

CHAPTER FOUR

‘ALL GOD’S CHILLEN HAD WINGS’: AFRICAN AMERICAN TRAVEL WRITING AND THE CLAIMS OF FAITH

Essentially, it [religion] is nothing other than a body of collective beliefs and practices endowed with a certain authority. (Emily Durkheim, *Morality* 51)

Sacred gaze is the manner in which a way of seeing invests an image, a viewer, or an act of viewing with spiritual significance. (David Morgan, *Sacred Gaze* 3)

Seeing is not innocent, and religion or religious beliefs come out as a major influence on the ways of seeing of humans. Durkheim's description of religion cited above links it to the formal and structural authority of society. These ideas and beliefs, as Morgan suggests, project themselves on to different images in the society and are instrumental in the act of producing, receiving and circulating the power of the sacred through gazes. The chapter title is based on the hymns of the newly arrived slaves in America. The prayer symbolizes hope, and in a way captures the optimism of the African Americans in spite of the horror of the Middle Passage. Religion, especially Christianity, newly introduced among the 'black' people, spells hope and opportunities. Even more importantly, it shows the role of religion in African American life and culture. The 'black' American looks to God at moments of crisis, despite the failure of the twin institutions of the church and Christianity. If this belief in God does not reflect the relationship of the 'black' American to the Christian church purely in terms of reciprocity, it at least hints at the willingness of the "black" American to continue believing. Travel writing reflects on this paradoxical relationship between the 'black' people and the white and 'black' 'versions' of the church world.

I

This chapter aims to analyze the functioning of religious ideology on a traveler and its effects on the traveler's gaze at the culture that is being seen with reference to Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, The African, written by himself* (1789), Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* (1845), Richard Wright's *Black Power* (1954), *The Color Curtain* (1956), and *Pagan Spain* (1957) have been taken into consideration. What is important to note here is the complexity

of the relationship between the two, given that the travel writers carry several, often conflicting, shades of their ideological concerns to their travel, hence writing. This study tries to explain the consequences of religious conditioning on a traveler's gaze, or as a matter of fact any human being, as religious ideology portrays itself as the strongest pillar on which the gaze of a person in a particular society or culture is contoured and diffused.

This chapter assumes (i) that religion and travel are two factors that move alongside while acting as active agents in manipulating each other; (ii) that there exists difference in the gaze of the travelers due the difference in the dimensions of religion and spirituality of different cultures; (iii) that the evidence of religious faith and practice is materially present in everything that a culture presents (food, clothing, dance, etc.); and (iv) that the first world religious ideologies, generally, bear a condescending gaze for the tribal or "pagan" religious practices and beliefs.

This study takes into consideration the fact that African American traveler's gaze is veiled by the leaf of religious consciousness, one that they espouse in America, where Christianity in the form of a first world consciousness plays a big part. It is important to note that getting educated in this religious doctrine and sharing this consciousness leads the African American traveler, doused in the white/first world religious ideology, to look at the 'rest' in a patronizing manner, as it also enables them to understand the solemn disengagement in the 'black' and white world.

This chapter argues that despite the not-so-congenial social atmosphere for the 'blacks' in America, they, nevertheless, adorn the religious cloak of the white/American Christianity. It is done with a view to anchor the selves; censure the same for its inconsistent discourses; or to understand how the 'blacks' have been situated in the American landscape over the centuries with the help of the most potent weapon for a social crusade, religion. This leads the traveler to delve into reflection and/or corroboration of the understanding or consciousness carried hitherto and thereby engages in an act of refashioning the self/views.

It is necessary at this stage to briefly review the work on the theory of gaze as it operates on the sacred plane of the social landscape. The review would help relate

travel writing to religion, which acts as the strongest controlling and guiding factor in the human milieu. These studies will be then linked with the idea of the gaze to assist the reading of religious gaze of African American travelers.

Perhaps the first person who attempted to examine religion from an objective and scientific perspective was Karl Marx. He is credited with a worthwhile effort of bringing religion from the domain of spiritual abstraction to the fields of economics and politics. For the present study, with at least one travel writer, Richard Wright, following Marxist philosophy/ies, the ideas and opinions of Marx can be judiciously applied. Marx, in his “Introduction” to *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* (1844), suggests that religion can only be appreciated/understood in relation to other social structures and the economic configuration of society. Talking about the Catholic Church, during the Middle Ages, he shows how religious bodies orated about heaven on the one hand, but acquired as much property and power as possible with its merger with the oppressive Roman state on the other hand. It dictates that religion emanates a power play. In this regard, African American race very appropriately showcases a power play on religious grounds. Thus, it is as if, religion becomes “the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet won through to himself, or has already lost himself again” (*Early Writings* 244). Religion thus, is the pivot around which the major part of human lives revolve.

Marx suggests that religion covers all aspects of human life, “religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people” (*Early Writings* 244). In this regard, travel writing is an apt medium for understanding the gaze of one person on another’s religious/spiritual world. It envelopes the traveler, while he travels, in the consciousness of the religious beliefs that he/she is nurtured in at home. Even an atheist like Richard Wright, also tends to receive and treat the spiritualism of the rest of the world from his exposure to the American Catholic environment. In fact, appreciating religion depends upon what social purpose religion obliges, and not the constitution of its beliefs/principles. Marx suggests that man makes religion and then religion becomes “man’s self-consciousness and self-awareness....Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual point of honor, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement,

its general basis of consolation and justification” (*Early Writings* 244). Thus, religion serves as the pivot on which societal consciousness/gaze hinges on to a large extent. And with the difference in the religious orientation of each society, the traveler’s religious gaze dissipates as the subject’s faith and the object’s spiritual beliefs and practices meet head on.

At this point it is pertinent to look at the relation between religion and ideology. Religion, as Engels describes, “Is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men’s minds of those external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces” (Marx and Engels, *On Religion* 56). Every culture, thus, has its own set of ideologies by which the “state apparatuses” (Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* 127) run and the citizens are conditioned, thus, the external forces that Engels talks about. Of these forces, religion, being the most potent one, traverses across any race, class, gender or color. It becomes an ideology when the followers of one religious sect cease to endure the existence of those who have different religious or spiritual views or beliefs, become fanatic. It is then that they comprehend their religious text literally and refuses to accept any way of understanding or recognizing the religion other than their own way of understanding. A religion thus, becomes an ideology when culture specific truths, created by humans, become infallible doctrines. Having said that, it can be discerned that travel writer’s tend to carry the ideologies that they have been seasoned into by the “state apparatuses” of their own countries or states. Religion/faith is definitely the loudest metaphor that acts as a veil though which they gaze at the world, whether one is inside its realm (believer) or outside (non-believer).

Religion is perhaps the strongest form of ideology which a traveler’s gaze builds on. It is significant to understand ideology at this point. Ideologies, as stated by Louise Althusser, are a set of state apparatus which helps regulate the economy and polity of a state. In a straight and simple way, an ideology is a set of ‘conscious and/or unconscious ideas’ that comprise one’s aims, expectations, and the resultant actions. Ideology is a belief of the mind through which the gaze gets filtered and derives its knowledge from senses. As for the purpose of the present study, we can say that this philosophy of the mind derives its knowledge from the perceived senses as when a traveler gazes at someone’s culture. Althusser says, our understanding of the real

conditions of existence is constrained due to the reliance on language. Althusser posits a very important statement when he says, “Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* 109). It is language that helps us connect to this world and make sense of what we see around us. Language and the sense associated with it is again culture specific. Thus, trying to understand different people, their ways and beliefs are restricted and veiled through the language that one uses. As such, one ‘constructs’ an apparently ‘real world’, a world informed by the religious ideologies of the subject.

It is noteworthy that this apparent ‘real world’ operates on power play and ideology/ies provide way/s in which social relations of power mediate in a process of meaning making. Ideology serves as an intangible link between communication and power and contextualizes the communication process within such social relations which are grounded in power and that communication is fundamental to the avenues by which relations of ascendancy and control are produced and reproduced in a culture or society. In travel writing, it is seen that a wide range of discursive power play is demonstrated as the ‘all-seeing-all-knowing’ colonial traveler visits far-flung places. The white ideology/ies often end up defining the subject and its culture and proliferate/s endless meanings. However, as one moves ahead temporally, the modern and postmodern travel writings display a subject on the move who is vulnerable to the ideological gaze/s of the object/s. Hence, the power play diffuses. As travelers, who end up writing their travel accounts, the African Americans definitely engage in the process of meaning making or at least narrating the ‘other’ and its culture, but at the same time, with a persecuted history/past and what has been understood as their ‘double-consciousness’ (see DuBois, *Souls* 3), they ‘see’ others while also being aware of themselves being under constant scanner.

Talking about religion and the gazing consciousness, David Morgan opines that sacred gaze is the way in which a way of seeing capitalizes a viewer, an image, or an act of seeing with spiritual connotation. David Morgan’s *Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (2005) suggests that vision is a cultural act and argues that seeing is an operation that rests on an apparatus of suppositions and predispositions, routines and habits, historical connotations and cultural practices. It suggests, “Sacred gaze is a term that designates the particular configuration of ideas,

attitudes, and customs that informs a religious act of seeing as it occurs within a given cultural and historical setting” (3). The term sacred gaze connotes to the spiritual significance that is attached to the way/s of seeing, “the study of religious visual culture is therefore the study of images, but also the practices and habits that rely on images as well as the attitudes and preconceptions that inform vision as a cultural act” (3). Thus, sacred gaze is a cumulative phenomenon of objects, images belonging to the spiritual realm and practices attached to those.

Elaborating on this, Morgan writes:

Belief...does not exist in an abstract, discursive space, in an empyrean realm of pure proclamation... First, that belief does not happen without a body. Even when it happens in the discursive form of a proposition, it must be uttered by one person to another, by someone in the presence of a company of people, or argued, circulated, collected, studied, and taught in print. The material culture of religion is the physical domain of belief, the lived practices that constitute so much of the ritual, ceremonial, and daily behavior of belief.... Second, it follows that, rather being a private or purely subjective matter, belief happens between and among people. (8-9)

Belief is, thus, shared in imagery and visual practice. Visual culture can be a dominant part of the collective apparatus of memory, the socialization of the young or the converts and national citizenship; “religions and their visual cultures configure social relations, over time and space and between one life-world and another” (9). Thus, when visual culture is constitutive of religion in some way, one may address the optical/ocular dimension of religion as a subject matter in its own right, that is, as an atypical form of evidence. This brings to light that understanding how images operate expands the range of evidence and visual data and the interpretive tools available to the scholar/reader.

