

Double Consciousness in African-American literature  
Case study: Richard Wright's novel *Native Son*

الوعي المزدوج في الأدب الأمريكي الزنجي:

رواية 'ابن البلد' لريتشارد رايت انموذجا

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**Abstract:**

The main purpose of the actual work is to illustrate the effect of Double Consciousness on the deep structure of the blacks' psyche. How does whites' oppressive and racist gaze impact black life and destiny? And how should the blacks resist such inhuman practices and come out instead with the best of them? To achieve the desired objectives and get deeper into the concept, the masterpiece novel *Native Son* by Richard Wright was taken as a sample to be studied based on Du Bois's Double Consciousness theory. The final results show that blacks' obsession with their self -image in the eyes of the other-whites- make them wallow in severe identity trauma and crisis.

**Keywords:** African American literature, Double Consciousness, black psyche, white gaze, self, other.

ملخص البحث

ان الهدف الرئيسي من هذا العمل هو توضيح تأثير الوعي المزدوج على البنية العميقة لنفسية السود. أي أثر اضطهاد وعنصرية البيض على حياة السود و مصيرهم. وكيف يجب على السود مقاومة مثل هذه الممارسات اللاإنسانية عليهم، و الخروج بدلا منها بأفضل ما لديهم. من اجل الوصول الى الأهداف المرجوة و الخوض فيها عميقا، تم اختيار الرواية الفنية "ابن البلد" لريتشارد رايت كعينة من أجل الدراسة وفق

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نظرية الوعي المزدوج لـ "دو بويس". النتائج النهائية تبين ان هوس السود بصورة الانا من خلال نظرة الاخر جعلهم يتخبطون في ازمة هوية شديدة.

الكلمات المفتاح : الأدب الأمريكي الزنجي، وعي مزدوج، نفسية السود، نظرة البيض، انا، آخر.



## I. Introduction

There is no doubt that the blacks in America suffered for centuries from racism, alienation, exploitation, marginalization and oppression in addition to economic and social tragic living conditions. Although slavery was abolished, the whites continue to treat the blacks as an inferior unwanted race in America. As a matter of fact, considerable masterpiece literary works emerged to depict the blacks' issue in America by a number of talented Black-American authors such as Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and Maya Angelou. White offensive gaze towards the blacks is an issue of equal importance that should also be scrutinized. The present work deals with Richard Wright's *Native Son* as an accurate sample to illustrate the extent to which the whites' discriminatory looks inflicted the blacks' psychological equilibrium, self-esteem and identity. We attempt to clarify how Double Consciousness terribly scrambled blacks' life and how the blacks ought to face such oppressive practices in return. Through *Native Son*, Richard Wright intends to ring the alarm on the biased effects of race relations in America through the tragic story of his protagonist Bigger Thomas. Throughout the novel, Bigger was deeply obsessed by the *other* white men's racist gaze towards him and his folk. The stereotypical image that Bigger had about the whites became the engine that controlled his behaviours and attitudes towards this superior race. After committing an unintentional murder and getting in touch with a communist white lawyer, Max; Bigger realized his mistake in surrendering to his Double Consciousness thoughts and making of the whites' gaze the centre of his life. But, it was too late.

## II. Du Bois: A Spokesman for the Blacks in America

W.E.B. DuBois is considered a pioneering theorist and critic and a furious defender of his fellow black subjects in the American context. The first and foremost aspect that Du Bois emphasizes and feels really heart- broken<sup>1</sup> towards it is slavery and its aftermath consequences. In

