to dominate women. Baldwin's homosexuality struck him as a betrayal because the former presented a public image of the African-American man a castrated, the African-American man as a woman. Cleaver saw no brave new world in Baldwin's vision. He saw the resurrected old world in which African-American men lynched, their manhood desecrated.

Baldwin occupied a complicated position in politics and culture of the sixties. An outspoken advocate of civil rights, he was nevertheless viewed as subversive and fractious by many of its leaders. Though Mailer cast him as the embodiment of virility by colour, he was, paradoxically, vilified by fellow African-American for not being "African-American" enough. Baldwin resisted the erosion of cultural authority by reinventing himself in the language of the new vanguard regarding the African-American left which composed jeremiads against a view is regarded as outmoded. Two essays, published a decade apart, witness Baldwin's shift from a vision of unitary culture to a more separatist stance; *The Fire Next Time* argues the interconnected destinies of African-American and white America, resisting the separatist philosophy of Malcolm X. Elijah Muhammad, and the Nation of Islam, and locates the possibility

of African-American salvation in cooperation: "We, the black and the white, deeply need each other here if we are really to become a nation if we are, that is, to achieve our identity, our maturity, as men and women. To create one nation has proved to be a hideously difficult task; there is certainly no need now to create two, one African-American and one white."(Baldwin,1963)

The African American conception of the "Great White Father" has been an obstacle and a menace to the African-American self-knowledge. Although Baldwin rejected the aggressive virility of both the white liberal intelligentsia and the radical African-American vanguard he did celebrate the male body, not as a juggernaut of power, but as a sensorium of comfort-the body as harbor and refuge, recapitulating the infant's relation to the mother,

enjoying an amorphous, passive sexuality, a luxuriant dependency, played out between men, Baldwin's emphasis on the pleasures of nurturance as opposed to mastery was anathema to African-American radicals who feared and despised such imagery as a return to childish dependence, a soft-pedaling of agency and activism, but Baldwin repudiates masculine autonomy as the instrument of repressive social order by revelling in the Senate, celebrating the messiness of body odour and fluid- a convergence of bodies that opposes the formulations of white liberalism and African-American radicalism. He does not invoke the cult of the primitive as a reservoir of primal energy capable of bursting through social restraint. Instead, he marshals love as the glue of a just society. The exchange of odours between men cuts across racial, class, and sexual lines.

Baldwin's novel *Giovanni's Room* dramatises the consequences of self-deception through the experiences of a young expatriate American who is unable to come to terms with his sexuality. The story opens with a proleptic image of the end-David, alone in an empty house in the south of France, staring at his reflection in a window pane, through which is exposed that he is white, the son of an affluent father. That Baldwin ventriloquizes his story through a white protagonist is instructive, as if Baldwin wishes to distance himself from the autobiographical element of the novel. The fact that David's experiences are expatriate underlines the untenability of the African-American homosexuality as a lifestyle in America. David is socially unmarked by his colour, a privilege that Baldwin himself enjoyed to a much higher degree in France than in America, but David's experiences in Paris nonetheless

reinforce the web of self-deception that characterises his life in America.

At its broadest reach, *Giovanni's Room* investigates the meaning of identity of the man. It is the burden from which David takes refuge in flight but cannot escape, and it dominates his reflections on two formative experiences: A homoerotic childhood friendship that he terminates in deference to an internalised cultural homophobia and his relationship with his parents marked by a sense of filial debt. Through the metaphor of a 'cavern, Baldwin brilliantly condenses David's story as a dead-end, the cul-de-sac in which he finds him at the end of the novel. The hollow of innuendo and rumour refers to the discourse of mortification in which the sapphic pilloried, but it also symbolises an intensity of pleasure so acute as to culminate in self-dissolution.

In suppressing his homoerotic impulses, David finds no solace in more conventional heterosexuality, figured here through the activities of a philandering father and the memories of a mother who haunts David's dreams:

She just thought in my nightmares, blind with worms, her hair as dry as metal and brittle as a twig, straining to press me against her body; that body so putrescent, so sickening soft, that it opened, as clawed and cried, into a breach so enormous as to swallow me alive(Baldwin,1964).