In this regard, Emily Durkheim’s theory on religion says, “sacred things are simply collective ideals that have fixed themselves on material objects” (“Dualism” 42) Durkheim attempts to do two things: institute the fact that religion was not supernaturally or divinely enthused and was in fact an artifact of society, and he sought to recognize the everyday/common things that religion placed a stress upon, as well as what outcomes those religious beliefs, which are the products of social life,

had on the lives of everyone within a society. Thus, religion can guide the gaze of a traveler, and can create a society and its people through that gaze. Durkheim's pronouncement that religion was social can best be illustrated by this excerpt from *The Elementary Forms*:

Religious representations are collective representations which express collective realities; the rites are a manner of acting which take rise in the midst of assembled groups and which are destined to excite, maintain, or recreate certain mental states in these groups. So if the categories are of religious origin, they ought to participate in this nature common to all religious facts; they should be social affairs and the product of collective thought. At least—for in the actual condition of our knowledge of these matters, one should be careful to avoid all radical and exclusive statement—it is allowable to suppose that they are rich in social elements. (10)

Durkheim also recognizes the fact that religion acts as a binding force between people and cultures while also differentiating one set of people or culture from the rest. This can help one to look at and understand the variety of gazes (sacred in this regard) that travelers carry. Durkheim says that a belief in a supernatural sphere is not essentially common amid religions, but the division of diverse aspects of life, physical objects, and certain behaviors and phenomenon into two groups, the *sacred* and the *profane* is common. Physical objects and behaviors considered sacred were measured as part of the spiritual or religious domain. Whilst things considered profane belonged to the world that did not have a religious purpose or embrace religious meaning. But while these two classifications are strictly defined and set apart, they cooperate with one another and rely on each other for continued existence. He writes, “A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them” (*Elementary Forms* 44). Religion, thus, maintains the manipulation of society, whereas *society* signifies the beliefs and norms held in general by a group of individuals.

Discussing the theorists so far, it becomes manifest that the selected African American travel writers in this study carry the dominant ideology of religious credence in their outlook thereby resulting in the religious/sacred gaze that is being examined in this chapter. Olaudah Equiano's narrative serves the purpose of

showcasing the religious power play where in, for his race, religion, in Marx's words, becomes the "sigh of the oppressed". His indulgence in the consciousness of the 'master' religion also helps to gaze at the world and expose the duplicity and pretense of the white world in the name of religion. Richard Wright on the other hand is an atheist or a non-believer. His mobility and gaze rests largely on politics as the base. However, how a self-proclaimed atheist accommodates, examines and reciprocates 'others' faith, presents an interesting text. He hails from a period much later than that of Equiano, where the apparent power plays between the 'black' and the white world had ceased to exist. Nevertheless, religion still played a considerable part in demarcating boundaries between the 'black' and white worlds or the first and the third worlds. With his exposure to and seasoning in the tight Christian environment of America, a first world, his gaze at the rest of the world, even the European Spain, show a conscious or unconscious patronizing/condescending tenor. However, in the process of gazing, the subject and the object world coincide resulting in a broadening of the horizons of the African American traveler's religious/sacred gaze.

This chapter tries to look at questions that emerge from the religious gaze that forms part of African American travel writing. To this extent this chapter broadly addresses questions relating to: (i) understanding how images vested with spiritual connotations enlarge the range of facts/evidence and the interpretive tools available to the traveler; (ii) analyzing how 'black' travelers dwells on the religious consciousness of the first world to examine the incongruous practices of that world; (iii) how religion acts as a meditative tool to examine cultures and their progress or relapse; and (iv) exploring how visual evidences interrogate and determine what they can tell us about acts of seeing as well as the correlation between visual illustration and ways of feeling, thinking, acting, and believing, conditioned by religion in this case.

II

4.2.1 Olaudah Equiano: *The Interesting Narrative of The Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, The African, Written By Himself* (1794)

A review of American literature can demonstrate that the idea of the American Dream has often meant rather different and special to African Americans than the white or

any other division of the population in America. This might be the result of the ever shifting status of African Americans in the white American society and to the fundamental modifications in the shared viewpoints of white Americans over the past three centuries. However, the essential theories of identity and equality have been the persistent apparatuses to analyze and understand the African American vision of the American Dream.

From the time the first Americans of African origin were brought to the New World as slaves, the African American dream in its most basic and most tenacious form can be best articulated in a single word: freedom; and if the 'black' consciousness can be broadly seen as a synonym for the term 'freedom', then, Olaudah Equiano's *Narrative* can be read as the first widely read travel-autobiography/narrative inscribed by a former slave, that narrates one of the first popular descriptions of a slave ship bound to America, and how freedom meant more than even life to those poor 'black' souls bound in slavery.

He is abducted from Africa as he turns eleven and is sold into slavery. Not only did he board on several voyages through the Atlantic ('Middle Passage') while traveling to different British colonies, but he also goes through a progression of cultural integration which shapes his individuality and consciousness. Abducted from Africa and 'dumped' in the New World, Equiano spends some time in Barbados after which he is shipped off to the English colony of Virginia, where he was purchased and put to work with Henry Pascal, a Royal Navy Officer. After leading a life with him for some time, Equiano is traded off to a Philadelphia Quaker who initiates him to Christianity and instills in him the fervor of reading and writing. Eventually, Equiano is capable of buying his own freedom and becomes an efficacious seaman; he finally settles in England. His story is a compelling testimony of the point that it is probable, through years of fortitude and hard work, for a slave or a 'black' American to accomplish not only his own freedom but economic realization corresponding to that of white Americans.

Equiano's work also obliges to inspire successive generations of white Americans in supporting the abolition of slavery and 'black' Americans who strive for attaining freedom by abolishing slavery. Besides, Equino's narrative may also suggest a

rudimentary form of “double-consciousness”, an integral part of the ‘black’ American consciousness, a term later coined and theorized by W.E.B. DuBois. The very first look on the front cover of Equiano’s narrative, *he* presents an uncommon picture of himself for his times, this front piece shows an undeniably African body in a European dress. It is an instance of Equiano’s assimilation and ‘becoming European’. Equiano, thus, is considered an important name in the creation of the African American consciousness and the assertion of a free space for the ‘black’ bodies. His *narrative* thus finds a space amongst the African American travel writers selected for this study.

Equiano engages in a wide deliberation of freedom. However, in his narrative, the freedom that he asserts is not through escapes but by fulfilling his duties as a slave and most importantly, by placing an irrevocable trust in God. In his words, “I certainly would have made some attempts before now; but as I thought that if it were God’s will I ever should be freed it would be so...it was not his will, it would not happen” (170-71). His narrative comes out as a testimony of an African slave’s journey to freedom by recognizing divinity as a foremost route; and in this route he comes across a wide range of people, places and cultures that are outlined in the reflection of his own faith and outlook towards life.

In the very beginning of the narrative, he situates himself under the merciful protection of the Lord. He says, “I regard myself as a *particular favourite of Heaven*, and acknowledge the mercies of providence in every occurrence of my life” (2). Thus, under divine supervision, he commences on his journey examining people, their practices, places and their peculiarities.

4.2.1.1 African Native Religion

Equiano, as one can see, is brought up in the typical pagan religion and customs of his tribe, which he describes vividly in the first chapter of his book. He describes his notion of a God as he remembers from his memory in his tribe during his childhood. It is a life which is mindful of a single Creator whose abode is the ‘sun’. However, it has no notion of eternity. Equiano does not find the tribes in Africa follow a classified

form of religion. However, they do have forms of worship, beliefs and principles, some of which he finds noteworthy of mentioning. He observes, “As to religion, the natives believe that there is one Creator of all things, and that he lives in the sun” (18). In pagan worship, that marked most of the African world, these people believe in one power controlling the universe and every aspect of their lives, a belief that runs through every known religious sect of belief. This religion speaks more about the ideas of decency and tribal unity than to any idea of personal salvation, which, for the Christian Equiano is quite disturbing. He further writes:

He (God) lives in the sun, and is girted round with a belt that he may never eat or drink; but, according to some, he smokes a pipe, which is our own favourite luxury. They believe he governs events, especially our deaths or captivity; but, as for the doctrine of eternity, I do not remember to have ever heard of it: some however believe in the transmigration of souls in a certain degree. Those spirits, which are not transmigrated, such as our dear friends or relations, they believe always attend them, and guard them from the bad spirits or their foe. (18)

It seems the Ibo god is more like an eternal feudal lord who sits fashionably girted with a belt around his waist smoking a pipe while ruling the human society. However, as for the humans there seems to be no way to getting out of the mortal circle and achieve eternity. This kind of a spiritual system, thus, provides almost no hope, the basic tenet that every religious structure should provide. Undoubtedly, there seems to be no evangelical form of this tribal faith. For this reason, he often thinks of death as more expedient to the indentured and battered life he is living and thus textually confirms his thought of death as the answer to his ills. With no grasp over the English language, no reckonable skill in reading or writing, and no education, his future seems bleak to him. These thoughts continue until he comes to know from his fellow servants on the ship about heaven and Baptism, how one cannot reach without the other. Two sisters, Miss Guerins, of his master Pascal are also instrumental in leading to his conversion into Christianity. The sisters persuade Pascal to get Equiano baptized. He thus, gets baptized at the age of fourteen, and consumed as he is eventually in the new religion, a new lease of life unfolds.

Equiano discusses the various tribal rituals, practices and general beliefs about soul and afterlife engulfing the daily lives of the people. He compares Africans to another

set of people with an equally old culture and religion, Egyptians, and talks about their belief in an afterlife. For that matter, it is widely accepted and revered that the souls of the departed guard the bodies of its mortal friends and relatives, and the people. Equiano observes, “always, before eating...put some small portion of the meat, and pour some of their drink, on the ground for them; and they often make oblations of the blood of beasts or fowls at their graves” (19). Equiano remembers visiting such oblations with his mother, and used to get “extremely terrified” (19) on seeing such “awful and gloomy” (19) practice.

He talks of the practice of circumcision which the Africans carry out “like the Jews” (20). He says, how Africans, like the Jews, makes “offerings and feasts on that occasion” (20). Abiding with the similarities with Jews, Africans too name their children “from some event, some circumstance, or fancied foreboding, at the time of their birth” (20). Equiano tells that his name, *Olaudah* signifies “vicissitude, or fortunate...one favoured, and having a loud voice, and well spoken” (20). Throughout the text there are evidences of Equiano actually believing himself to be God’s favored child.

Amongst the tribal people in Africa, their belief makes them “totally unacquainted with swearing” (21), those terms of abuse, that he says, “find their way readily and copiously into the language of more civilized people” (21). However, he experiences widespread cursing and use of swear words in the white Christian world.

It is interesting to see Equiano’s attempts to relate religion to cleanliness, and in a way foregrounding the translation of spiritual cleanliness and moral purity to physical cleanliness. He writes, “This necessary habit of decency was with us a part of religion, and therefore we had many purifications and washings” (21). He evaluates this aspect with the Jews too. In keeping with this cleanliness, it also becomes a monthly practice for the women to seclude themselves for during their menstrual cycle.

However, with such wide range of beliefs and practices, the natives did not have “places of public worship” (21) but they do have “priests and magicians, or wife men” (21). These people are held in great “reverence” (22) by the natives. These people calculate time, foretell events and also act as doctors or physicians. Thus, even though

the tribal religious practices and beliefs are not fortified into one condensed form of religion, they, nevertheless, do demonstrate a well advanced and systematic form of spiritual/religious consciousness.