his outstanding work, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois stresses the fact that even after the abolishing of slavery and granting the blacks the so-called 'freedom', the blacks continue to undergo hard living conditions characterized by poverty, homelessness, unemployment and above all physical abuse, hatred and racism. In other words, the Negroes were deprived from enjoying the privileges that the whites live; i.e., they were not allowed to become full respected American citizens as supposed to be with the abolishment of slavery. According to W.E.B. Du Bois, though white workers get low salaries they receive in return respectful public recognition and honorable social status that compensate, with no doubt, their financial needs and requirements just because they have a white complexion. He carries on: '[these whites] were admitted freely with all classes of people to public functions, public parks, and the best schools.'<sup>2</sup>' (Du Bois, 1970,p.700) In other words, there is no room of comparison between blacks' and whites' economic and social life conditions in America. In describing the blacks' rural housing, Du Bois depicts them painfully as "dirty and dilapidated, smelling of eating and sleeping, poorly ventilated, and anything but homes." (2007,p.96) This aspect has been well stressed by Richard Wright through his depiction of the miserable living conditions of Bigger's family. In the very first scene of the novel, he shows the awful inhuman living conditions of Bigger's family in a nasty one room house with rats inside. In the novel, Bigger and his folk appear to live in ghettos far from white districts where the blacks were not allowed to roam in without obvious reasons.

Through Du Bois's stands and declarations, we can easily notice his strong influence by Marxist ideas and thought. Although Marxism opposes principally Capitalism, Du Bois refashions it to suit the blacks' situation in America. The black workers' miserable conditions are due to color- line racist laws imposed by another different 'superior' race; the whites. In other words, Capitalism exercised upon black workers in America is not imposed by a similar race -by the rich blacks- as the usual other Capitalist doctrines in the World. In fact, Capitalism in America is a far more oppressive and exploitative system upon the blacks. Therefore, it is a race based division not social class based division. Hence, it can be assumed that the Negro workers in America are suffering double bondage oppression. The first one is due to the Capitalist doctrine adopted by the American economic system which is based on two major social classes. Those who own money and enjoy

luxury life; i.e., the bourgeois white Americans who flourish and enrich their business through exploiting the lower social class in addition to those poor workers who work very long hours for very little money. As mentioned earlier, according to Du Bois those white workers may suffer financially from Capitalism but at least they are compensated by social, psychological, and educational privileges, which is not the case of black workers. Therefore, the second and most important bondage is racism due to slavery and its legacy. Here, the American workers of African origins suffer not from low wages but from total exploitation as they provide free- labor for the white Bourgeois especially during slavery. Stated differently, the oppressed Negroes work for no wage in addition to animal- like living conditions and housing. For this reason, Du Bois's Marxist ideas are based on criticizing and fighting imperialism, slavery and racism that worsened the situation for the Negro worker under the American Capitalist system. In the sample under study, Richard Wright stressed the antagonist living conditions of both blacks and whites in America. While the blacks were deprived from the very essence of life, the whites, on the other hand, were remarkably privileged. Mr Dalton's house was so big and comfortable that they could provide their mere driver, Bigger, with an individual room that he never dreamt of. These whites had money and very delicious food that Bigger was also deprived from in his house. This unfair division between the two races in America was the main urge for many black authors to revolt and refuse such practices in their notable works.

### III. Du Bois's Double Consciousness

For the previously stated reasons and others, Du Bois rebels and claims that the major problem of the twentieth Century is based, with no doubt, on color-line divisions (Du Bois, 2007,p. 3); i.e., how people of various races live and coexist with each other. In the American context, it is all about racism and oppression that the whites exercise upon the people of color. This aspect has long been the concern of several African American authors. Through their works, they intend to spot light on the blacks' legal but immoral situation in America. In *The Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison wants to illustrate his protagonist's suffering to make himself visible in a society that repudiates his presence instead. Maya Angelou's autobiography *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* is in fact a journey towards the self through which she desires to discover her lost identity in the American racist system. Similarly, Richard Wright, through his protagonist, wants to

show how Bigger was deprived from realizing his dreams to fly an aeroplane or to become a soldier and how whites' oppression rendered him a criminal instead. Accordingly, the history of the blacks in America is "the history of men who tried to adjust themselves to a world whose laws, customs, and [weapons] were leveled against them...the Negro is America's metaphor." (Richard Wright, 1964,p.72) Du Bois in his turn wondered if he was an American or a Negro and if there was a possibility to be both (Du Bois, 2007,p.184). Du Bois personality conflicts reflect the critical situation that all his fellow race citizens encounter in their daily life. The answer to this question may be as Du Bois claims that the blacks in the United States are "American – by citizenship, political ideals, language, and religion – and African, as a member of a 'vast historic race' of separate origin from the rest of America." (Rampersad, 1976,p.61) Accordingly, the African Americans have double identification; Americans but still Africans at the same time. This situation urged Du Bois to form his 'Double- Consciousness' concept to explain and justify the blacks' psychic trauma in America. Du Bois writes:

