

Negro's "Double Consciousness" in *To Kill a Mockingbird*

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Abstract—Living among the Whites has caused many problems for the Blacks throughout the history. African Americans, who are African in their roots and American in their life, as opposite races, are segregated from the White's societies due to their colored skin. They are considered as uncivilized and lowbrow people who do not have equal rights to the Whites. Thus, racial segregation acting like a veil, as Du Bois refers to, brings African Americans a dual identity which leads to their double consciousness. Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, written in 1960, further to its depiction of racial prejudice and discrimination issues of American society in 1930's, pictures the life of a minor character named Calpurnia as a black woman who lives with a white family and has the role of a mother for the white children. Therefore, living among the Whites and the Blacks at the same time leads her to a double consciousness, which is the result of segregation. Thus, using W. E. B. Du Bois' concepts of "veil" and "double consciousness", in this study it has been tried to investigate the inner as well as the outer truth of African Americans' life and their merged identity under the impact of racism.

Index Terms— double consciousness, Du Bois, identity, segregation, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

I. INTRODUCTION

Racism as an issue has been a matter of fact among the human societies since the end of the 19th century. Black people were predetermined throughout the history by the racist societies due to their skin color. They are considered as the inferior creatures who are socially, politically, and culturally deprived of their rights as human beings. Likewise, Prejudice, injustice, fanaticism, and discrimination have always existed throughout the history so that many innocent individuals were the victims of these concepts. Cultural, gender, and racial stereotypes are indeed the causes of such immoral acts. People living in a society are most of the time under the pressure of being judged by others whether truly or false. In this case, people of opposite races, females, and low-class members are mostly under the attention. Therefore, Cultural, social, and racial superiority has been a kind of instrument to oppress the inferiors. These inferior people, especially people in colored skins, then, are the subjects of prejudice and injustice. Thus, their rights as human-beings are ignored, their services and efforts are unnoticed and they are most of the time treated unfairly. They are segregated from the Whites' societies and are treated as slaves because they are seen as savages and lowbrow people in the eyes of the Whites regardless of their righteousness and humanity. African Americans are the main victims of segregation who are facing with the problem of double consciousness due to their dual life and merged identity because of being both African and American.

Accordingly, prejudice and injustice toward innocent members of a society, especially Blacks, has been the main concerns of many writers and has prompted them to write for their rights. Unfortunately, despite the enormous struggle of black and white writers, the inequality rights of individuals based on their social, cultural, gender, and racial differences is still alive. These individuals, who are at most of the time from the low-classes of the society, are in the eyes of the others as the subjects of any criminals done in their surroundings, regardless of their innocence. Whereas writing and literature is a good weapon in eliminating wrong believes and behaviors toward such blameless individuals, teaching moral lessons and developing ethical codes in societies to prevent people from judging their fellowmen is the purpose of Nelle Harper Lee by writing *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Nelle Harper Lee, a white novelist, is the one who wrote *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) to express her point of view toward racial and cultural prejudice throughout moral codes of behavior. She also has defended the rights of black people as humans in her second novel *Go Set a Watchman* (2015). Harper Lee in her two novels, *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Go Set a Watchman*, attempted to demonstrate how people of different race, culture, and class should be responsible to respect each other and coexist in the world regardless of their differences. She, in the heart of her *To Kill a Mockingbird*, depicts the life of a Black woman, Calpurnia, who can be considered as a victim of segregation with a dual life. Calpurnia, who is the maid of a white family, lives a dual life as

being both African and American. She lives among the Blacks and the Whites at the same time and this oscillation brings her a sense of double consciousness which can be seen in her language and behavior, a double consciousness which is the result of segregation of the Negroes from the Whites' society.