David's attempt to find himself becomes a search to discover a social space that will accommodate his sexual ambivalence. From the family dynamics of his household, David projects various potential futures for himself, all of them limiting. Taking a little comfort in his aunt's idea of masculine responsibility, a view of oppressive

duty typically imagined in the context of marriage; he is nevertheless imprisoned by the social codes militating against the expression of his homosexual impulses. Faced with this double bind, a prisoner of both society and his nature, repulsed both by social convention and by his errant desires, David takes refuge, as he suggests, in 'constant motion,' journeying to France, where he meets Giovanni.

Eventually, David finds himself living in Giovanni's room, where the cavern becomes literalized. The place is both the new world of avowed homosexuality as well as sadly, the closet. He experiences the meaninglessness of his life in this room. This life seems indifferent to his existence.: "I remember that life in that room seemed to be occurring beneath the sea. Time flowed past indifferently above us; hours and days had no meaning...Life in that

room seemed to be occurring underwater, as I say, and it is certain that I underwent a sea change there."(Baldwin,1985).

Removed from the demands of the world the room becomes a "garden of Eden, but also a prison. Baldwin believes in an ethic of love, and not only briefly this room provides a space for the efflorescence of desire, but precisely because it is a world apart, cut off from social and political demands, this aesthetic space becomes cloying suffocating with its closed and whitened windows and its "courtyard malevolently pressing, encroaching day by day, this is a room without a view: and the novel goes on to imply that love cannot be enacted meaningfully except in a social and political context.

David's sea-change is not a conversion to a homosexual identity; instead, the sea change acquires subtle overtones, Despite



Giovanni's overtures of love, David cannot imagine a life together with him, taking flight instead of in his fiction of an imminent marriage with his fiancée Hella and the occasional liaison with a woman. For Giovanni, David's repudiation of their love is a symptom of a more generalised fear of intimacy expressed as a loathing of disorder and the uncleanness of one body in contact with another body: You have never loved anyone, am sure you never will! You love your purity; you love your mirror... You want to be clean....you do not want to stink, not even for five minutes(Ibid,1986).

Ultimately, David's existentialist quest to find himself fails not only because he has been unable to extricate himself from the malaise that plagues him at the beginning of the novel, but also because of this in the first place. Baldwin believes that Paris quest is futile, it is a milieu

more tolerant of homosexuality than America. The Paris of existentialism, of Camus and Sartre, which the individual takes responsibility for constructing the rules of existence in his own life, ironically defeats Baldwin's purpose, precisely because of its emphasis on the individual, its politics and collective action. David is unable to construct an alienation from homosexual identity for himself because this Paris is aesthetic and its mandarin pleasures eventually degenerate into the grot lust of old fairies like Guillaume. In this context Giovanni's room, both a haven from and a symbol of society's oppressive structures, comes, to sum up, the impotence of the aesthetic ideal.

In *Giovanni's Room*, homosexual relations cannot epitomise the new society because Baldwin cannot realise this vision apart from political commitment. Politics allow the gay man to rationalise his

desires, and, in turn, is non-mainstream sexuality enables him to articulate a more egalitarian form of political protest. Ironically, Baldwin finds that his ability to mobilise the power of love depends upon the politics of American life.

*Just Above My Head* contextualises Baldwin's exploration of African-American masculinity in the most volatile decade of the Civil Rights Movement. The novel begins with news of Arthur's death, as his quixotic quest for a more sexually tolerant society comes to a violent end in the bathroom of a London pub, which becomes the occasion for Hall's meditation on the meaning of Arthur's life. In the process, Hall attempts to come to terms with his own identity as an African-American man in America. Arthur's quest is thus realised through Hall, who reminisces, "Your life can now be written anew on the empty slate of his... I saw myself in Arthur"(Baldwin,1979).