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 two-ness—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. (DuBois, 2007,p.8)

Here, Du Bois depicts pityingly the situation that the blacks are experiencing in an extremely racist society. The blacks become aware about their inferiority and their disgusting look in the eyes of the *other* 'superior' race. This down look becomes an obsession to the blacks which, according to Du Bois, hinders them from advancement as their entire energy and interest is devoted to fight and brighten the whites' negative perspective towards them. Splitting the African Americans' identity into racial and national identities pushes them to struggle to unite their divided souls and antagonist identities. However, the mission is not that easy especially in a hostile environment monitored by white men's racist and alienation systems. Du Bois suggests instead that the blacks take positively the idea of 'twoness' and invest it to create the best of the two races in one identity. He calls the blacks to merge

between these two antagonist identities as they are an opportunity for the blacks to create the best of man; i.e., a mixture of an American who, “has too much to teach the world”, and an African whose Negro “blood has a message for the world.” (2007,p.9) Instead of antagonism, psychological trauma, and identity crisis, the Negroes should benefit from the positive aspects of both blackness and Americanness. Du Bois clarifies better the idea saying: ‘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.’ (DuBois, 2007,p.9) In this merging, Du Bois wishes a compromise between American and African traits. He wishes that the blacks get rid of these destructive conflicts. He calls the blacks not to deny their origins and their ancestors’ traits and at the same time Du Bois confirms that the blacks can neither Africanize America nor whiten their souls and become white Americans. He resumes saying: ‘[the American Negro] 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.’ (p.9) According to Du Bois, the only remaining possible solution is that the blacks and whites put hand in hand as brothers and sisters to coexist and live peacefully in America sharing equal opportunities and tolerate differences<sup>3</sup>. All in all, the blacks’ postcolonial experience in America depicts the period of slavery and its aftermath consequences. It spots the light on the wounds caused by racial prejudice and suggests a cure in return.

Du Boisean “sense of always looking at one’s *self* through the eyes of the *other*” is similar to Fanon’s experience in the train journey where he has confronted racism that made him realize his inferiority. This down look gaze towards Fanon was a slap like on his face. He suddenly became concerned about his body, race, and ancestors and the way they are conceived, as cannibals and intellectually disabled, by the ‘civilized’ whites. Through the following passage, Frantz Fanon depicts painfully blacks’ daily life suffering from the white’s offensive gaze: ‘In the train I was given not one but two, three places. I had already stopped being amused.’ He carries on ‘It was not that I was finding febrile coordinates in the world. I existed triply: I occupied space. I moved toward the other . . . and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nausea...’ (Fanon, 1986,p.112 ). Fanon felt really painful towards whites’ attitudes in

avoiding sitting near him. They were disgusted and even had nausea to see his skin colour. Here in this passage, it is obviously clear the vertical relationship that the whites impose upon the blacks as the whites consider the blacks as nasty creatures. This down look gaze towards the blacks makes them aware about their inferiority and repulsive situation in a white society which in return contaminated their psych and weakened their identities. Under such oppressive conditions and constant assaults, the humiliated black citizen is made to feel stranger in a world dominated by the whites and even stranger to himself.

#### **IV. Bigger Thomas's Double Consciousness**

##### **1. White Offensive Gaze**

Throughout the novel, whites' racist gaze and Bigger's obsession about his image in the *other's* eyes was the main engine that enhanced the development of events. At the beginning of the novel, Bigger invited his friend Gus to act white through which they imitated white manners and their attitudes towards the blacks. The novel showed how the whites perceived the black folk as a source of trouble to the country. They were referred to as an inferior undesired race in the United States. Bigger and his folk knew exactly the extent to which the whites hated and disgusted the Negroes. For this reason, Bigger was too much nervous about his image in the whites' eyes when he got the job in the Dalton's house. When he first arrived to the house, Bigger did not know from which door these white folks expected him to enter; was it from the front way or the back? After hesitating for a while, he decided to look for a walk that leads to the rear side instead. Bigger's hesitation and worry about how the whites would allow him to enter their house justified his final decision to look for a rear walk. Bigger kept roaming in the neighbourhood before he finally decided to enter the house, but this again inflicted in his Double Consciousness thinking another fear and worry. This time he wondered what would the police think if they saw him roam in a white neighbourhood. For Bigger, the police would think that he was trying to rob or rape somebody (Richard Wright, 1940,p.53). Bigger's negative image about himself and the Negroes came from the whites' stereotypical image they had about the blacks as robbers and rapists. Now, Bigger became painfully conscious that he was wrong to come to this place; this is not his world. This is not the world where he can behave without being enslaved by his Double