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which has been recognized as the second moral book after Bible in America and has a widespread popularity around the world, Du Bois' concepts of "veil" and "double consciousness" can be seen obviously. W. E. B. Du Bois, who is himself a Black, in his *The Souls of Black Folks*, fights against racism and introduces the concept of "veil" which functions like a wall and segregates the Blacks from the Whites. In Du Bois' words this veil, which is made by the Whites, brings a sense of double consciousness for the African Americans which finally leads them to a merged identity. Observing Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, this study will focus on the dual life and merged identity of Calpurnia, as a Negro woman in the story, based on Du Bois' concepts of "veil", as the wall of segregation, and "double consciousness".

II. DISCUSSION

Racism has existed among the groups of people since the very beginning of the people's communication and therefore can be considered as the part of human nature. W. E. B. Du Bois in "Of the Training of the Black Men" points to the Whites' belief that God has created the Negroes as simple and "clownish" creatures to serve them. Therefore, Whites know themselves as the master race and superior to the Blacks. They treat the Blacks as inferior people and segregate them from their own society so that the Blacks are kept behind the wall of segregation, social injustice and oppression. Lois Tyson in his *Critical Theory Today* says, "Racism refers to the unequal power relations that grow from the sociopolitical domination of one race by another and that result in systematic discriminatory practices (for example, segregation, domination, and persecution)" (2006, p. 360). Likewise, racism

makes it more difficult for black men to earn a living or spend their earnings as they will; it gives them poorer school facilities and restricted contact with cultured classes; and it becomes, throughout the land, a cause and excuse for discontent, lawlessness, laziness, and injustice (qtd in Katz and Sugrue, 2001, p. 205).

Consequently, Blacks are deprived of their rights in the Whites' societies and are separated physically and psychologically just because of their colored skin, which is the sign of their inferiority in the eyes of white people. In fact, the Whites believe that "human races were not just different from one another, but that some were superior to others" (Moore, 2008, p. XI) and therefore can dominate the inferiors.

W. E. B. Du Bois, a sociologist and Pan-Africanist, from the late 19th century until his death devoted his life to refuting the superiority of one race over the other. Du Bois himself was a victim of prejudice because of his black skin, thus he endeavored all along his life to fight against racism and demanded equal civil rights for African Americans. He was such a prominent figure in the discussion of racism that his work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, has gained the position of the political Bible for the Negro race. And all creative Afro-American literature has been inspired by it in some degrees (Edwards, 2007, p. Vii). Du Bois in his collection of essays, *The Souls of Black Folk*, which is a seminal work in African American literature, speaks about his perspectives on the effects of racism and addresses the problem of institutionalized racism as a veil which has segregated the Blacks from the Whites like a wall and has prevented the human nature of the Blacks to be seen by the Whites. Furthermore, Du Bois argues that the veil brings African Americans a dual identity which leads to their double consciousness.

A. Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird"

Harper Lee wrote *To Kill a Mockingbird* in 1960 but set it in the 1930s, the time of the Great Depression, to remind the readers of the socioeconomic hardship of those era and also the historic Scottsboro Trial, which Lee has fictionalized it in the story through the character of Tom Robinson who is an innocent Negro accused of raping a white girl. She wrote this novel on the purpose of showing the immoral aspects of cultural, social, racial, and gender discriminations and indeed tried to invite people to coexist with one another despite any differences among them without prejudice and injustice. On the year which Lee wrote *To Kill a Mockingbird*, it was immediately successful and won the Pulitzer Prize, it has become a classic of modern American Literature and still is a successful and readable novel for 55 years after its publication. This novel also was adapted into an Oscar winning movie in 1962. Further to its depiction of racial prejudice and discrimination issues of American society in 1930's, *To Kill a Mockingbird* pictures the life of a minor character named Calpurnia as a black woman who lives with a white family and has the role of a mother for the white children. Therefore, living among the Whites and the Blacks at the same time leads her to a double consciousness, which is the result of segregation. Thus, in this study, it has been tried to scrutinize the inner as well as the outer truth of African Americans' life and their merged identity under the impact of racism based on Du Bois' concepts of "veil" and "double consciousness".

