

CHAPTER FIVE

**‘I’M GONNA BE A GYPSY WOMAN’: AFRICAN AMERICAN
TRAVEL WRITING AND THE CLAIMS OF GENDER**

Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. (John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* 45)

The gaze is not necessarily male (literally), but to own and activate the gaze, given our language and the structure of the unconscious, is to be in the “mas- culine” position. (E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film* 30)

The phrase “I’m gonna be a gypsy woman” is taken from Langston Hughes’ poem “Gypsy Man”. In the poem, the ‘black’ woman seeks to fashion herself in keeping with the world’s ways. She says that she would be a gypsy woman—she would leave home and travel, that is, without a fixed destination—as her husband does not come home. More importantly, she says that this decision is taken because she cannot be home alone. Hughes offers the most important reason for the ‘black’ American woman to travel, though the irony should not be lost on anyone. Travel is as much about mobility as about travel. When a woman leaves home with the object of seeing the world she becomes an object of attention. When a ‘black’ American woman travels, she invites attention as a woman and as a ‘black’ woman. She looks at the world, and she is looked at.

I

Focusing on what has been termed as the *second sex*, this chapter aims at revisiting and examining what Mary Ann Doane calls “the sexual politics of looking” (86). This reading entails a question that feminist theory has been asking, “Is the gaze male?” (Miller 175) and to look for possibilities if the patriarchal “regime of the specular” (Miller 175) could be eluded. Ensuing in this line of thought, this chapter attempts at an analysis of the African-American female spectatorship as a critical area of enquiry owing to the long cessation between the visual and visuality when it comes to the concerns of their representation and identity. As is manifest in several African American women’s travel writing, by writing the self, the woman travel writers externalizes their inner experiences and thereby tend to destabilize patriarchal stereotypes. They succeed replicating a bourgeois gendered subject, a commonplace of dominant culture; the bourgeois gender ideology treats reproduction as a

specifically feminine activity, opposing it to the stereotypical activity of production of identity (female) by men. Women's travel writing is a gendered site of containment, cooptation, and resistance. It is seen that the 'black' females have been further denied the right to gaze in the already subjugated 'black' world. It has always been the men (white) who have exercised a controlling power over the 'black' females by their look or gaze. However, in every relationship of power, there is a definite possibility of resistance. The 'black' female gaze, thus, has been a site of resistance throughout history. Nevertheless, the 'black' female body has been continually on the move along with the male body. However, travel writing has been largely treated as the domain of males for long. Females, their movements, and experiences had been relegated to the margins all through, and a 'black' female at that has been in a much more subjugated and contentious position. However, a systematic analysis of the 'black' female travel narratives paves the way for fresh and interesting ways of looking. For the purpose of this study, the texts that this chapter incorporates are: Nancy Prince's *The Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince* (1853), Maya Angelou's *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (1986), and Carolyn Vine's *Black and Abroad* (2010).

This chapter assumes (i) that African-American women travel writers use the trope of travel and perceive and draw a world through their gaze/s which tend to challenge the established ideologies that seek to restrict women's mobility; (ii) that the female traveling self is not just a 'silent' receiver of meaning but an active meaning maker too; (iii) that female gaze can successfully traverse the gap between their long designated space of the private and personal and the masculine space of the public and professional; and (iv) that African American women travelers successfully resist and dismantle the social constructions of race, class and most importantly gender.

The foremost point of observation in this chapter is that travel writing as a genre has well-marked gender demarcations in the activity of travel and the act of gazing. Hence, if looks have language, then travel and the travel writing books have all the more been a masculine province for long. However, African American women travelers have been on the move since the beginning of slavery. Their writing, in navigating across varied geographical landscapes and through cultural and social landscapes, nurture what Iain Chambers calls the self which is subject to 'mutation' and always in transit (*Migrancy* 5). This leads to a deconstruction of the presumed

fixities of racial, national and gendered identities which eventually leads to the merging of the domestic and public spaces of the female and male travelers respectively. The diverse journeys they document become a mapping of the self (as such of gender too), which according to Cheryl Deborah Williams is, “conceived in transit and delivered in passage” (see Williams 10).

This chapter seeks to argue that African American women travel writers effectively makes use of the masculine metaphors of travel and act of looking at people and places and engage in the process of meaning making. This is augmented by the fact that women’s travel writing reflects impressions of one gender viewing another and of one culture viewing the other. Adding to this is an important facet that these travel narratives showcase women travelers also engaged in the activity of looking at themselves through the gaze of the ‘other’, i.e. the male gaze. They are therefore, in much stronger position/s than the male travelers, as they carry a “double consciousness” in a gendered perspective that, as ‘blacks’, they already have.

The review of literature for this chapter engages with the survey of theories related to the politics of gazing and gazing as an activity in itself in the larger social context. This in turn will be associated with the idea of gender as is constructed by and operated in the society.