Consciousness thoughts that hindered him from acting appropriately and being himself and not what the *others* want him to be. Feelings of hatred entrapped Bigger before even getting to know the folk he is going to work for. Negatives thoughts continue to come to his mind even deeper when he entered the house. The white world was so strange to him that he was not able to sit appropriately on a chair; unconsciously he sat at the very edge of it. When Mr Dalton introduced to him his wife Mrs Dalton, Bigger had a quick look at her fearing that Mr Dalton had seen him gazing at his wife. For Bigger, the blacks should be careful in dealing with the whites (56). A similar behaviour Bigger showed with both Mr Dalton and his daughter Mary. When Mary saluted him, he kept his eyes on the floor thinking that he should not have looked (60). Moreover, 'he had not raised his eyes to the level of Mr Dalton's face once since he had been to the house' as 'There was an organic conviction in him that this was the way white folks wanted him to be while in their presence' (56-7). Accordingly, poor Bigger Thomas was so oppressed by his Double Consciousness thoughts that he cared only for white men's expectations and totally ignored his wills and being himself. Stated differently, his personal identity is smashed in white men's presence. When Mr Dalton asked Bigger to provide him with the paper, Bigger Did not know what he ought to do. What was the appropriate behaviour according to Mr Dalton's view? He was confused if he should pick up the cap first from the floor and then find the paper or just the opposite (56). Again Bigger did not want to appear stupid in front of Mr Dalton. When the latter kept asking Bigger questions, Bigger in return used to long for short and brief answers until another oppressive thought overwhelmed his mind. Would Mr Dalton think that Bigger was stupid and that he could not offer full convincing answers? Then, Bigger decided to speak in order to brighten his image; 'yessuh, there's four of us'. He stammered, trying to show that he was not as stupid as he might appear. He felt the need to speak more, for he felt that maybe Mr Dalton expected it. And he, suddenly, remembered the many times his mother had told him not to look at the floor when talking with white folks or asking for a job. He lifted his eyes and saw Mr Dalton watching him closely. He dropped his eyes again' (58). Here, it is strictly clear how Bigger could not bear white men's looks; he felt unease, self-pity, and self-hatred.

Things went even worse in his first driving mission with Mary, the daughter of Mr Dalton. When Mary introduced to Bigger her friend



Jan, both Mary and Jan were communists, Jan offered to shake hands with Bigger. It was the first time in all his life that Bigger encountered with a white man who wanted to shake hands with him. Bigger wondered if he really should shake hands with Jan and felt puzzled and even angry when Mary laughed. Bigger quickly thought that they were making fun of him. Even if Mary and Jan were real to Bigger and were serious in treating him as an equal human being, Bigger was enslaved by his Double Consciousness thoughts that kept telling him that he was just a mere mean of entertainment to them. Such wrong thoughts pushed Bigger to hate the couple instead of valuing their unique behaviour as whites towards the Negroes. Throughout the time he spent with them, Bigger was too much concerned about his skin colour and each time Mary and Jan treated him in a human and polite way, he kept looking to his black hands in order to remember that he is black and thus there is something wrong and unusual in the situation Mary and Jan put him in. His black hands and skin, which were a source of shame to Bigger, were sufficient reasons to make Bigger feel towards Jan and Mary a 'dumb, cold, and inarticulate hate' (72). These two whites made him feel naked transparent, their behaviours helped but to put Bigger down and deform him (72). Accordingly, Bigger's negative stereotypical<sup>4</sup> image about the whites and even about his *self* and his folk prevented him from understanding Jan's and Mary's truthful feelings towards him. When he was sitting between these two communists, Bigger's legs were aching because he was not comfortable but he preferred to bear his pains rather than draw the attention of Jan and Mary and remind them about his black disgusting skin colour; 'These people made him feel things he did not want to feel. If he were white, if he were like them, it would have been different. But he was black. So, he sat still, his arms and legs aching' (74). Bigger pitied himself that he was not white, that he was not equal to them; a feeling that he did not appreciate. In the restaurant, Bigger did not want to sit and eat with Mary and Jan as he was too anxious about his image in the eyes of both white and black folks. For the whites, Bigger was convinced that Jan did it on purpose to appear with a black boy to humiliate him and make him conscious about his black skin especially when Jan asked Bigger not to call him sir again. Bigger directly looked at his black hands and asked himself; 'Did not white people despise a black skin?' (72). For his black folks and friends, Bigger feared that 'they would tease him about such a thing as long as they could