B. Du Bois' Concepts of "Veil" and "Double Consciousness"

Du Bois in his *The Souls of Black Folk*, written in 1903, introduces the symbolic concept of "veil" and states that the Blacks are shut out from the Whites' world by a vast veil. He believes that racial discrimination is like a veil which has separated whites and blacks so that they cannot integrate to one another even when they are living in one country. In Du Bois' view this "veil" is interwoven thread by thread by the white world under the impact of racism and is imposed on

the Blacks. As its basic definition, veil is a piece of clothes that covers the face especially of a woman to protect or hide (Oxford Advanced Learner's dictionary, 2005). Therefore, in Du Bois' words, as its function, the veil conceals the abilities and humanity of the Blacks and only gives a faint and distorted image of the Blacks. Likewise, in Charles F. Peterson's words, Du Bois' concept of "veil" has become "the signifier, metaphor, symbol for the barrier and its resulting level and layer of tension, difference, ignorance, and prejudice that demarcate Afro-us society from mainstream American society" (2007, p. 14). However, Du Bois does not have a negative attitude toward this veil and even refers to it as a "second sight" which reveals the racist face of the Whites, but he also persuades African Americans to tear it down and show their good nature and real humanity to the world. Du Bois states,

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, --a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (2007a, p. 8).

Indeed, this metaphoric veil, as the consequence of segregation and racial discrimination, brings African Americans a double consciousness. African Americans are faced up to a great psychological challenge which is the lack of a true self-consciousness, due to their merged identity as being both African and American, inner and outer of the veil. They are viewed by the Whites as inferior and nonhuman and only themselves can see the trueness of their identity and race under the threads of the veil. In the other words, as Robert Gooding-Williams says, Blacks are seeing themselves from the perspectives of the Whites which is a "false self-consciousness that obtains among African Americans when they observe and judge themselves from the perspective of a white, Jim Crow American world that betrays the ideal of reciprocal recognition due to a contemptuous, falsifying prejudice that inaccurately represents Negro life" (2009, p. 80). Thus, being in such an in-between position, living among the Africans and Americans at the same time, and facing a merged identity is the case that Du Bois refers to it as "double consciousness". In this regard, African Americans are asked by their defenders to struggle against discrimination to obtain a true self-consciousness. As Du Bois stipulates,

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,--this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face (2007a, p. 9).

Accordingly, in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, double consciousness can be seen through the character of Calpurnia, a Negro woman, as the result of her interactions with both Blacks and white people, under the impact of Black's segregation from the Whites' society and putting them behind a vast veil.

C. Negroes' Double Consciousness in "To Kill a Mockingbird"

To Kill a Mockingbird is the story of racial discrimination, injustice, lynching, and prejudice which is set during 1930s, the time of Great Depression in America. It happens in the state of Alabama in a fictional town named Maycomb, where its people are racist, selfish, and fanatic. *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a bildungsroman is narrated by a little girl named Scout Finch who lives with her father and brother, Atticus and Jim, and also their black maid Calpurnia. The story revolves around Tom Robinson's trial, as a Negro accused of raping a white girl, and Atticus' courage as a person who has undertaken Tom's advocacy in such a racist society. Lee's depiction of the contacts of two races in the novel proves Du Bois statement that despite daily intermingling of the Whites and the Blacks "there is almost no community of intellectual life or point of transference where the thoughts and feelings of one race can come into direct contact and sympathy with the thoughts and feelings of the other" (2007a, p. 123). In contrast to Maycomb's racist people, all the people of both races, Whites and Blacks, are equal for Atticus and he tries to be friend with both of these two groups. Thus, Calpurnia lives in their house and has the role of a mother for Atticus' children. Calpurnia, who is a Negro, trains the children kindly or even fight with them when they do something wrong. Indeed, there is no difference between her and a white mother in Finch' house and she is treated as equal as a White person in there. On the other hand, she is a Negro who has a house among the Blacks which she goes to after doing her job in Finch's house. In fact, she is a Black woman who lives both in White's and Black's society and this oscillation brings her a double consciousness.