4.2.1.2 The Religion of the Whites: Christianity

After being kidnapped and torn away from his countrymen, as Equiano sits in a vessel, he shudders listening to the cries and moans of the fellow slaves in pain. He exclaims at the white world Christian world:

O, ye nominal Christians! might not an African ask you, learned you this from your God, who says unto you, Do unto all men as you would men should do unto you? Is it not enough that we are torn from our country and friends to toil for your luxury and lust of gain? Must every tender feeling be likewise sacrificed to your avarice? (57)

Seeing this “new refinement in cruelty” (57), Equiano very thoughtfully condemns the barbarity of the whites by soliciting the virtues of the very faith of the white world, Christianity. He relates the white men to the image of a savage, normally attributed to ‘blacks’. He writes, “The white people looked and acted, as I thought, in so savage a manner; for I had never seen among any people such instances of brutal cruelty” (49). Similarly, while working under one of his white masters, he observes, “I was often a witness to cruelties of every kind, which were exercised on my unhappy fellow slaves. I used frequently to have different cargoes of new negroes in my care for sale....commit violent depredations on the chastity of the female slaves....I have known our mates to commit these acts most shamefully, to the disgrace, not of Christians, but of men” (133). He cites the instance of one Mr. Drummond, who has 41,000 ‘negroes’, and who once “cut off a negro-man’s leg for running away” (134).

Equiano asks him as to how as a Christian would he answer for such an act before God. To this the white Christian plainly replies that answering is a thing of another world, and his act is a policy of this world and that the policy brings him desired effects. Equiano, the ‘black’ man, reminds him of a Christian principle, “do unto others what we would that others should do unto us” (134). Equiano perceives how slavery corrupts the Christian minds and “hardens them to every feeling of humanity”

(146). On several occasions while on the sail, he is “plundered or ill used by these tender Christian predators” (159) proving the dubious nature of the white Christians.

At the age of twelve Equiano reaches in England. He is astounded at the sight of tall and numerous buildings, the pavements, the streets, in fact, as he says, “every object I saw filled me with surprise” (67). However, one thing that surprises him beyond limit is seeing the white snow. This leads to his final course of turn towards serious inquiries and interest in Christianity. He remembers, “One morning...I saw it covered all over with the snow that fell over-night; as I had never seen anything of the kind before, I thought it was salt” (67). After being explained by one of his ship mates as to what the white matter is, his next curious intrusion is into the concept of the Supreme Being who creates the amazing white thing. After a while it showers all snow and the air is filled with it. Equiano is delighted and amazed beyond point as he had never witnessed such a wonder of nature in Africa which the “great man in the heavens” (68) makes to occur here. This is followed by his visit to a Church and he gets amused and delighted here too. It is an all new kind of place for him of people’s congregation where they assemble to pray to God, who he is told “made us and all things” (68). Still he is at loss and fails to grasp the full meaning of that entire he views. Thus, he delves deep into the ocean of inquiry.

His little friend onboard, Dick, is his best interpreter of the Bible and the Christian world. Of the initial impression he carves in his mind of “this God” (68) and the white people, he is much relieved because the whites did not sell each other unlike Africans. Moreover, their God need not be pleased by brutal sacrifices and offerings. He specially makes a direct statement at an African ritual of scarring the face of chieftains, judges, senators and their heirs. Since Equiano’s father was a chief, Equiano too was destined to scar himself, but he gets kidnapped unexpectedly. However, that unfortunate event later metamorphoses into a fortunate one for him as he says, “As I was now amongst a people who had not their faces scarred, like some of the African nations where I had been, I was very glad I did not let them ornament me in that manner when I was with them” (70). In the beginning of the narrative, Equiano himself understands and acknowledges the fact that beauty based on color is a matter of relativity. In his native place, where being ‘black’ is the natural color, while the pale, colorless Europeans are considered strange and sometimes even ugly;

while ‘black’ people are frowned at or laughed at in America and Europe. However, now Equiano seems to have fallen a prey to the theory of relativity in a reverse way in the land of the whites. The facial scar, which is considered a mark of prominence in his native place, is looked upon as a shame by him amidst the Europeans. Now he finds the physically intact white people as more pleasing and an informed and intelligent lot of people. He, in fact, sounds quiet contented to live amidst the whites and starts considering them “superior” (86) to ‘blacks’/Africans. Eventually he ends up declaring that “I had the strong desire to resemble them” (86) which can be considered as the high point of Equiano’s transformation from a tribal Iboian to a ‘civilized’ Christian.

While in England as a slave in a white home, he is told that he cannot go to heaven unless he is baptized and this piece of knowledge make him “uneasy” (87). Thus, he gets baptized in 1759. He is taught to “shave and dress a little and also to read in the Bible” (112) and thus he becomes, in the words of the white men, the “black Christian” (112) and eventually is told by a priest that there has also been a ‘black’ Pope in Pope Benedict. However, as he learns to read the Bible and understand the passages, he is surprised to see similarities in African tribal beliefs and the Christian ones. He says, “I was wonderfully surprised to see the laws and rules of my own country written almost exactly here” (112). He comprehends that color is not related to one’s status or point of progression or regression. He hopes that the “prejudice that some conceive against the native of Africa on account of their color” (28) may be erased in time.

The blackness of the Africans, he understands, can be “naturally ascribed to their situation” (28), i.e., the climate, and not God’s judgment on one section of the people. He read the Bible, and is ‘glad’, but at the same time he continues to get irked by the unjustified practices of the Christians, like a ‘black’ and white being barred from marrying in a Church, which is “against the law” of the Christians. He thus, desires to understand the religion further, which he supposes is beyond and above these weird practices and beliefs.

Not being fully content with his Christianization process, he yearns to become a “first-rate Christian” (263) and “procure a title to heaven” (263). He is thrown amongst the

Quakers, but whose “silent meetings” (263) keeps him in the “dark as ever” (263). He finds the Roman Catholics and their principle not at all “edified” (263). Finally, he takes recourse to read the Four Evangelists, and becomes an ardent Evangelist. He talks to Christians about the ways of going to Heaven, but is not satisfied with any of the answers. He writes, “I found none among the circle of my acquaintance that kept the holy Ten Commandments. So righteous was I in my own eyes, that I was convinced I excelled many of them in that point, by keeping eight out of ten; and finding those, who in general termed themselves Christians” (264). However, for a change, he does see a different Christian world while in England on being invited to a Chapel to attend a “love feast” (271). He writes, “I was much astonished to see the place filled with people, and no signs of eating and drinking...At last they began by giving out hymns...ministers engaged in prayer....Some of the guests began to speak their experience...of the providence of god, and his unspeakable mercies to each of them” (273). He then sees them pass on a neat basket of bun amongst them and have it genially. He says, never having seen this “kind of a Christian fellowship” (273) on earth, he remembers the Holy Scriptures and of the primeval Christians who loved and respected each other and everyone equally. He is moved, and he longs for such a fellowship everywhere.

Philadelphia, however, becomes a “fruitful” (184) land for Equiano. One Sunday morning he visits a “house full of people”, which happens to be a Church. He sees a very tall woman standing in the middle of a lot of people and speaking to them in an audible voice which he can’t understand. Having never seen anything like this, let alone visit a church in “England or West Indies” (183), he wonders at the “odd scene” (183). He makes an inquiry and comes to know that these are the Quakers, “freeing and easing the burdens of many of my oppressed African brethren. He sees, “a pious man exhorting the people with the greatest fervor and earnestness, and sweating as much as I ever did while in slavery at Montserrat beach” (184). Philadelphia, thus, becomes his “favourite old town.” (340)

While in Spain, he is apparently “shocked at the custom of bull-baiting, and other such diversions” (298) prevailing on the Sunday evenings. He finds it to be a “scandal” (298) of Christianity and its morals.

On the whole, the 'black' amongst the white Christians is looked upon as a "barbarian" (286), but the barbarian continues to talk of the "love of Christ" (286) while declaring, "the Bible was my only companion and comfort" (286). It becomes apparent that Equiano is gradually getting disillusioned with the Christian faith. This has serious overtones over his re-self-fashioning and reorientation of faith at his personal level.

4.2.1.3 The Turks

Equiano refers to the Turks and their devout ways a number of times in his narrative. At times he looks at them as of superior spiritual values that Christians and says that the latter are "not so honest or so good in their morals as the Turks" (264). He also thinks that the "Turks were in a safer way of salvation than my neighbors" (264). He is most of the times disturbed by the disgraceful use of swear words by the Christians on some occasions. He says, "I have been twice amongst the Turks, yet had never seen any such usage with them" (319). He is so much impressed by the Turkish religious and secular ways that he gets determined to live in Turkey till the "end" (265) of his days and never to return to England.

He engages in an elaborate description of a Turkish city and the Turks. He writes, "This is a very ancient city; the houses are built of stone, and most of them have graves adjoining to them; so that they sometimes present the appearance of churchyards" (244). The natives, he observes, are "well-looking and strong" (244), who treat him with "great civility" (244), giving him the impression that these Moslems are "fond of 'black' people" (244). Interestingly, on having invited to stay with them on several occasions, he notices that "they keep the Franks, or Christians separate, and do not suffer them to dwell immediately amongst them" (244). He however, did not see Moslem women working in any of the shops, and "very rarely in the street" (244), but whenever he sees them they are in a "veil from head to foot" (244). His five months stay amongst the Turks makes him like the place and its people "extremely well".

(244)

Equiano's observations about the Turks are definitely first-hand, however, the fact that he places those as a yardstick in comparison to his experiences in America cannot be denied. The impressions of the Turks are, to a large extent, guided by his disillusionment with the Christians/Christianity so far.

4.2.1.4 Amongst Jamaicans and Musquitoes

He meets four Mosquito Indian chiefs before he embarks on his journey to Jamaica and Musquito shore. The colonial/white division of the world into "us" and "them" becomes a truth with Equiano, as he starts addressing the non-Christians as "them" (303). The first thing that they notice about them is that they are *not* Christians. He says, "I was very much mortified in finding that they had not frequented any churches and since they were here and were baptized, nor was any attention paid to their morals" (303-04). He feels crestfallen seeing their "mock Christianity" (304) and takes them to a church before they set on sail" (304). During the voyage, he instructs one Musquito Prince in all the Christian doctrines that he himself dwells on. He says, "I was pleased at this, and took great delight in him, and used much supplication to God for his conversion" (305). While amidst them, he says, he becomes a barbarian having talked about Christ. It is very interesting to see that Equiano tends to speak about the Indians by using the term "natives". Equiano, thus, comes a long way in his journey of religious understanding, so much that he becomes starts converting people into Christianity. It seems Equiano allies morality only with Christianity and not with the non-Christians, which included even his own Ibo tribe and its religion in Africa. At last, Equiano succeeded in converting one of the Prince's into a Christian in the course of the voyage.

It seems, unconsciously he allies with his earlier attitude of Christianity marching on with the 'white man's burden'. At one point, Equiano takes recourse to what Columbus had done amidst the Indians in Jamaica, "Recollecting a passage that I had read in the Life of Columbus, when he was amongst the Indians in Jamaica, where, on some occasion, he frightened them, by telling them of certain events in the heavens, I had recourse to the same expedient and it succeeded beyond my most sanguine expectations....I menaced them and the rest....people within our vicinity, out of respect to the Doctor , myself , and his people, made entertainments of the grand kind,

called in their tongue *tourrie* or *drykbot*” (313). Unconsciously thus, Equiano tags along the theory of the ‘white man’s burden’ in his own course of journey.