remember it' (74). In going back home, the three were drunk especially Mary who was not even able to stand on her feet and walk upstairs to her room. In such situation, Bigger was obliged to take her by himself to her room. But he feared, he feared that any white would see him, a black boy, holding a white rich girl, a thing that was totally forbidden in the American racist society. Too much concerned about his image in whites folk's perspective, pushed Bigger unwillingly to kill Mary just because he did not want Mrs Dalton to discover his presence in her daughters room. This situation could have been easily solved if Bigger was not imprisoned by his own image in the whites' eyes. Bigger knew very well that it was absolutely rejected that a black boy be in a white girl's room and that sex relations between whites and blacks were repulsive. Seeing him in a White girl's room, the whites would accuse him of rape attempt. Unfortunately, Bigger had no choice but to silence Marry, a murder that he did not even intend or plan. After realizing Mary's death and burning her body in the furnace, Bigger did not even feel pity for her as he hated her just because she was white. He hated her before even he knew her (303). He was not able to understand her good intentions towards him. The idea that oppressed his mind was just his own image in the whites' eyes and their reaction towards his crime. Bigger 'started imagining; the vast city of white people that sprawled outside took its place... a Negro murderer, a black murderer...he had killed a white woman ...' (89). Shortly afterwards he was relaxed, he was relaxed that nobody on earth would expect a mere introvert and doubtful black boy dares to kill a rich white man's daughter (104). According to Bigger, the blacks are maybe expected to steal, rape, get drunk, and make troubles but not to distort a millionaire's daughter (109). Bigger prettily knew that the whites thought that the blacks did not dare to approach a white girl, that they were even unable to plan such a crime. These white folks did actually underestimated blacks' capacities, a stereotypical image that Bigger wanted to exploit when he attempted to convince his girlfriend Bessie to collaborate with him in the Kidnap letter. Bigger calmed Bessie not to worry simply because they wouldn't think *we* did. Just because we are black and whites think that blacks do not have enough guts to do it. They think Niggers is too scared. (137). Biggers's expectations went right. He heard one of the men who came to the Dalton's house to report about their daughters murder referring to Bigger saying; ' Aw. He's a dumb cluck. He doesn't know anything'(192). This passage shows the

negative stereotypical image that the whites have about the blacks. They considered them stupid and unable to think appropriately. Throughout the investigations, Bigger was answering questions intelligently based on his stereotypical image he had about the whites. For this reason, he attempted to draw the police's attention to Jan just because the latter was a communist and that the American authorities hated communists. However, all of Biggers plans collapsed when the remained bones of Mary's corps were discovered in the bottom of the furnace. When Bigger was caught by the police and was surrounded by the whites ' He closed his eyes and turned his head away sensing that they were white and he was black, that they were the captors and he was the captive' (242). We cannot deny that when Bigger committed the crime, he felt an internal satisfaction especially when he puzzled the investigators with the kidnap letter. He could prove to the whites that the blacks were intelligent enough to fraud the whites. However, his sense of joy and revenge turned to self-disgust and hatred when he was surrounded by white hate looks.

