

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The United States of America is a multicultural country inhabited by people of diverse races and ethnic groups. With this diversity, the American society are divided into two groups, majority and minority groups. The majority group is White-American, which in 2014 comprises 79.96% of the total population (United States Demographics Profile 2014). The White American does not only become majority in terms of number, but also in terms of culture. It could not deny its culture being the dominant culture that has set the norms and values for the American people (Let's Recognize White American Culture). The second group is a combination of many races that include Native American, Alaskan Native, Asian-American, African-American, Latinos, and many more. Even though the number of minorities in U.S. is still less than White American, their population growing record shows a good progress (Wihbey).

Being the second largest minority group in the United States, African-American with 12.85% of the U.S. population, surely has a significant place in American society (United States Demographics Profile 2014). They first came to America during slavery era that started in the 1600s by Colonial America. The first idea of slavery in America was pushed by lack of number of workers on farms and plantations (Patrick). The slave traders brought Africans to work as slaves on farms or plantations to make

American colonists richer through a cruel voyage. Slavery brought anguish and sadness to Africans because they were separated from their homeland and family. They worked from sunrise until sunset six days a week, did not receive suitable food to eat, and lived in small and dirty shacks without any furniture (ushistory.org). African slaves were prohibited from learning how to read and write with the aim of making them dependent to their master (Patrick). African slaves were beaten and treated as property under the law at that time (Hallam).

After suffering for more than 200 years, African-American finally had an opportunity to live freely after President Lincoln started reconstruction era to bring freedom to slave in America. African-American as freedman could live with their family, get a job, learn how to read and write and also go anywhere they want to. Even though slavery was over, negative stereotypes were still attached to African-American throughout the course of history. In White-American's mind, African American was regarded inferior and therefore deserved no equal treatment. So many nicknames, such as Negro and nigger, were used especially by White-American to humiliate and denigrate African-American that it would have never been imagined that one day African-American could become important people in the United States.

However, in this 21st century Barack Obama brought a new history in his life and also to the United States of America when he decided to run as a presidential candidate. He was finally elected and inaugurated as the 44th President of the United States of America in 2009 and the first African American to hold the office. This moment brings the American society to alteration of African-American image in the

U.S.A. Furthermore, the awareness of race's role in society has risen because of the election of Obama (Rucker). Barack Obama is a biracial person whose parents had an interracial marriage. His mother is a White American and his father is a Kenyan who came to America to study. Obama can be classified as biracial person based on parental genes, yet he prefers to declare himself as African-American than biracial person in 2010. Root states that in the U.S.A there is still 'one-drop' rule to classify and identify people (qtd. in Ridgle). This also happens in Obama's case in which Obama classifies and identifies himself as an African-American instead of biracial person.

Jami Floyd assures that the main purpose of 'one-drop' rule is to keep the purity of white race (Floyd). In other words, the white people do not want to classify someone who has even a drop of African blood as white because it is seen as a threat to their purity. Accordingly, this 'one-drop' rule has for so long become the basis for the White to practice discrimination on African-American. This rule may also be classified as a form of racism against African-American that still exists until today. Thus, this fact further reaffirms the existence of racism which could not be vanishing in American society (Tyson 367).

Biracial people have no right to choose to which race they belong since they were born. It is because people around them push them to be one of them only (Ridgle). In the case of African-American, they were pushed to adopt only one race to belong to, i.e. the African race. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of biracial children resulting from interracial marriages is actually quite fantastic in the United States of America as it can bring new color to American society. The understanding about the 'gray' side

e standing in between the white side and the black side has increased through biracial issue. Biracial people cannot be defined as a part of black or white only. Therefore, it is believed that biracial people should not be categorized under a single race only.

As an interesting phenomenon in American society, the biracial issue of African-American is also brought to life in some literary works. *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* by Heidi W. Durrow is one of so many novels that deal with African-American issue. This debut novel won The Bellwether Prize for Literature of Social Change in 2008. The Bellwether Prize is an award for unpublished novel that consists on literary fiction portraying social justice as well as its political and cultural impact on human relations (PEN AMERICA). As the winner of The Bellwether Prize, *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* gained a publishing contract and was finally published in 2010.

Heidi W. Durrow, the author of this novel is also an African-American woman –with blue eyes and light dark skin– who lives in the U.S.A during 1980s (Durrow, About Heidi). Even though the story is not based on a true story, it cannot be denied that the author's background give a huge impact on her literary work. The early 1980s noted the beginning of the rise of successful black figures, such as Oprah Winfrey, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and many others (Wallefeldt). Their successes have contributed to a better image of African-American that helps reduce racist act from the white people. However, in the novel we could see that there is still a gap in the society between the white and the black people that might not emerge on the surface. This novel attempts to bring the injustice thread to African-American or biracial person which is forgotten by the American society.