Equiano, like the white people, could not drink what was offered to them as these unrefined drinks were far beyond the scope of imagination in his white-Europeanized mind. Even the dress of one of the Owden, or oldest father, seems strange and terrifying to him now. He sees any act of kindness and amicability on the part of the natives as Christian attributes. In the year 1779, while serving Governor Macnamara, Equiano even consents to act as a proper missionary and help the Governor by converting native Africans. Thus, in the course of his travel, we see Equiano’s religious gaze and understanding take a tumultuous ride and undergo a complete transformation from that of a doomed heathen to a blessed Christian.

In his travel to Jamaica and the Musquito Shore, Equiano almost accepts the role of a Christian/colonial man on the mission to rescue the heathens, the damned souls. He says, “I accepted the offer, knowing that the harvest was fully ripe in those parts, and hoped to be an instrument, under God, of bringing some poor sinner to my well beloved master, Jesus Christ” (303). He does not find “any mode of worship among them” (310) and says that, “in this they were not worse than their European brethren or neighbors” (310). He does *not* find any white Christian more “pious than those unenlightened Indians” (310). Sabbath is paid no heed, and the people either worked or slept on Sundays. This kind of a living he says, leads to his leaving. However, he finds the Indians to be plain people who he says, acts towards him like real Christians, much better than “those whites” (323) he knows.

Thus, Equiano, a protestant of the Church of England, probes different places, people and culture with his religious gaze. In the year 1779, Governor Macnamara decides to send him to Africa on a missionary project, to which Equiano consents with the hope of “doing good, if possible” (335) to his countrymen.

However, Equiano’s position as a religious ‘black’ American traveler is quiet debatable. It seems he makes use of the ethnographic or ‘imperial travel gaze’ and Christianity for his own self-legitimizing or at least partly dissident end. The act of writing empowers a slave. Literacy is the tool that enables the slave to determine his

own self-image and control over the events he chooses to relate while writing himself into history. However, the practical and confident African, knowing what his British and American audiences need in order to accept him as a credible narrator, uses religion as a mask for social critique. He turns into a complete Christian, and as we see, tries not only to salvage his soul, but he even seriously indulges in converting ‘blacks’ into Christianity.

Equiano also relies on his Christianity to give him the strength to endure his tribulations, telling himself that he will be free if and when God wills it. He had unflinching faith in the justice and judgment of God, so much so that the incessant rain and the overflowing waters once during his voyages made him amount it to the punishment of God for having worked on Sundays too. Religion, thus, can be viewed as the heart of the matter in Equiano’s long and extraordinary journey. Through Equiano’s own experiences, the readers uncover just how massive a role religion played in the part of his travel, narrative, and his life in general. Precisely, we get to understand how Equiano’s religious conversion meant a type of freedom as historic as his own freedom from slavery.

Thus, Equiano’s travel serves as an initiation into worlds of new knowledge. He carries a particular gaze, religious in this case, with him which in due course becomes transformative and occasionally also acts as a therapeutic gaze for him as when he gets cured of his distressed state right after his abduction. He finds a therapy in the divine faith. This faith that comes along with his transformation served through the gaze at his new found Lord. However, in the course of his journey from tribal faith to Christianity, we see a transformation of his local knowledge to an acquired knowledge to a religious knowledge. This further leads him to a final reassessment of what he got hold of so far in terms of religious knowledge and understanding.

4.2.2.1 Frederick Douglass: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* (1845); *My Bondage My Freedom* (1855)

Frederick Douglass, in his *Narrative*, relates Christian and Biblical knowledge to his feelings about the characteristic immorality and evil of slavery or the gap between the ‘black’ and white world that he witnesses during his travels. He observes, “We have

men sold to build churches, women sold to support the gospel, and babes sold to purchase Bibles for the *poor heathen! All for the glory of God and the good of souls!* The slave auctioneer's bell and the church-going bell chime in with each other, and the bitter cries of the heart-broken slave are drowned in the religious shouts of his pious master" (156-57). Wendell Phillips, in a letter (included in the text) to Douglass writes, "The most neglected of God's children waken to a sense of their rights, and of the injustice done to them" (18). In the light of this statement, Douglass's narrative does stand tall in the history of African American writing, and not just travel writing, enunciating the white world as an artful deceiver in the name of religion, which is evident in the narrative of Olaudah Equiano too.

The *Narrative* presents the ex-slave Douglass attaining freedom—physical and mental—through the use of a series of literary triumphs during the course of his travel.

4.2.2.2 The Christian Masters

In the South, Douglass comes across such white masters and overseers who are 'staunch Christians' in the white circles and monstrous torturers while in the 'black' circles. Whites, wearing the cloak of religion, turns the south into a dismal dungeon of atrocious barbarity on one part of the humanity, the darker one. He says, "the religion of the south is a mere covering for the most horrid crimes,- a justifier of the most appalling barbarity- a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds" (110). Thus, the South presents the most torturous white Christians.

Douglass meets slave owners who allege to be 'Christians', for he considers that a person cannot be both a Christian and a slave owner simultaneously. Thus, hypocrisy is what Douglass hates, but he also sees how slave owners are even eviler than those who don't sham to be religious. This sometimes gets Douglass in trouble with Christians who think him to be attacking them instead of holy imposters. Thus, he writes a whole appendix to clarify that he is against religious hypocrisy and not religion itself.

Talking about hypocrite Christians/slave owners, one finds him in the farm of Mr. Freeland, who, as he observes, “made no pretensions to, or profession of, religion” (109-110). He, thus, says is fortunate to be the slave of such a master. He regards that “being the slave of a religious master” (110), can be the “greatest calamity” (110) that can befall him. He finds such religiously pretentious slave holders to be “meanest and basest, the most cruel and cowardly, of all others” (110). However, remembering an incidence of such horror in the farm of his first master, he relates:

I have often been awakened at the dawn of day by the most heart-rending shrieks of an own aunt of mine, whom he (the overseer) used to tie up to a joist, and whip upon her naked back till she was literally covered with blood. No words, no tears, no prayers, from this gory victim, seemed to move his iron heart from its bloody purpose...He would whip her to make her scream, and whip her to make her hush. (28)

Similarly, near Mr. Freeland’s farm, he says, “There lives, one Rev. Daniel Weeden and Rev. Rigby Hopkins who are the members and ministers in the Reformed Methodist Church. Mr. Weeden owns a slave woman whose “back, for weeks, was kept literally raw, made so by the lash of this merciless, *religious* wretch” (110). His maxim is “Behave well or behave ill, it is the duty of a master occasionally to whip a slave, to remind him of his master’s authority” (110). Thus, the South, and its religion acts as the “strongest protection” (110) for the slaveholders against their “darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds” (110). The slave owners consider it their divine right to persecute the slaves and administer them.

4.2.2.3 Douglass’s Sabbath teachings

Douglass is however, heartbroken at the thought that the precious slave souls are trapped in the prison of slavery. While in Mr. Freeland’s farm, he succeeds in creating a “strong desire” (113) in two of the slaves to learn how to read. Accordingly, he says, “I devoted my Sundays to teaching these my loved fellow-slaves how to read” (113). His feelings say, “Does a righteous God govern the universe? And for what does he hold the thunders in his right hand, if not smite the oppressor, and delivered the spoiled hand out of the spoiler?” (114). Douglass delves pain and remorse seeing his fellow brethren suffer violently.

Douglass, thus, spends his Sabbath school time teaching his fellow slaves how to read. However, it is not appreciated by the Christian masters. He says:

It was necessary to keep our religious masters at St. Michael's unacquainted with the fact, that, instead of spending the Sabbath in wrestling, boxing, and drinking whisky, we were trying to learn how to read the will of God; for they had much rather see us engaged in those degrading sports, than see us behaving like intellectual, moral, and accountable beings. (113)

His Sabbath school gets broken at St. Michael's by "all calling themselves Christians! Humble followers of the Lord Jesus Christ" (113-112). Nevertheless, he continues his Sabbath school for a whole year at the house of colored man who is entitled freedom. He writes, "I taught them, because it was the delight of my soul to be doing something that looked like bettering the condition of my race" (114-15). Douglass believes not only in emancipating himself but the entire 'black' race.

4.2.2.4 The Christians and Their Land

He finds widest difference in the "Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ" (155). He believes in the "pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ" (155) and thus, hates the "corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land" (155). He, in fact, sees no reason to call the religion of this land Christianity at all, a place where the "the man who wields the blood-clotted cowskin...claims to be a minister of the meek and lowly Jesus" (156). In an artful description, he says:

Never was there a clearer case of "stealing the Livery of the court of heaven to serve the devil in...I am filled with unutterable loathing when I contemplate the religious pomp and show....The man who robs me of my earnings at the end of each week meets me as a class-leader on Sunday morning, to show me the way of life, and the path of salvation....He who is the religious advocate of marriage robs whole millions of its scared influence. (156)

For Douglass, such is the view of the religion in American, especially the south, which is "dark and terrible...where the overwhelming mass of professed Christians...stain as a gnat, and swallow a camel" (159). The American south is the land of the "slaveholding religion" (155), a Christianity, "of whose votaries it may be as truly said, as it was of the ancient scribes and Pharisees, 'They bind heavy burdens,

and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers'" (158). This, he finds to be the dark, but true picture of the professed Christians in America.

4.2.2.5 The Free Church of Scotland

Amongst the 'black' presence in Great Britain, Frederick Douglass's name stands in the deepest reverence. As he reaches Scotland, an anti-slavery campaign has already commenced. On one occasion, he addresses a large gathering of over three thousand in Paisley, 1846 and urges the people of Scotland to condemn American slavery and to discard all contact with slaveholders through denouncing the money that the Free Church of Scotland uses. It solicits, receives, and retains money in its "sustentation fund for supporting the gospel in Scotland, which was evidently the ill-gotten gain of slaveholders and slave-traders" (*My Bondage and My Freedom* 252). These people do have a duty, asserts Douglass, to destroy the malevolent sin of slavery, since they occupy a vital part in introducing it to the colonies in the first place. Moreover, when this evil gets metamorphosed with religion, it becomes all the more a dreadful sin. The Free Church had separated from the recognized/acknowledged church in Scotland in 1843, and some of its missionaries were sent to America to raise money for their new institution. They accumulated thousands of pounds from Southern slaveholders, which annoyed abolitionists on both sides of the Atlantic. When questioned by antislavery proponents, the church feigns innocence. He writes, "That Church, with its leaders, put out of the power of the Scotch people to ask the old question, which we in the north have often most wickedly asked: "*What have we to do with slavery?*" that church had taken the price of blood into its treasury, with which to build *free* churches, and to pay *free* church ministers for preaching the gospel" (*My Bondage* 253). After rebuking thus, the Church is nevertheless asked to return the money, for it being:

Disgraceful and shocking to the religious sentiment of Scotland, this church...instead of repenting and seeking to mend the mistake into which it had fallen, made it a flagrant sin, by undertaking to defend, in the name of God and the Bible, the principle not only of taking the money of slave-dealers to build churches, but of holding fellowship with the holders and traffickers in human flesh. (*My Bondage* 253)

However, the “*proud, Free Church of Scotland*” (*My Bondage* 256) mirrors no repentance, rather, “the Free Church held on to the blood-stained money, and continued to justify itself in its position-and of course to apologize for slavery-and does so till this day” (*My Bondage* 256). Nevertheless, this movement did furnish an occasion for “arraying against the system, the moral and the religious sentiment of that country” (*My Bondage* 257). Douglass is glad that the anti-slavery movement has made its way into the country.