### **2.Bigger's Unreconciled Worlds**

As Du Bois suggests in his Double Consciousness theory, Bigger hated himself because of the pity looks he appeared with when his family came. He did not like to appear weak; he did not like to see the members of his family in such contempt situation. ' Bigger held his face stiff, hating them and himself, feeling the white people along the wall watching' (260). Being under whites' mercy, Bigger saw in the very looks of the man's eyes, his own personality reflected in narrow, restricted terms (143). White feelings towards Bigger were in fact deeper than hate (241). Bigger knew that the whites felt nothing but abhorring him and his race that's why he disgusted white looks towards him. He wished anything to happen so that those white faces refrain from staring at him (284). Bigger could not bear white looks which made him more conscious about his skin colour. White gaze reminded Bigger about his blackness; a thing that he hated because it made him feel that he was a mere ape in the whites' view. Bigger went even further in hating and underestimating himself, 'Maybe they were right when they said that a black skin was bad, the covering of an apelike animal. Maybe he was just unlucky, a man born for dark doom' (241). Bigger refused even to defend himself in front of the investigators. He did not rape Mary but still he considered it useless to say it. In his own words, Bigger stated 'I'm black. They say black men do that (rape

white women). So it doesn't matter if I did or I didn't' (300). Here Bigger found the idea of defending himself useless because he knew beforehand that the whites wouldn't believe him. He knew deep in his conscious mind that blacks were conceived as rapists for the whites. For this reason, when he was asked if he liked Mary, Bigger felt excited and started to shout and tremble, No! No! I hated her (300). He knew that sex relations between blacks and whites were not allowed.

When getting in touch with the Lawyer Max, who defended Bigger and offered uncompensated help, Bigger could not trust him. He felt the same thing when Jan offered to shake hands with Bigger. How could Bigger trust Max and all the whites he met knew or heard about throughout his life were reluctant at keeping a distance away from the blacks (298). Double Consciousness again hindered Bigger from understanding Max. A situation that 'made him live again in that hard and sharp consciousness of his color and feel the shame and fear that went with it, and at the same time it made him hate himself for feeling it' (298). We can notice the psychological trauma that the blacks were undergoing under whites' oppressive measures which made the blacks hate even themselves for appearing weak and despised. As Du Bois's claim, the Negroes suffered from unreconciled souls, thoughts and identities due to whites' down look gaze and non-acceptance of the black race. When talking to Max, Bigger opened his heart and talked painfully the way he felt towards the white world. Indeed, Bigger had always felt outside this strange white world. He never felt that he belonged to such distant world. He could not find a harbour to his soul and identity. Yes, he was an American by citizenship but he was not accepted as such in fact. He wished to fly an aeroplane, to become a soldier but the whites' wouldn't allow him. Instead, the whites exploited him and his folk, hated them, and repudiated them from their district. They just gathered them in horrible and animal like living conditions to wallow in poverty, crime and hunger without even considering their needs and wills. 'They say we do things like that and they say it to kill us. They draw a line and say for you to stay on your side of the line...they don't care if there's bread over on your side. They don't care if you die' (302). The whites were the makers of law. They decided for the blacks' destiny. They did not care about their wills, desires, hopes and dreams. All what they were concerned about was to make the blacks at their disposal to serve their needs. The best white men pretended to care about blacks' education, and seeking their