Calpurnia is a Negro and Negroes are segregated from the Maycomb's white society. They are settled in a place near the town garbage dump, out of the town. As Leonard Dinnerstein notes, throughout the history in racist societies "the worst housing in the cities was reserved for the black migrants coming from the South" (qtd. in M'Baye, 2009, p. 173). Indeed, these Blacks are living behind a vast "veil" which separates them from the Whites' gatherings and conceals the Black's humanity and good nature from the others. Negroes in *To Kill a Mockingbird* are like mockingbirds which "don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us" (Lee, 2010, p. 103). Negroes in the story do the Whites' works and even are kind to all the people but are segregated and treated badly by the Whites, they are considered as the culprits in the case of any misdeed regardless of their righteousness and innocence. When a mad dog was appeared in the street,

Calpurnia called all the neighbors and made them aware of the danger, even she went in front of Radleys' door and banged on the door to aware them too (Lee, 2010, p. 107). Although she knew that Radleys will never come out, she saw it as a duty to aware them. Likewise, in Tom Robinson's trial, tom is accused of raping a white girl just because he wanted to help a lonely girl in her house deeds. He is lynched regardless of his innocence because he is a Negro and the girl is a White and Whites go on "the assumption- the evil assumption- that *all* Negroes lie, that *all* Negroes are basically immoral beings, that *all* Negro men are not to be trusted around our women" (Lee, 2010, p. 233). Thus, the Negroes are the subjects of prejudice in the story and are kept behind the veil of segregation.

Pursuant to the above information, as Wilson J. Moses stipulates in his essay, *The Poetics of Ethiopianism: W.E.B. Dubois and Literary Black Nationalism*, the veil is "often symbolic of black skin" (2001, P. 66) which differentiates the Blacks physically from the Whites. In fact, the veil makes the good nature of the Blacks invisible to the Whites so that they become the subject of any criminals in Whites' society, like Tom Robinson in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. And finally the veil gives a sense of double consciousness to the Blacks which leads to their merged identity. Accordingly, Living behind the veil, among the Negroes themselves, gives them their own real identity, but this identity is not accepted to the Whites' world because the Whites only see the ugly and distorted image of the Blacks due to the veil. Thus, the Blacks' goal is to tear down the veil and show their true identity to the Whites' world.

Calpurnia's double consciousness can be seen obviously in chapter twelve when she decides to take Finch's children to the Black's church. She carefully bathes them, puts them on their best clothes and makes them ready and when Scott asks her "what's all this for?" she answers, "I don't want anybody sayin' I don't look after my children" (Lee, 2010, p. 134). Calpurnia's answer, indeed, shows that she considers herself as the children's mother and among the Whites. Furthermore, she speaks in the Whites' language and "her grammar was as good as anybody's in Maycomb" and just "when she was furious Calpurnia's grammar became erratic" (Lee, 2010, p. 27). According to Lois Tyson, "double consciousness sometimes involves speaking two languages" (2006, p. 362). In the Black's church, Calpurnia spoke like the rest of the colored folks, in their language and tone. Thus, using two languages is the sign of Calpurnia's double consciousness. Scott mentions, "That Calpurnia lead a modest double life never dawned on me. The idea that she had a separate existence outside our household was a novel one, to say nothing of having command of two languages" (Lee, 2010, p. 143). Calpurnia has grown up among the Whites since her childhood, but she was still a Black who lives with them too. Consequently, she is living with a merged identity, a dual identity which shines in her using of language. In fact, when she becomes furious, she comes back to her real identity of being a Black, thus her grammar becomes erratic. On the other hand, her tendency toward being in the identity of the Whites can be seen when Jim tells her, "that doesn't mean you hafta talk that way when you know better" (Lee, 2010, p. 143), and she answers:

It's not necessary to tell all you know. It's not ladylike- in the second place, folks don't like to have somebody around knowin' more than they do. It aggravates 'em. You're not gonna change any of them by talkin' right, they've got to want to learn themselves, and when they don't want to learn there's nothing you can do but keep your mouth shut or talk their language (Lee, 2010, p. 143).