The novel narrates the story of Rachel Morse, a daughter of Danish mother and African-American father. She is the survival of her family's rooftop suicide tragedy happened in Chicago that killed her mother and her siblings. After the tragedy, she moved to Portland to live with her fraternal grandmother – a strict African-American. This new environment dominated by African-American makes Rachel finally realize that white people have blue eyes and black people have dark skin, while she has both of the characteristics. She receives rejection from her black friends because of her intelligence and her beauty. She can never make friends with her white friends because her skin is too dark for them. She realizes that her habit is not completely the same with either white people or black people. In fact, she later learns that her habit is more a combination of both.

Her social identity is the biggest question in her life beside the truth of her life tragedy. She finds it difficult to define herself because of her mixed beautiful and exotic appearance that looks different from either white or black. Nevertheless, the society she lives in keeps defining her as black. The judgment that comes from her society pushes her to accept herself as a black person instead of a biracial person.

The problem of anxiety over her own identity that Rachel has to face in this story is well-known in African-American criticism as double consciousness introduced by W.E.B. Du Bois in his book *The Souls of Black Folk*. Racism that happens to African-American in the United States is not a new thing that leads them to experience double consciousness. According to Du Bois, double consciousness is how someone tries to see themselves through their own perspective and also other's perspective. They s

ee how other perspective is much better (9).

Double consciousness is not a new issue since there have been many researches on the identity of African-American and biracial people especially in literary works, including the studies from Lubowicka and Isenberg who both analyze the identity of biracial girl. Lubowicka focuses on studying Rachel Morse's identity in *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* through Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy's approach (1), and Isenberg analyzes Maureen Peal in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* using Stonequist's theory (1). In her article, Lubowicka concludes that Rachel chooses to be neither black nor white, and Danishness from her mother becomes her crossroad. Different from Lubowicka, Isenberg reveals that Maureen is a great example of Marginal Man. Maureen's connection to both white and black cannot help her to be a bridge between them. As the study to be conducted also concerns with the identity of both African American and biracial person, the two previous studies above can help to lead the writer to further explore the issue of double consciousness that has not been addressed in both studies

1.2. Statement of the Problems

This study would like to answer these questions:

1. How is double consciousness as experienced by Rachel Morse portrayed in Durrow's *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky*?
2. How does Morse negotiate her identity as biracial person in her society?

1.3. Objective of the Study

This study aims to:

1. Examine the portrayal of double consciousness experienced by Rachel Morse in the novel *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* by Heidi W. Durrow.
2. Explore the way Rachel as biracial person negotiates her identity in her society.

1.4. Significance of the Study

Until today, racism has always been a serious issue in American society and the effect of racism based on skin color still has a lasting effect on the life of African American. Accordingly, this study is expected to be a window to observe the practice of racism in the United States nowadays, particularly in literary works, which may serve as evident that racism is still active in other forms. The study is also expected to shed a light on the fact that biracial is different from white or black. This expectation hopefully could bring impact to the society and persuade them to treat biracial people as people who could belong to two or more races and not only one race.

In addition, the writer hopes that this study can be used as reference for any further studies on the issue of double consciousness from the perspective of African American criticism done by the students of the English Department in Universitas Airlangga. This study hopefully can also become a useful addition to the study of African-

American and especially the study on the works of Heidi W. Durrow.

1.5. Scope and Limitation

In order to make a comprehensive analysis, the writer would set the scope and limitation of this study. Durrow's novel is the main concern in this study which focuses on the issue of double consciousness of the main character in the novel, Rachel Morse. The scope of this study is double consciousness that appears in Durrow's *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky*. The double consciousness experience is limited only in Rachel Morse's experience as a biracial person who just moved to American society.

The double consciousness that might be experienced by other characters in the novel would not be analyzed in this study. Nevertheless, other characters in this novel will only be analyzed as far as their role in setting the condition of environment around Rachel that contribute to her double consciousness. In *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* novel, we can find the story of Rachel's past life in Chicago through some characters' point of view. This part of the novel will not be described thoroughly yet only the part which has significant connection to support Rachel Morse's double consciousness experience.

As the setting of the novel is the United States in 1980s, this study will also observe the social condition of the American society during that era. In addition, to interpret how this novel which portrays 1980s events can be relevant to the social condition at the time it was published more than three decades later, the writer will analyze t

he relation between the social condition of American society during the time of the novel's setting and time of its publication. In this study, the 1980s and 2000s will be the time frame set to prove or bring evident to the reader that racism against African-American especially those of mixed races or biracial still exists.