integration into the society while in fact they were just worsening the situation. In the novel, Mr Dalton pretended to help the blacks when he hired Bigger although he already knew that the black boy stole tires and was in a reform school. Mr Dalton own buildings that were rent to the blacks but he refused to rent to the blacks respectful houses in white areas. Mr Dalton had considerable charity projects to the blacks, but they were useless. What the blacks would do with Ping Pong games while they suffered from fragmented selves, while they were refused to be full-American citizens, while they were still treated as slaves although slavery was abolished. Mrs Dalton in her turn wanted to help Bigger and send him back to school but for what? To seat in isolated corners? Or to be educated but not allowed to choose their jobs or to realize their dreams. There is no doubt that Bigger and his folk had always felt outside of this white world and civilization. They were mere savage beasts utterly untouched by the softening influences of modern civilization (244). It is true that these blacks live in America but they did not enjoy full-citizenship<sup>5</sup> as they were absolutely deprived from their rights. Therefore, the blacks in America suffered unreconciled souls, thoughts and identities. According to Tajfel (1974), there are mainly two important elements in social identity formation, the cognitive and affective side. For Tajfel (1974), social identity involves one's knowledge and awareness about his group membership in addition to his feelings and affections about belonging to that group (p. 69). These affective elements are further divided into one's *sense of belonging* in addition to *attitudes towards the ingroup* (Feitosa, Salas, & Salazar, 2012, p. 532). As the name of these two types entail; the first means the degree to which an individual is connected and involved into group interests and matters and feels part of them, whereas the second refers to an individual's stands, attitudes and feelings about being a member of that group and the specific value he gives to it. Bigger knew very well that he did not belong to that superiour world, he was rejected, alienated, deprived from his rights as an American citizen. That world was strange to him and had no positive feelings towards it. He knew that the whites hated him and therefore the sole feeling he had for the *others* was hate. Therefore, Bigger and his folk lived without sense of belonging, without self-esteem and without even a reconciled identity. How can Bigger and his folk belong and have positive feelings to a nation which deprived them from their rights, which treated them as inferior species who did not have the same living conditions, destiny

and future as the *other* members. According to scholars such as Tajfel (1974) and Smith (1991), all these elements are fundamental ingredients for personal, social and national identity formation.

When Max asked Bigger why he killed Mary although she accepted him as another human being, Bigger replied that for him she acted as all the *other* white people did. Bigger could not understand her because blacks and whites were strangers to each other. Their world was split up (301). Here, it is clear how Bigger find difficulties to understand and reconcile the two antagonist worlds; black and white. Though Mary was kind to him, the stereotypical image Bigger had about the whites hindered him from accepting Mary's helping hand. Instead he felt extremely mad and nervous as 'she made feel like a dog' (301). Feelings of self-hatred and disgust overwhelmed Bigger when Mary attempted to know more about Negroes life. She reminded him of his sufferings, of his miserable life and dramatically of the whites' racist gaze. She reminded him that because of Mary and her folk that Bigger and his folk were suffering. But he could do nothing. He felt handicapped towards whites' power and strength. When Mrs Dalton came to Mary's room, it was like another man took control of Bigger and started acting for him (302). He was confused, mixed up and was not able to think appropriately. White superiority complex and civilization inspired in Bigger's deep structure of consciousness hate, fear, identity fragmentation and psychological trauma to the extent that Bigger and the like were losing the very essence of their existence. They failed to build a healthy self-identity as they were only obsessed about their self-image in the *other's* eyes. They could not act as they should or as they want to, it was just like another soul-white gaze- was controlling their bodies. Bigger hopelessly stressed that each time he attempted to forget the whites, he failed. The whites entrapped his thinking and would not let him go (360). Bigger sadly asserted 'a guy gets tired of being told what he can do and can't do' (303). Whites' world totally erased blacks' wills and desires. For this reason, the blacks were exhausted, they no more beared such treatment. Therefore, they behaved in a violent way. However, the whites failed to understand that they were the actual cause of such crimes, and violent terrorist behaviours. In the court, Max attempted to convince the judge that the way the whites treated the black push the latter to act the way the whites did not want them to. Referring to the Negroes who are sitting at the back corner of the court, Max blamed the whites for refusing the blacks

to sit with them on the same bench (338). Under such tragic circumstances, the blacks were victims of misunderstanding and negative stereotypes. For this reason, Du Bois suggested to give chance to those inferiorised blacks, to try to understand each other; blacks and whites, to excuse each other and unite to live in harmony and peace as brothers and sisters.