Michel Foucault describes power in a relational/interactive term. In this relation there is always someone in a far more or absolute privileged position than the other and controlling the life of that other completely. Emphatically, he also suggests that in such a relational power “there is necessarily the possibility of resistance” (“Final Foucault” 12) and the one being subjugated eventually tries or is successful in asserting agency. Douglass not only resisted and fought back by learning to read and write, the foremost of the master’s weapons, but he also asserted agency by claiming yet another and most important of the master’s bludgeons, “properties” and privileges, i.e., travel. Douglass might have started off with fleeing his cruel masters and their savagery; nonetheless, he moved and reached new places. He sees people, their practices, beliefs and ideologies; he looks at places and examines them; in doing so, he covers a big space starting from Maryland to New Bedford and lets us gaze at the world through his eyes, an eye which has been predominantly ‘black’ and an active ‘site of resistance’.

For Douglass, religion isn’t about what one does on Sabbath days, but what is practiced during the rest of the week that counts. Therefore, he disdainfully looks at the slave holders who go to church on Sundays but whip the poor ‘black’ souls on rest of the days. He understands that those who are not acquainted with his religious views may condemn him as an opponent of religion. To this he declares:

What I have said respecting and against religion, I mean strictly to apply to the to the *slave holding religion* of this land, and with no possible reference to Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible reference to Christianity proper; for, between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference— so wide, that to receive the one as good, pure, and holy, is of necessity to reject the other as bad, corrupt, and

wicked. To be friend of the one, is of necessity to be the enemy of the other. I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ: I therefore, hate the corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land. Indeed, I can see no reason, but the most deceitful one, for calling the religion of this land Christianity. (*The Norton Anthology* 365)

Douglass, thus, portrays potentials of an early African American humanitarian; one who believes in and preaches the religion of humanity.

4.2.3.1 Richard Wright: *Black Power* (1954)

Black Power is an account of a diaspora's return to his roots in Africa from the New World America; from the country of modernism to the country of tribal religiosity. It is Wright's visit to the Gold Coast on the eve of the country's declaration of Independence under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah. Wright aims at charting the historic moment; seeks to provide the western world with some insight into the harsh background of the continent and the numbing effect of the West on its culture and what was going to happen in Africa. Most importantly, the trip is also about Wright's cherished desire to see and understand the so-called primitive people and the concept of primitivism as a whole and thereby the unique religious/spiritual space of Africa.

Wright, on his part, gets distanced from God or the sacred social order. The major reason behind this is the color-based discrimination run in America and also in the colonies in the name of religious conviction. For Wright, there must be a color line in Heaven and so, the whites, who are staunch Christians, reflects so much of racial biasness in dealing with their fellow 'blacks'. It is as if God has entrusted the running of the earth to the white man, and thus, Wright finds the 'Jim Crow Holy Ghost' to be natural and inevitable. However, in Africa, Wright didn't see British draw color lines in matter mystical and metaphysical. He concludes that in a continent which is completely 'black', the white 'others' could not preach the doctrines of Christianity and draw a color line in religious matters simultaneously, or else they would fail to prove that God is a common Father. He writes, "Jim Crow religious services would surely defeat the aims, economic, cultural, and political of *Pax Britannica*" (19). Wright, in fact, notices a strange phenomenon on the ship that he had boards. It is not

the British who distances themselves from the 'black' Africans; it is rather the other way round, a practice which is almost unthinkable for 'black' Americans to carry out in America.

The study of American social history and politics has a long tale of treating religion as a vital sovereign variable, which means, religion has been knotted with the nation's politics and rationales since its commencement. In Africa too, politics, and as a matter of fact every aspect of life, has been heavily entwined with religion, spiritualism. In spite of the fact that Wright is an agnostic or a not-so-religious person on personal front, one of the strongest cultural conundrum through which Wright gazes at Africa is religion, and religious ideology, as he paints large the cultural, social and political scenario of Ghana in *Black Power*. In the words of Everett V. Stonequist, "African revolts are frequently a mixture of *religious fanaticism* and anti-European sentiment" (31). It is indeed interesting to study how the long lost 'black' brother of the Africans comes to their *mystically religious* land and narrates it to the world.

4.2.3.2 People: Beliefs

Africans manage to blend hell and sin in an organic and concrete manner. Wright is surprised to learn that Africans have gods and goddesses for everything available around-rivers, trees, rocks, wind, sun, moon, and every seen and unseen things. He thinks, "Imagine four hundred gods! Every possible combination of impulse and desire are projected and symbolized; the subjective and the objective melt; through ritual, man and nature fuse" (265). And then in a quiet scoffing manner he says, "Jesus Christ? God number 401" (265). For a nation as raw as Africa, whose way of life itself is religion, having gods and spirits for every other phenomenon is very typical, as is the case with other 'oriental' countries like, India, Sri Lanka, etc. but the American Wright is not able to appreciate it in an indulgent manner. However, it is noteworthy that even in the Western world there are beliefs which classify Thor as the God of thunder, Athena as the Goddess of forest, Father Tiber as God of river, Poseidon as the God of Seas, Minerva Medica as patron of physicians, etc.

Nature, thus, holds a revered position in every primeval society. In this orientation, Ponds, lakes, rivers and lagoons hold a special respectful place in the hearts of the

religious Africans. Many myths and legends are associated with them and water is almost “enshrined” (116). For instance, walking past a few stagnant lagoons, he notices the swarms of mosquitoes around them. Wright inquires and finds that there is rampant malaria and yellow fever around, but even then, the lagoons have been left uncovered. He suspects that “the reason was that some god was connected with the lagoons” (145). Another famous legendary lagoon is the Korle Bu on the outskirts of Accra. It is a stinking lagoon whose odor announced its presence even before Wright’s car reached it. It also bred mosquitoes. On inquiring about why it has not been covered up, he is handed down another legend which goes, “Years ago, the Fanti tribe was fighting the Accra tribe. The Fanti tribe...advanced with a powerful army to the edge of the lagoon but, since it was nearly night and they were tired, they decided to camp and rest till morning...The Accra tribe...mobilized their forces, made a few sacrifices, called on their gods...won a smashing victory” (166). People believe that the gods and spirits residing in the lagoon helped Accra win the battle and is, therefore, held in high reverence. Thus, mosquitoes, malaria, typhoid or yellow fever, nothing matters to these people when it comes to religious/spiritual beliefs even when, according to Wright, “this reeking lagoon lies within a stone’s throw of the most modern tropical hospital in all West Africa!” (166). Wright very correctly sums up, “Religion is law in Africa” (245) giving out a distinct echo of Equiano’s account of Africa.

Regarding women, amongst the Ashanti people, Wright finds a strong belief that circumcision is a taboo and “among those close to the royal family, the spilling of a woman’s blood was also strictly forbidden” (70). Thus, “no wife of the King of Ashanti could submit to any operation” (70). An “intelligent tribal doctor” (70) informs him that “no wife of the King of Ashanti could submit to any operation, no matter how urgently needed” (70). In fact, the sight of blood exercises a “magical compulsion” (262) upon the emotions of the Akan people, so much so that the “monthly menstrual flow of women made them feel terror and dread, made them think that a child was struggling futilely to be born. The women were believed to be the nexus of a battle between the visible and invisible worlds, and what man, in his right mind, would have sexual truck with a woman so involved with the dark and abysmal forces of a deified and polytheistic nature” (262). This belief runs down the general

masses so thick that leads a truck driver write at the rear of his vehicle, “FEAR WOMEN AND LIVE LONG” (262), a point cited in the previous chapter.

4.2.3.3 Practices

Wright comes across the funeral of a dead girl in which people are engaged in dancing and walking with an absent-minded and expressionless faces. He thinks, “*Why are they dancing...?* It was like watching something transpire in a dream” (126). He tries hard to get an answer for this, but secretive as Africans are, he gets nothing and ends up mumbling “Jesus Christ” (126). He understands nothing of the ceremony but concludes, “I was black and they were black, but my blackness did not help me” (127). Similarly, he watches the funeral of an African chief. It seemed to him more like “an advertisement for a circus” (128) or a “parade or procession” (129). One costly item for funerals is alcohol, “most funerals are occasions for an inordinate degree of drinking” (115). However, he finds that, off late, due to the influence of Christianity, chiefs are “actually arguing for lemonade” (115). He could not grasp the significance of whatever goes on as a part of rituals, “I had understood nothing, nothing” (130). In fact, he ends up wondering whether his ancestors also “acted like that? And why?” (130). He witnesses the wide variety of rituals surrounding a dead, and sums up thus:

All of these seemingly gruesome duties are performed with awe and tenderness. Make no mistake about that.... Even human sacrifice is solemnly ritualized. What strikes us as being monstrous is done by them with a sense of exaltation.” (214). Not being able to grapple with the wide paraphernalia of such rituals, he feels it about time to dip into the “muddy metaphysical waters of those African intellectuals who had tried to explain these spiritual riddles. (215)

In Africa, death was “not death as we know it; in fact, it was not death at all. It was a departure” (212). Here, the dead live along with the living; “they eat, breathe, laugh, hate, and continue doing in the world of ghostly shadows exactly what they had been doing in the world of flesh and blood” (213). Wright talks to the Akans about their rituals regarding the death and the dead that he cannot at all relate to and gets the simple answer, “the dead” get lonely in that world and are anxious for the living to come and keep them company. Thus, the pacification of the “dead” constitutes one of

their biggest problems in life” (213). The other world concept which is more real to the Africans than the actual world of flesh and blood that they live in. Wright says that he is far from the world of metaphysics, and in while in Africa, “it was about time that I dipped into the muddy metaphysical waters of those African intellectuals who tried to explain these spiritual riddles” (215). They even have so much belief in ancestor worship that many times the British found it difficult to govern and work in Africa. A native of the Gold Coast impatiently tells Wright, “You mustn’t get the idea that there’s anything fantastic in ancestor worship” (223). However, he quickly confesses that he is “far from being the most suitable person in the world to report on metaphysical doctrines” (215). He finally concludes, “the religion of Akan is not primitive; it is simply terrifying” (217). Far removed from his roots that he comes away, “terrifying” is what Africans pose a world to him. These people have broad religious propositions underlying their beliefs which are simply beyond the grasping capability of a Westerner, even when she/he is African in roots.