Calpurnia, indeed, has a sense of identity hesitation. She is an African American who lives a dual life. Du Bois responds to the identity hesitation of African Americans and notes that Negroes are Americans by birth, their language, their political ideas, their religion, and citizenship. And their Americanism does not go further, they are still Negroes, from a vast historic race. Although Calpurnia lives with a White family, still she is a Negro. And because of this fact when Jim asks her that why she does not speak in a better language with the other Negroes, she answers, "suppose you and Scott talked colored-folks' talk at home- it's be out of place, wouldn't it? Now what if I talked white-folk's talk at church, and with my neighbors? They'd think I was puttin' on airs to beat Moses" (Lee, 2010, p. 143).

One of the other features that makes Calpurnia different among the Blacks is her ability to read. She learned literacy from the Whites and also taught it to her son, Zeebo. Blacks were deprived of education and there were lack of educational facilities for them as a reason of segregation and discrimination, based on Du Bois' description in the "Of the Meaning of Progress". In this regard, all the Blacks in *To Kill a Mockingbird* are illiterate except four of them that Calpurnia and his son are two of these four. In fact, segregation has affected all aspects of Blacks' life which Du Bois refers to it in one of the chapters of *The Souls of Black Folk*, "Of the Sons of Master and Man":

They go to separate churches, they live in separate sections, they are strictly separated in all public gatherings, they travel separately, and they are beginning to read different papers and books. To most libraries, lectures, concerts, and museums, Negroes are either not admitted at all, or on terms peculiarly galling to the pride of the very classes who might otherwise be attracted (2007a, p. 124).

Calpurnia's tendency toward education and speaking in Whites' language and also her attempt to teach reading to her son, all shows her endeavor to be equal to Whites. Blacks, indeed, wants to eradicate their inferiority to the Whites and be as equal as them. According to Du Bois, "they must not expect to have things done for them- they must do for themselves" (2007b, p. 186). And this sometimes happens through simulation which again brings the Blacks a sense of double consciousness. Living with Finch's family since her childhood caused Calpurnia to simulate whites' behaviors and act like them. On the other hand, being a Negro in blood and also being among their gatherings forces her to act like the Negroes when she is with them. Thus, she is an American in her confrontation with the Whites, and an African in the Negroes' gatherings. Therefore, vacillating between these two separate lives has brought her a dual life and consequently a merged identity.

III. CONCLUSION

African Americans were always treated as the inferior race throughout the history. They were segregated from the Whites' society because they were known as the lowbrow and uncivilized people due to their colored skin. "W. E. B. Du Bois was a Black critic who devoted his life to fighting against racism and refuting the superiority of the Whites over the Blacks" (Rezazade & Zohdi, 2016). In his *The Souls of Black Folks*, which is the collection of his essays regarding racism written in 1903, "he considers racial segregation as a vast veil which has concealed the humanity of African Americans and prevented the good nature of them to be seen by the white world" (Rezazade & Zohdi, 2016). Du Bois believes that African Americans who are forced to live behind the veil, which is created by the Whites, are faced with many problems which one of them is the lack of true self-consciousness. He argues that, because of their dual life as being both Africans and Americans at the same time, African Americans experience a sense of double consciousness and finally a merged identity.

Regarding Du Bois concepts of "veil" and "double consciousness", Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* can be a good case in point. For it depicts, in its heart, the life of a Negro woman named Calpurnia who lives with a white family as their maid and simultaneously is among their own race in her house in the Negroes' settlement, which is segregated from the Whites' society. Therefore, as an African American she lives a dual life, living among the Whites with a black skin and also living among the Blacks, behind the veil of segregation, with having the features of the Whites' behaviors along with her. Consequently, vacillating between two opposite races brings her a sense of double consciousness and a merged identity which can be seen clearly in her behavior and language. Therefore, in this study the main focus was to investigate the dual life a Negro under the impact of racism based on Du Bois' concepts of "veil" and "double consciousness".

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