In a powerful image of the claustrophobic nature of the closet, Arthur is described as lying prone, while he imagines the ceiling descending ominously upon him with the last remnants of consciousness. Hall realises that there never was a place for Arthur in society, and his elegy is an attempt to make such a space.

*Through the Miller family*, Baldwin examines the dark underworld of the African-American church, traditionally conceived as the heart of African-American communities and an integral element of the Civil Rights Movement, as well as the source of forms of indigenous African-American expression. As Hall suggests, "Somebody was giving the public, and I knew it had to be. Julia's father and mother, who surely did not look holy to me."(Baldwin,1979). Julia, who is called to preach when she is seven years old, is the cynosure of the

Miller family, but she is merely the instrument of a dominating father, "the zoot-suited stud of studs," whose familial authority has its analogue in the institutional power of the church. Julia is possessed of beauty and a voice that is co-opted by a system of hieratic privilege, Julia found her life a void, a meaningless life. She was unable to understand the force that has predominated her life since childhood, "As a child and preacher, she had not belonged to herself, nor had the remotest idea who she was. She had then been at the mercy of a force she had no way of understanding"(Ibid,524).

Baldwin presents the church as incapable of organising and using the energy of sexual desire to work for social and political change. Instead, this specifically feminine charisma is dissipated, channelled into the minutiae of sexual conquest, visual display, and vain enthusiasm, as witnessed by the

erotic spectacle Amy makes in church. Hall reports, "When she got happy, she would stroke her breast."(Ibid,70) Baldwin is not ridiculing or denigrating women; instead, he is dramatising the tragic waste of Amy's spiritual energy, which, in the absence of a worthy human value object to give it direction, ends by devouring her, consuming her from within and eventually leading to her death out of breast cancer.

Baldwin challenges the sexual iconography that white southerners consciously vilify and unconsciously imagine, offering in its place the tableau of two African-American men embracing "they curled into each other, spoon fashion, Arthur cradled by the crunch."(Ibid207). This image of two musicians side by side offers a utopian vision of sexuality that challenges gay the figurations of dystopic homophobia, destabilising the culture's oppressive imagining

of a fetishised virility. Through these images, Baldwin generates an alternative vernacular of African-American masculinity.

Although Arthur's quest for a homosexual utopia fails, Baldwin suggests that feminist self-determination is a crucial step toward achieving it. Julia on her part is finally able to recreate herself through crunch's intervention and, by journeying to Africa, realises that her story is part of a more substantial history. Julia's trip to Africa offers a kind of secular redemption for the religious hypocrisy that she unwittingly contributed to as a child, as she discovers there a larger family, symbolized by the family of an African diplomat, a father figure who, in her words, is "really African-American, African-American in a way she'd never encountered," and the only male who understood something Africa provides a form of

sustenance that the religious life never did, but although Africa enables Julia to understand something about herself. Baldwin suggests that pan-Africanism is not a viable solution for problems of African-American. As Julia realises: An African-American girl in Africa, who wasn't born in Africa, and who have never seen Africa, an extraordinary creature for herself, and for everyone who meets her... they don't know who they are attending You don't know who they are visiting either(Ibid,529).

Baldwin here debunks the notion of authentic African-American, as Julia realises she has very little in common with villagers she meets in Africa. Instead, she recognises that her future lies in America, for it is her home, however racially divided she comes to realise the need for a new vocabulary that will accommodate a culture of refugees, rather than merely reproduce the

language of the fathers(Baldwin,1985).

### **Conclusion:**

To conclude the discussion, James Baldwin's novels present existential dilemma of the African-American characters. They attempt at discovering an authentic African-American identity. The writer reflects his subjective view of this dilemma and identity discovery. The difficulty and the exploration of the characters of their authentic identity indicates a transference of the issue of race from its ideological one. To sum up, Baldwin's novels exposes character's investigation of an authentic African –American identity in their subconscious side from the writer's intellectually personal standpoint.

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