On the marriage front, Wright’s eyes witness peculiar customs which fall heavily on his western sensibility. Marriage and adultery “operate on a ‘cash and carry’ basis” (113). And if a wife commits adultery or runs away, the woman’s family needs to compensate the male. Interestingly, “a person’s ultimate importance to the state, in the Akan tribal society, is judged by the amount of his adultery fee” (114). Marriage fees are similarly fixed. When Wright visits, the fees are as follows: New marriage: £ 1.10/; Second marriage: £ 1.2/.

This deep aura of paganism fused with Christianity presents a deep aura of sexuality in the “mood and the bearing of people” (39). “*Sex per se*” (39) turns almost into an everyday ritual and that too in the open. He writes, “sex was so blatantly prevalent that it drove all sexuality out” (39). He compares this tribalism where women go almost in their skin, whereas, the West covers every bit of its women. There is “no rouge or powder on any woman’s cheeks; no fingernails painted; and save for a few tiny earrings of gold, they were bare of ornamentation of every kind” (39-40). The only chosen aspect of their life on they concentrate seems to be their bodily passions. Wright wonders, “Was it hunger? Was it war/ was it climate? Or was sex being *deliberately* brought into the open?” (40). Wright, rather, concludes that it might be sourced from “some taboo originating in their religion” (40). In the West, religion

curbs passions to be displayed in public and relegates it to sin; in Africa Wright finds it turn almost into a ritualistic sort of practice. However, “There is no sighing, longing, or other romantic notions in a young African seeking a wife; kissing is not a part of courtship, and is unknown except among chaste Christians” (116). It seems Wright is himself engulfed in the superficial layer of pre-conceived assumptions that he preaches to discard since at one point he declares that, “A Westerner must make an effort to banish the feeling that what he is observing in Africa is irrational, unless he is able to understand the underlying assumptions of the African’s beliefs, the African will always seem a “savage”...” (117). But since then almost every ritual that he sees around, makes him feel that he is a spectator to “an advertisement for a circus” (128); “the word “pagan” was beginning to have a real meaning for me now; it was against these desperate pagans that St. Paul had fought...I could understand a Christian service; I knew its assumptions” (133). And he wonders “at the newness and strangeness of it” (130) and worries, “Had my ancestors acted like that? And why?” (130). Wright becomes uncomfortable in tracing his ancestry to such deep and almost unfathomable roots.

4.2.3.4 Christianity Amongst the Pagans

Africa stands for paganism, no doubt, but the long years of colonialism have also made Christianity seep in deep amongst people. As a result, “paganism and Christianity were all mixed up, blended” (151). It seemed, to Wright, that being a Christian didn’t mean giving up one’s entire former outlook. The concepts of *evil* and *good* hold a very strong position in Christianity. The African, however, “does not distinguish absolutely between good and evil” (334) and thus, “the African religion has no hell and no sin” (215), observes Wright.

As Christianity and modernity makes way into this continent, Wright wonders “if Africa can be changed” (159), but comes to the conclusion that changing Africa is to try changing human itself. It is a fight that “modern man has not yet thought of” (159) for “Africa must and will become a religion. Not a religion contained within the four walls of a church, but a religion lived and fought out beneath the glare of a pitiless tropic sun” (159). Their life is religion; religion is their whole way of life itself, and Wright could easily perceive that Christian missionaries have ruined one whole way

of life, “They had, prodded by their own neurotic drives, waded in and wrecked an entire philosophy of existence of a people without replacing it” (152). While in the markets, Wright didn’t even see any of the famous African wood carvings or art objects, those odd, elongated and ebony figures. Wright could clearly make out that in the eyes of the new black Christians those figures hold no value and the “advent of the missionaries has driven underground much of the religious expression of the tribal people” (207). Wright understands that natural resources like gold and timber can be regrown, “but there is no power on earth that can rebuild the mental habits and restore that former vision that once gave significance to the lives of these people” (153). Thus, however hard Christianity might have tried, Africans have not become fully Christianized natives, but have turned out to be “numb” (153) rather.

However, amidst this numbness, Africans still cling to their old religious customs, the ways of the forefathers, but “in secrecy and shame” (69). He cites an example in which he comes across a group of women sitting bare-breasted. Seeing the man approaching, most importantly, a man who “wore Western clothes” (83), they immediately cover their “naked breasts” (82). He perceives that, “My approaching presence had been like the shadow of the Cross falling athwart the innocence of their simple lives, and because of their conditioning, they had paid deference to that Cross; but the moment I had gone, they had reverted quickly and naturally to their traditional behavior”. In this regard, the Ashanti, for instance, “had to dilute his indigenous religious customs with Christian ones, had to pretend to be Christian in order to live and be left alone” (119). In a quiet patronizing tone Wright states that it is a “fragile” (69) religion in Africa that has been carved out of the “naked impulses of the naked man” (69), and Christianity is all the more obscuring that *naked* religion.

There comes, however, one point where Wright equates African ritualistic beliefs with the Christians on an equal footing. Looking at the practice of African human sacrifice he observes that even in Christianity human sacrifice happens. However, on a symbolic level, where one simply feels it and not performs the action, it is different. Here “the advantage of the white Westerner is that he found a way of killing and dodging the consequences of it...found a way of stifling that awful need in a socially acceptable way...African believes straightforwardly; his heart lacks the artful sophistication of the white man” (299). Now the biggest deliberation remains as to the

authenticity of the Ashanti and the Christians. And Wright answers, “I think both are lamentably right, terribly childlike, and tragically human” (299). Wright thus, ends up putting the tribal African religion and Christianity on equal footing on, at least, one ground.

On a not-so-welcome note, Wright looks at another degenerating effect of Christianity on the ‘natives’. Coming across a young girl who tries to snug upon to him in a taxi, he writes, “Christianity had changed her. Before professing Christ, she might have slept with a man, for the sheer physical pleasure; now, she still wanted to sleep with a man, but she wanted to be paid” (163). Materialism and avarice comes as by-products of Christianity that intends to ‘civilize and save the heathens’.

The arrival of the Church and missionaries have “driven underground” (207) much of the religious expression of the tribal people. Wright notices, “They no longer allow it to be known that they fashion those odd, elongated ebony figures that Europeans seek so ardently. In the eyes of the new ‘black’ Christians those figures hold no value” (207). In fact, Wright now observes that “Instead of many Gods, the Gold Coast African now has one Who is nailed to a cross and Whose image is stamped out by mass production” (207-08). Sympathizing with these ‘natives’, he writes, “My sympathies were with the pagans; the kind that the Christians hated and feared” (134). He understands that these ‘natives’ are probably unaware that they are gradually losing their heritage.

Thus, contemplating about the state-of-affairs, he says, “The more I reflected upon the work of the missionaries, the more stunned I became. They had, prodded by their own neurotic a people without replacing it, without even knowing really what they had been doing” (152).

4.2.3.5 The Irony of Pagan Africa

Wright visits a Christian Church while in Ghana to see the contrast and that “how the followers of Jesus behaved themselves” (132-33). He attends a Methodist Church, and observes, “The service was underway as I entered rather timidly. I didn’t know if they had any special rules or not, so I stood discretely at the back. A preacher was talking

in a tribal tongue, quietly, with no gestures, no passion. To my astonishment, the congregation was segregated: men sat on one side and women on another; young boys sat together and young girls did the same” (133). The interior of the Church is dim and silent. In the midst of those people stands the Cross, “the symbol of Christianity, just as the Golden Stool was the symbol of the Akan religion” (133). Contrasting this Church service with the pagan funeral that he had attended, he writes, “If religion partakes of the terror stemming from the proximity of human life to eternity, to an absolute otherness, then there was, by a hell of a long shot, much more genuine religion in that barbaric pagan funeral than I could feel in this quiet, bourgeois Christian church!” (133). Moreover, he is also displeased with the tribal men and women “striving to be middle class” (134) in their best attires. He wonders, “Why was it that Christians always seemed to have money and comfort, when the symbol of Christ, half naked and bleeding on the Cross, evoked a sense of suffering in the world” (134). He leaves the Church and goes out to the “sinful streets” (134). He observes that religion has been the most important aspect by which the “Gold Coast has been maintained as a captive nation for more than a hundred years” (135).

On another note, he finds that the religion of the Akan “is not primitive, it is simply terrifying” (217). Talking about the ‘pagan’ African religion and its human sacrifices, he says, “The voice of the Ashanti joins that of the human race in testifying that the human heart has need of blood” (298). However, he then compares this ritual to the symbolic sacrifice of the Christians “300,000,000 times a day in the form of the mass....But the blood that flows from the Cross is imaginary blood, magic blood, make-believe blood, and the blood that flows from the knife of the Ashanti is no less magical, but all too real” (299).

Wright admits that he has been “made into a Westerner” (707). It began in his childhood, even before he could choose himself, and “the process continues” (707). In this light, it’s very important to identify with the way he looks at African religious practices and spiritual beliefs. He says, “One does not react to Africa as Africa is, and this is because so few can react to life as life is. One reacts to Africa as one is, as one lives” (158). At one point, he feels that whatever religion he sees is “a vast, dingy mirror, and what one sees in that mirror, he hates and wants to destroy” (158). He looks at “these jungle children” (261) and their rituals, and thinks, “May be it

contained some foolish, but, to his mind, powerful fetish? I wanted to burst out laughing, but I inhibit myself” (249). But finally he concludes that Africa cradles “an astounding religion, complicated and abounding in taboos...and no one has ever really fully traced its growth or origin” (242). Thus, trying to come with terms with all that he sees, he suggests, “a Westerner must make an effort to banish the feeling that what he is observing in Africa is irrational, and, unless he is able to understand the underlying assumptions of the African’s beliefs, the African will always seem a “savage” (117).

4.2.4.1 Richard Wright: *Color Curtain* (1956)

Talking about his religious dis/orientation, Richard Wright remembers growing up in the “Methodist and Seventh Day Adventist churches” (15) and says, “I saw and observed religion in my childhood; and these people are religious” (15). The atmosphere that he grows up in was religious no doubt, but everything is forced upon him. On the other hand, religion in Asia and Africa was a complete way of life; religion is the blood here. He says, “Religion is their cultural heritage from many thousands of years of living and dying, longing and fearing, and it has molded their institutions and loaded their valuations” (foreword). His intention of using religion and race as his instruments in gazing at the people seem quiet dissatisfactory. On Wright's understanding of his non-Western subjects, James Baldwin charges: “[Wright's] notions of society, politics, and history ... seemed to me utterly fanciful” (*Nobody Knows* 148). Whatever might his ancestry be, his birth and budding up amidst the Americans has had a big impact on his persona and thereby his ideologies and gaze/s. The fact remains that even though Wright identified himself with the colored, the dispossessed around the world and their cause, he nevertheless, at times, parroted western scientific and economic superiority which his travelogues testify.