1.6. Theoretical Background

W. E. B. Du Bois is one of the pioneers who proposed African-American criticism in 1898 with aim to counteract institutionalized negative images and representation of Blacks within academia and society (Land, Roderic R., and M. Christopher Brown II). Tyson describes African-American criticism as one of approaches in literary research which deals with slavery, struggle to be free, racism, stereotype and representation of African-American. The main focus of this theory is to correct the stereotype and misrepresentation of African-American through literary works (Tyson 364).

Durrow's *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* is one of the novels that brings African-American perspective as its point of view. Therefore, the writer would examine the novel using African-American theory especially double consciousness which is experienced by Rachel Morse as the main character. Double consciousness concept is introduced by Du Bois in his book, *The Souls of Black Folk*.

According to Du Bois, African-American people in the United States experience double consciousness because they try to see themselves through their perspective and other's perspective and believe that other's perspective is much better than their o

wn perspective (9). Similar to Du Bois, Schaefer also states that African-American will feel to be American and not fully American in the same time (2). This feeling of being and not being American at the same time clearly reflects double consciousness, which is the awareness of belonging to two conflicting cultures (Tyson 362). African-American experiences to have African cultures in their home and should adjust with white domination culture outside of their home.

Moreover, the double consciousness concept, Du Bois also introduces the 'veil' term which illustrates how African-American view White-American and also the other way. Du Bois believes that the veil in African-American exists since they were born and it is also the reason why double consciousness could be experienced by African-American (9). The veil is another term of stereotype in society which can lead people to racism toward African-American.

Double consciousness as experienced by African-American is the effect of racism toward them. Racism in the United States not clearly visible in this 21st century, but this act of racism has not disappeared or still invisibly exists among American society (Tyson 367). Racism does not only happen towards different races, but it also happens among the black community since internalized racism often brings result intra-racial racism in the society (Tyson 362).

Another form of racism is the existence of 'one-drop' rule in The U.S. declaring that when someone has a drop of African's blood in his/her body, all people will agglomerate them as black (Ridgle). This rule leads biracial people to feel hesitant of their identity. As identity is a set of characteristic which could differentiate someone fr

om others (Atchley qtd. In Kelly), when someone experiences double consciousness, his/her identity becomes blurred because he/she cannot decide which one he/she belongs to.

1.7. Method of the Study

Qualitative method is applied in this study to analyze a literary work entitled *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky*. Qualitative method is one of the methods that are often exerted in social sciences. Interpretation, naturalistic approach is adjusted to analyze data of the research. In other word, this method interprets the data in natural way to examine the meaning of it and use it to answer the question of the research (Denzin 3). This study interprets double consciousness phenomena in Durrow's *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* which aims to measure and apply Du Bois' double consciousness theory to the Rachel Morse' experience as biracial person in Durrow's novel.

To do this literary research, Durrow's novel is selected as the primary source of this study. African-American criticism focusing on double consciousness proposed by Du Bois will be applied as the main theory to interpret double consciousness phenomena in the novel. The next step is to find the secondary sources such as articles from journals, related studies or online sources from the internet which are related to the subject of the study. The data needed from all of the sources will be collected through close reading. The intention of close reading is to understand further the central ideas

and key supporting ideas by uncovering the layer of meaning (Boyles).

The data which is important to analyze Rachel's double consciousness in the novel will be obtained from Rachel's point of view in 'Rachel' chapter. It contains of her position in her new environment, the differences atmosphere that she finds in her new environment, the different attitudes of her new friends toward her, and Rachel's double views as biracial person who is neither white nor black in her new environment. It is also important to analyze 'Nella' chapter to reveal Rachel's 'one-drop' rule experience in Chicago. Other chapter, such as Jamie, Laronne, Roger, and Brick will not be analyzed because these chapters do not have significant of Rachel's double consciousness experience. Du Bois' theory on double consciousness will be applied and utilized in analyzing the data to discover how Rachel Morse's double consciousness can affect her identity and how she then negotiates her identity in the society. The final step of this study is to conclude the analysis of Rachel Morse's experience in *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky*.

1.8. Definition of Key Terms

There are some important terms needed to be noted, which are listed as follows:

Double consciousness : A condition where a person is trapped between two cultures and he/she is confused about which side or culture to

- hat he/she is going to take (Tyson).
- Biracial** : A term for person whose parents are of two differently *socially* designated racial group (Root qtd. in Khanna).
- Racism** : Unequal power relations that grow from the sociopolitical domination of one race by another that result in systematic discriminatory practices (Tyson).
- Identity** : Characteristic of a person that could differentiate him/herself from the other and also define him/herself to a specific group of people (Atchley qtd. in Kelly).
- One-drop Rule** : Racist judgment which exists in the U.S.A. that classifies biracial children or the offsprings of black people who still have their black parent identity (Ridgle).
- The Veil** : A condition which African-American possess from birth that makes difficult for them to see themselves through the eyes of others (Schaefer).