### 3. Towards Self- Reconciliation and Promising Future

Max, Bigger's lawyer, attempted through his conversation with Bigger to help him get rid of these destructive internal conflicts. Each time Bigger blamed the whites for the blacks' suffering, Max showed understanding. But still, Max tried to make Bigger aware that change comes from the *self* first. When Bigger blamed Mary for her acts towards him, Max stressed to Bigger that he should have tried to understand her. Max wanted Bigger to reconcile his conflicting ideas so that he could think appropriately. After talking to Marx, Bigger started to think in another way and change his visions of the world, a thing that he had always feared simply because he constantly thought of the *others'* hate to him. Now that he talked to Max who opened his eyes to the world, Bigger started valuing himself. 'For the first time in his life he felt ground beneath his feet, and he wanted it to stay there' (310). Bigger understood then, that he should not have imprisoned his thoughts to whites' expectations, rather he should have concentrated on valuing the *self* to enhance his self-esteem that white gaze ruined. Bigger was convinced now that he should overcome his internal conflicts and hate first so that he can win the battle for his life (312). Bigger should have loved himself first to love the *others* as hate blinded his sight. For the first time, Bigger imagined the sun melting the whites and blacks wiping out all differences based on color (311). Now, Bigger started to see the world from a different angle full of hope and promising future. He imaged the whites and blacks join hands and walk towards harmony and peace. Now, Bigger did not want to die not because he fears jail and punishment, but to check if his dreams might become true one day (311). He wanted to see if it would be possible to be a full American citizen and managed to reconcile these antagonist worlds that struggle inside him. If he got another chance, he would change things and try to understand and fight for the blacks' falling apart identity. Yes, Bigger was wrong in wasting time thinking of white people and not seeking for positive change. Bigger was not in need to feel that the whites loved him. What he only needed is mere

acceptation that he and his folk were deprived from (310). For the American society to prosper, both blacks and whites should accept the existence of the *other*. They should live peacefully in America sharing equal opportunities and tolerate differences. The blacks need not the whites to love them but to accept them as another human being. Under such convenient conditions, the blacks would be able to unite blackness and Americanness to come out with the best of them. Only then, the blacks can achieve high self-esteem and construct a healthy Black-American identity. But, unfortunately, it was too late.

#### V. Conclusion

Bigger Thomas is just one example of millions of Negroes who suffer from white men's racist gaze in America. What we attempted to do in the actual work is to illustrate how oppression and violence may lead to reciprocal outcomes. We can never expect positive behaviours and attitudes out of negative ones. But still, Richard Wright through *Native Son* attempted to help the blacks see the beauty of the world from another angle where the whites are not the center of it. Instead, the blacks should reconcile their souls, thoughts and identities to come out with the best of them.

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<sup>1</sup> In his *Dusk of Dawn* (1940), Du Bois asserted that *The Souls of Black Folk* was "written in tears," was "a cry at midnight thick within the veil, when no one rightly knew the coming day." (1992, p. xxix-xxx)

<sup>2</sup> Concerning schooling and education, Du Bois emphasized the inequality distribution of financial spending among the blacks and whites in South America. According to him, out of five dollars, the whites get four while the blacks obtain only one dollar (Du Bois, 2007, p.122).

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Du Boisean Double –Consciousness ideas, several writers and authors defend and call for a horizontal relationship between the blacks and whites to get rid of racism and color-line ideas.

<sup>4</sup> According to Tajfel, "stereotypes can be used strategically to justify particular prejudicial group relations that reinforce one group's power or status at the expense of another" (Spears, 2011, p. 211). What Tajfel meant here is that stereotyping can be a useful element in explaining and justifying group prejudice.

<sup>5</sup> According to Smith (1991), the construction of a nation is based on a certain recognized and distinguished group of people who must share ancestral geographic location in addition to common past, culture, traditions, customs, economy, and conventional codes and laws that define the rights and duties of the members of the same nation (p.14). For Guibernau (1996), sharing culture and territory by a certain community is not sufficient; having the same destiny for all the members of a certain nation is of crucial importance too. According to him, a nation refers to a certain group of people who consciously form a community who have a shared culture, past and future in addition to a well-defined independent territory (p.47-48). Other scholars went even further to claim that members of a certain nation do not need merely to belong to a nation, instead what matters is the way they feel towards the

nation they belong to- similar to Tajfel's affective side- (Emerson, 1959,p. 95 ; Connor, 1993,p. 376-77). All in all, an individual cannot build his own identity outside its social context. Certain elements have to be available to have a sane and healthy identity. Living in one nation necessitates the sharing of certain vital elements such as geography, culture, history and economy; positive feelings towards the nation; acceptance by the other members; and sharing common destiny and future.