4.2.4.2 Asia at Bandung: It is all Religion

Wright finds it complicated to make a way into and relate to the emblematic religious, spiritual plane of Asia and Africa or the philosophies of such people. One of the most stirring lines coming from Wright is, “Wherever I looked in Asia I saw signs or

symbols of religion and it made me Silent” (79). Even before he sets on sail to Indonesia, he reads in the paper about the conference and notes that the leaders at the Bandung hail from nations which are “deeply religious” (12) who carry a “religious consciousness on a global scale” (12). In the narrative, he gives a clear picture of his estrangement with this religious, spiritual world, “It was strange how, the moment I left the dry, impersonal, abstract world of the encountered at once: *religion*, religion, feeding on itself, sufficient unto itself” (77). Wright thus, confronts a world almost alien to him.

Wright, as it is seen, abruptly finds himself amidst this “vague but potent” force, religion, and is at loss to grapple with it. In an elaborate staging of thoughts, he describes this politico-religious conglomeration:

It was the kind of meeting that no anthropologist, no sociologist, no political scientist would ever have dreamed of staging: it was too simple, too elementary, cutting through the outer layers of disparate social and political and cultural facts down to the bare brute residues of human existence: races, *religions* and continents. Only ‘black’, brown and yellow men...their religion could have felt the need for such a meeting. (13)

Wright comes across a journalist who is to attend the conference. The journalist holds strong views about the Jews. Wright notices, “I peered up into the face of the journalist; his eyes were unblinking, hot, fanatic” (77). He feels it as if “Irrationalism meeting irrationalism” (77) in the clash between the religiously fanatic journalist and the Jews who are eternally “spurred by religious dreams” (77).

It is interesting to note what Wright observes about the people and their culture at two of the most important places in Asia, Calcutta and Bangkok. Enroute to Indonesia, as Wright’s plane lands in Calcutta, he sees “*Hindus* entered the plane” (80) (italic mine), who seemed, however, urbanized in Western attires. Similarly, in Bangkok, the flight suddenly gets flooded with *Buddhists* (italic mine) in “orange-colored robes” (80). It flashes past his mind that “here religion came before all else” (80). Wright comes to acknowledge a fact, “if the men of the West were political animals, then the men of the East were religious animals” (80). He understands that he is in a different world altogether.

4.2.4.3 Religion: An Alternative for Political Alignment/Ideology

Wright meets a Singapore-born journalist girl who is a Eurasian. She seemed to him as “highly color-conscious as an American Negro” (44) who “felt the racial insults thrown from both the sides” (44). He understands that the journalist “feels that no state ought to sponsor religion; Christianity has had no deep effect in her country...the role of religion in history is to her an open question; she takes religion for granted” (34-35). Wright felt as if her “agonizing position was born of accident, and her emotional rootlessness aggravated it” (45). At this moment, Wright looks at religion as an alternative to political alignment/ideology. He says, “Had Communism been presented to her before she embraced Catholicism, she might well have accepted it” (45). Wright also understands that here Christianity has been used as a tool for European imperialism which, he evidently sees in Africa too. While talking to an Asian he feels that the person may not have “anything to do with religion, but perhaps the state ought to try to keep alive the sense of the religious, the attitude and feeling of religion without regard to sects or ideology” (45-46). Wright could clearly sense the gravity of the situation.

While talking to a young Pakistani journalist, he observes a similar quandary. An uprooted Asian, he is “eloquent, bitter, with a fund of fire smoldering in his heart” (63). This boy is “educated by missionaries....With a wry smile, he called himself a Christian. He had grown up in a home that a mixture of Christian and Hindu influences. ‘Religiously, I’m really nothing’” (63). Wright sees that the Christian religion has been used by the West to rule his country, “I was born in the Christian faith, but I feel that that faith was used against me and my country” (64). The West also brought along with it industrialization. And he fears that it is killing the culture in his country, and culture is religion here, “the one item I value most in my culture is religion for the masses; we can keep religion for the people if we don’t industrialize too much” (66). He finds that Christianity has been used as a tool for European imperialism. Talking against state sponsored religion, he says, “Let the religion be a private affair. The Christian religion helped the British to gain power. Christianity divided my country, sundered an already greatly sundered people. The Christian religion, as it operated among us, was a political instrument, used by the West to rule my country” (64). He feels that his Christian faith, in which he is born, has been used

against him and his country. However, Wright perceives a strange attitude in him towards religion, “he was willing to allow religion to exist in his country in the future, but not for himself; he wanted the *masses to believe*” (70). Wright wonders as to how much more scared the illiterate millions be if thrown into the void when such literate people fear so much. He looks at the Asian mind, which, he feels, considers “industrialization was not a project...but a dogma in a religion” (74) and this religion no longer remains “a delicate relationship wrought through centuries and embodied in ritual and ceremony, but a proof of one’s humanity, something to defend and cling to (even if one did not believe in it!) passionately, for the sake of one’s pride, to redress the balance in the scales of self-esteem” (74). He feels that the only way for his country or any country, as a matter of fact, to become free of the West is to industrialize, however, he is afraid of too much industrialization as well. Therefore, he suggests, “The one item I value most in my culture is religion for the masses; we can keep religion for the people if we don’t industrialize too much” (66). Wright here calls for a judicious balance to be maintained.

4.2.4.4 Indonesians and the Javanese Country

Looking at the Indonesian Moslem people which covered 90% of the total population, he feels that these Moslems “had a personality that was intact, poised, healthy, and largely free from neurotic conflicts... had not been tampered too much by missionaries as had all too many Africans” (120). These people utter words colored with passion born out of centuries of “racial and religious oppression” (123). However, the Asian mind, to the utter amusement and surprise of the Western mind of Wright, firmly rejects to create a distinction between the secular and the sacred. To this, Wright reacts, “In the end, the Moslem state was a blur to me” (124). This leads Wright to state that “day by day I was learning to appreciate that one of the greatest realities of Asia was religion” (123), and a fact which he is so distanced from.

Indonesians are not great drinkers, which Wright attributes to “religious reasons” (189). They rarely frequent bars. However, when it comes to wrestle with the West, “even the mild-tempered Buddhists echo this attitude of defensiveness toward the West in religious matters” (191). Wright finds them defensive of their religion.

As a religious place, the Javanese countryside has many white mosques and “now and then the delicate Gothic spire of a Catholic Church looking fantastically out of place in this near-jungle scenery” (130). All these remind him of the countryside of Africa. He can make out the similarity in the postcolonial scene of these third world countries where landscape is largely painted in one central element, religion.

4.2.4.5 Religion in Politics

In fusing politics with religion, no one could better an Asian leader, observes Wright. For instance, Sukarno, the President of the Republic of Indonesia, makes use of the “strong and defiant” (136) note of religion to mobilize the masses through his speeches. In trying to muster the “Moral Violence of Nations” (Wright’s terminologies) in favor of peace, Sukarno knew what he appeals to, “Religion is of dominating importance particularly in this part of the world. There are perhaps more religions here than in other regions of the globe.... Our countries were the birthplace of religions” (139). Sukarno tries to organize this vast “irrational” (140) force called religion to organize the people. It is hard for Wright to realize how tenaciously these Asian leaders adhere to religion in their political endeavors. He says, “As I sat listening, I began to sense a deep and organic relation here in Bandung between race and religion, *two of the most powerful irrational forces in human nature*. Sukarno was not evoking these twin demons; he was not trying to create them; he was trying to organize them....The reality of race and religion was there, swollen, sensitive, turbulent” (140). Wright tries to grasp how big a role religion plays in Asian and African politics.

While wondering about this strange fusion of religion, race and politics, Wright comes across yet another forceful speaker, Dr. Mohammad Natsir, the former Prime Minister of Indonesia and who is a “leading spokesman for the idea of the Moslem state” (119). On being asked by Wright about his co-operating with the West, Natsir replies, “If the West would meet us half way, yes,...The part we shall be able to take in the co-operation, our own views and considerations must be fully taken into account....The *Islamic precepts* and our position as Asiatic countries are decisive factors which cannot be neglected” (123). Wright finds these “strong words” (123) colored in the

passion born of centuries of “religious oppression” (123). He thus, appreciates the fact that, perhaps, the biggest “reality” (123) in Asia is religion.

In the public front, the distinction between the religion and politics is almost invisible too. Talking to a young Political Science student, Wright perceives that:

He was totalitarian-minded, but without the buttress of modern Communist or Fascist ideology.... Allah was his dictator. Hence, preachments against the separation of Church and State, for liberty of the individual, sounded like so much alien, diabolical propaganda to his ears. But he was sophisticated...He knew both East and West, without really believing in either of them. There was another and other world that he and his kind had to create. (62)

This world remains so much alien to a Western-minded traveler in Asia like Wright.

Wright quickly examines some of the delegations at Bandung which, however, revealed a solid presence of Christianity, “The five Liberation delegates were all members of Y.M.C.A. two members of the Indonesian delegation were Christians. The Philippine delegation was probably all Roman Catholic. The Ethiopian delegation was mostly of Hindus, Moslems, Buddhists, etc.” (167). He finally feels that religion, and particularly the Christian religion, “was no bulwark against Communism in Asia” (167) because people here are very “desperate” (167) and would accept anything to act in “common defense of themselves” (167). For a Western mind, the relationship between Communism and religion (Christianity) seems very confusing. He says, “In the West one is inclined to feel that the two doctrines of life, Christianity and Communism, are opposed, but, at bottom, they are not as opposed as one would think.... Seen through Asian eyes, the two philosophies share much of the same assumptions of hope” (168). The sharp ideological distinctions between religion and politics often drawn by the Westerners are blurred in Asia.

Wright starts perceiving the fact that religion, together with race, merges into the veins of the Asians like a stark reality that flows in the veins of any other man in the form of blood. He writes, “A racial and religious system of identification manifesting itself in an emotional nationalism which was now leaping state boundaries and melting and merging, one into the other” (140). In the end, he could see the powerful

and omnipresence of religion in this part of the world in almost every walk of people's life, but fails to comprehend its true essence.

4.2.5.1 Richard Wright: *Pagan Spain* (1957)

For Wright, it is the “pagan” that constitutes a Spanish ideology, as is also clear from the title of the book chosen. He knows, “Spain was a holy nation” (192) and in the course of his journey realizes that “all was religion in Spain” (192). Before Wright left for Spain in 1954, he had just returned from a trip to the Gold Coast of Africa, the land of the ‘dark’, his ancestral land, where he had a number of disturbing encounters regarded as tribalism and paganism. And now he, the ‘black’ explorer, will, perhaps, write a ‘report’ on the antediluvian and historically stranded culture of Spain.

4.2.5.2 Wright: *The Heathen*

In the course of his journey, many of Wright's encounters bring about the stereotypical image the Spanish have of him as a heathen/non-Catholic. On the top of it, to the utter surprise of the Catholics, Andre and Miguel, he declares he is not a Catholic. He is, thus, seen as an *atheist* who needs to be rescued. He almost feels “ashamed of not being Catholic” (8). To them, Wright stands “outside the pale” (8), for he could tell from their expression that “they could not conceive of anyone ever being anything other than Catholic” (8). And thus, they attempt to convert Wright into a Catholic. He writes, “I was a heathen and these devout boys were graciously coming to my rescue. In their spontaneous embrace of me they were acting out a role that had been implanted in them since childhood. I was not only a stranger, but a “lost” one in dire need of being saved” (9). But, within just half an hour, Wright feels that it is he who, perhaps, has to take up the task of refining and saving the Spanish-white heathen lot, “now it was I who was feeling the tissue and texture of their lives” (22).

4.2.5.3 Protestantism: *A Castaway*

The average Spaniard, Wright observes, “knows nothing of Protestantism; does not know what Protestantism is” (137). They are so alien to any religious model other than Catholicism that, Wright wonders, if they meet one from outside Catholicism

“would stare with more bewilderment than hostility” (137). However, the official Spanish attitude toward Protestantism is very different than the Spanish masses which are reflected in the “daily practices and policies of the Church and State” (137). According to them, as Wright sees it, Protestantism is “a mortal sin, and, since the State of Spain is buttressed and supported by the Church, each government official, being naturally devout Catholic, feels that it is his bounden duty to abhor, defeat, and banish Protestantism when and wherever he meets it” (138). It is religion against religion; one sect of Christianity against another.

Wright, on the other hand, is a born Protestant (Wright’s relationship with religion is never clear. He is, perhaps, unhappy with religion because of his left links), and lived a Protestant childhood, but he feels “more or less toward that religion as Protestants in Spain feel toward Catholicism” (138). He understands the “utterly barbarous nature of the psychological suffering that the Spanish Protestant was doomed to undergo at the hands of the Church and State officials and his Catholic neighbors” (138), and being a ‘black’ in America and a Protestant on top, he has a “spontaneous and profound sympathy” (138) for that “exquisite suffering and emotional torture” (138) of the Africans. Wright is drawn towards this emotional suffering of the Spanish Protestants because he sees an “undeniable and uncanny psychological affinities that they held in common with American Negroes, Jew, and other oppressed minorities” (138). Thus, being an American Negro and looking at the emotional sufferings of a “group of *white Negroes*”, whom he meets in Spain, he assumes that “Negroes are Negroes because they are treated as Negroes” (138). Protestants tell him that other than their religion, there haven’t been any stigmas against them in Spain, perhaps, just like the Negroes, for whom other than their color, there has been no stigma against them in America. Someone informs Wright, in Spain “we are prisoners because of our religion” (143) and the only crime is being a Protestant and staying in Spain. At one point, he meets a Jew, who tells him, “It (Church) nullifies our religion and makes us confess the omnipotence of Catholicism... You see, we Jews either had to leave, or turn Catholic” (224). Christianity (Catholicism) creates almost an oppressive regime governance.

4.2.5.4 'The Maw of Paganism'

However, Wright finds the cold fact that “Spain was not even Christian! It had never been converted, not to Protestantism, not even to Catholicism itself! Somehow the pagan streams of influence flowing from the Goths, the Greeks, the Jews, the Romans, the Iberians, and the Moors lingered strongly and virtually on, flourishing under the draperies of the twentieth century” (193). He sees that the margins of the Spanish religiosity went past the Church with the “maw of paganism buried deep in the hearts of the people and they act like the “Akan in the African jungle” (192). It is the function and nature of Catholicism that enables paganism to stay integral, opines Wright, and “today Spanish Catholicism boasted that it was the most perfect and purest Catholicism in all the world” (193). Wright brings out the hollowness of Catholicism.

Yet, Wright could perceive that Religion is a reality in Spain, “an opiate of the masses” (see Marx). The Spaniards rule “in the name of their religion and they were capable of killing you in the name of that religion...” (195), and at home, as Spaniards tell, “our Church is anti-democratic. The Falange scorns the ballot...The Church in Spain is too oppressive. Day and night the priests yell against sin, that is, sex” (205). But Wright notices that the more sex has been curbed by the Church, the more blatantly omnipresent it has become in Spain. Catholicism talks about sin, and “prostitution is a proof of sin. So prostitution exists” (152). Wright could see that it is almost a vicious circle.

Wright compares the paganism in Africa and that of Spain. African paganism, in confrontation with the Western religion, has almost crumpled down, but “the pagan traditions of Spain had sustained no such mortal wound” (193). He goes on to observe, “Those traditions were intact today as never before. In fact, they were officially revered and honored; they were the political aims of the State” (193). This fact makes him feel that “the naked African in the bush would make greater progress during the next fifty years than the proud, tradition-bound Spaniard!” (193). The rigidity of the Spanish mind, bound deep in its ‘queer’ religious beliefs, almost binds it to regression.

4.2.5.5 The Catholic Church

“The Church here is an industry” (212), to enunciate this, Wright relates an anecdote. A woman’s husband dies and he is supposed to be buried by the Church which is there in that section of the city. But due to sentimental reasons, the woman wants the body to be taken to another part of the city, and the business of the Church starts who tell her that “it would cost her fifteen hundred pesetas for each quarter of the city through which the body of her husband would pass” (212). The life and even the afterlife of a person becomes business for the church.

In the name of religion, Wright sees that “Spaniards had despoiled entire continents” (195). In the era of progress, the Spanish Catholic Church remains “static” (227). He finds that the follower of the Spanish Catholic Church is “a victim of a spell cast by external configuration of fetish objects that coerced his imagination and emotions to unchangeableness. He was doomed to apprehend his environment through the fogged and sacred glass of the Church’s hierarchy. And the physical area of the Spaniard’s life reflected this: low standards of living, illiteracy, no control over material forces, and a charged, confused consciousness that compelled him to seek release from his frustrations in the projected shadows of his own personality” (227). To Wright’s eyes, a small glimpse is sufficient to come to the conclusion that “how little Spain had altered during the long centuries” (227). He feels a deep pathos lurking beneath the general Spanish scenario.

4.2.5.6 Jews in Spain

Interviewing a young Spanish Jewish businessman provides Wright a very dismal picture of the uncongenial religious atmosphere in Spain. On being asked if there is any anti-Semitism in Spain, he denies hesitatingly after a long pause. However, opening up the “dark domain of his heart” (222), the boy says, “If a Jewish boy and girl wish to marry here, they must first get a certificate from the priest in their area certificate saying that they have never been baptized... Without a certificate of nonbaptism, they cannot marry” (223). However, it relies entirely in the hands of the Church to decide whether such a couple can marry or not. Even the certificate of nonbaptism upon a Jew who belongs to the synagogue “nullifies” (224) his/her

religion and makes them confess the “omnipotence of Catholicism” (224). Wright almost paints a sinister picture of Catholicism.

In fact, it is noticed by Wright that, “A Jew could not marry a Catholic who would not want to be married in the Church and who would not pledge to rear the children as Catholics” (224). The young man exasperatingly declares, “You see, we Jews either had to leave, or turn Catholic, that is, become *conversos*. I’ve come back to the country from which my ancestors were driven centuries ago. *I feel that I am Spanish*” (224). Wright could gauge that he is “seething with shame and burning with fury” (225) but is vulnerable at the same time.

Wright ends up wondering, “That they had triumphed in the name of a dead God nailed to cross was undeniably true, but what had that cross meant to them? And what had it meant to the millions whom they had subjugated?” (234). He feels, “In Spain there was no lay, no secular life. Spain was a holy nation, a sacred state” (192), but “irrational” (192). Of Catholicism, he speaks, “This was a militant religion of death and suffering, of death a resurrection, each death being linked with a rising from the dead, and each rising from the dead being enthroned in a new generation of men; of the Spanish Catholics he opines, “This was the religion that had enabled the Spaniards to conquer and despoil Mexico and Peru; these were the roots of the ‘black’ Legend” (238). At the end of his journey, Wright finds Spain primitive, and desolately caught in the past. However, he also sees that Spain’s culture is also enticing in its own way, but beyond his grasp of understanding. It is almost as if he encounters the primitivism of Africa in the paganism of Spain, both ‘strange’ to him.

III

In the travel writing texts discussed in this chapter, it is found that religion and travel go hand in hand. Religion acts as the strongest pillar on which the foundation of any society rests and thus, religion serves as, perhaps, the foremost ideological framework through which a traveler looks at different people and places. Right from Equiano to Wright, religion pervades the narratives in the form of myriad observations and commentaries about the cultures visited, while throwing light on the religious orientations of the travelers themselves.

Equiano, Douglass and Wright get conditioned by the dominant ideological consciousness, religion, which has been acquired over the long process of their assimilation in America. From the days of the ill-repute slavery to the present times, in the 'black' community, the Church plays an important role. It is an embodiment of faith where the 'black' returns frequently to channel out his frustrations and to get a lease of new hope. While Equiano and Douglass takes refuge in the acquired/adopted religion, and uses it as a shield to attack the hypocrisy and persecutions of the white slave-practitioners, Wright's dealing with religion presents some variations. He is a Seventh day Methodist Christian, but religion has been more of a forced concept on him than a spontaneous spirit and therefore looks at the people and the cultures of the 'third' world nations with dubious and surprised notes. For instance, he says, he almost becomes "silent" when he confronts the thick religious atmosphere in Asia. Nevertheless, religion unquestionably acts as a meditative tool to examine cultures and their progress or decline from the traveler's viewpoint.

However, this brings in another observation in that the first world religious ideologies, by and large, bear a sarcastic and patronizing tone in its gaze for the tribal or 'pagan' religious practices and beliefs of the 'third' world nations. Equiano, abducted from the 'tribal' Africa, is then seasoned in the fundamental concepts within the Christian doctrine of the 'first' world. He comes a full circle when he arrives in Africa only to find those 'tribal' religious practices and beliefs 'strange'. He finally takes charge as a missionary in England and sets off to Africa to convert those 'pagan' into the faith of a 'civilized' world. Similarly, Douglass too, having taken recourse to the faith of the masters, makes attempts to teach his fellow slaves the Christian doctrines and provide them with a path to salvation. Wright, on the other hand, being an atheist himself, looks at the religiously clad Africa, Ghana and Asia as "irrational". He comes to Africa to search for his long-lost roots, but ends up feeling almost mortified on wondering if his forefathers indulged in the religious 'antics' that he witnesses while he is in the ontologically primitive Africa. In Spain, Christianity fused with 'paganism' is seen almost like a deathblow by him. He sees no sane future for the 'hypocritical' Catholics who still cling on to their traditional, irrational 'pagan' ways. Meanwhile, at the Bandung conference, he is surprised to find the political leaders reinforce their world views through religious essentialism. Even in the largest Asian and African political conglomeration, he finds religion and "religious animals"

pervading the atmosphere. He thus, acts more like a cosmopolitan ‘outsider’ from a ‘first’ world of rationalism to the ‘third’ world spaces of religious irrationalism.

It is clear that the African American traveler writers’ response to the cultures they visit is subject to their underlying religious convictions. Travel writing responds to the religious otherness of the cultures that the writer comes across. It shows a deep divide within cultures when it comes to men and women looking at themselves looking at the religious beliefs and practices of alien cultures. The relationship between travel writing and the religious gaze of the traveler and the travelee is informed not only by movement from one place to another religion but also by ideologies and ecclesiastical beliefs that do not come to the surface and do not necessarily move with the people.

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