In her influential essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (written in 1973 and published in 1975), Laura Mulvey develops on the feminist thought and conception of the passive role of women in cinema. She argues that film provides visual pleasure through scopophilia and identification with the on-screen male actor. Hence, looking in itself is seen a “pleasurable” act of voyeurism. This combines with the dominant patriarchal order that transforms or portrays the women on screen as a “bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning” (7). Mulvey proposes the eradication of female sexual objectivity, thereby giving her a subjective space.

It is noteworthy that understanding the role of women in the society has been defined long by the male gaze and is central to understanding their position in the society. ‘Woman’ can be seen as a design or construction of the masculine gaze. However, before one sets out to analyze how women thought of themselves and of their

relations with men, she/he must find out how they were glimpsed at by men. The masculine notion of woman gave rise to idealizations and standards that strongly influenced the mannerisms of women, who lacked the power to confront the male outlook of their sex. Mulvey, in “Visual Pleasure”, says:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. (837)

Further she adds:

An active/passive heterosexual division of labour has similarly controlled narrative structure. According to the principles of the ruling ideology and the psychological structures that back it up, the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like. Hence the split between spectacle and narrative supports the man's role as the active one of advancing the story, making things happen. The man controls the film fantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen to neutralise the extradiegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle....As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look onto that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look. (838)

The question of female spectatorship was further addressed by Bell Hooks in her powerful essay “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators” (1992). Whereas, Mulvey and other feminist film critics talk about women, but that criticism confines itself to ‘white women,’ Hooks successfully brings in ‘black’ women into the mainstream feminist criticism and carefully fuses racism with feminism. The politics of colonialism and the racialized power relations had not only denied the ‘black’ women the power to look, but had denied them any kind of agency or individualistic identity. Amongst other things, Hooks talks about the fact that in cinemas ‘black’ women were used as a foil to white women to enhance the latter’s power of being the centre of phallogentric gaze by appearing to be desirable and pleasant. Hooks puts

forth the perception of the “oppositional gaze,” encouraging ‘black’ women not to accept stereotypical representations in film, but rather dynamically critique them. Putting together Mulvey and Hook’s theoretical perspectives in the context of female travel writing , it can be contended that:

- I. women traveler writers, whether subtly or overtly, eradicates the patriarchal notion of female sexual subjectivity and makes meaning instead of bearing one. Moving further, in the case of ‘black’ women travelers, they supplement the oppositional gaze asserting agency and doing away with the racist ideas.
- II. gazing/looking is a mode of power; ‘black’ female travelers get hold of this power and go a step further by articulating/narrating what they see. They gain a subjective perspective over the objects of their gaze which includes white females and ‘black’/white males and even narrate them thereby reversing the concept of meaning production through gazing altogether. Substantially, these narratives provide the readers with different ways of seeing at ‘black’ female subjectivity, ‘black’ female participant spectatorship and bring in new points of recognition for the subject.

The concept of social construction of gender and the dominant role that gaze plays in it finds an interesting ground to function and develop in travel writing. Early travel narratives were written mostly by males as adventures requiring exploring new, unknown lands. Travel has been traditionally associated with the male body, especially the white. Travels and thereby the travel texts of the ‘black’ body have been largely ignored over the centuries. But these marginalized bodies, whether as active or passive travelers, have been on the move ever since the concept of travel came to the fore. The repressed female subject has largely been a site of silence and immobility rather than one of movement and meaning production. Study of the ‘black’ female travelers is a genus that has received a steep rise in the recent decades. A female traveler, gazing at different places and people therein has a variety of marked specificities of her own and several differences than that of a male travelers’ gaze. When a female sets out on a travel, she creates multiple layers of interesting and intriguing gazes. To start with, the traveler in such cases belongs to the so-called *second sex* and certain aspects related to women traveling have not undergone much

change over the centuries. Second, with the outer forces, i.e., society/civilization compartmentalizing her to a particular class (biologically) comes the inner force which keeps reminding her of her socially structured self. Simone de Beauvoir's well known quote could be aptly registered here, "One is not born, but becomes a woman" (*The Second Sex* 301). Over time, as a woman grows up, she incorporates the attributes and a mental set-up that is expected of her by her 'human surroundings'. No doubt, women have made attempts to get out of the male-structured and female garnished space presented to them. However, the fact remains that a woman's gaze is heavily influenced by her particular sexual orientation and her social milieu. As such, a 'black' female traveler's gaze, given the history of the race to which it belongs, and its own particular gendered quandaries, creates an array of interesting images of the world around, which makes her texts a reasonably remarkable read.

About the idea of the outer forces, which create a double self for women which the latter has to carry perennially with them, is well defined by John Berger, in *Ways of Seeing*. He puts forward his views on the social construction of gender. He says:

To be born a woman has to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men. The social presence of women is developed as a result of their ingenuity in living under such tutelage within such a limited space. But this has been at the cost of a woman's self being split into two. A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. Whilst she is walking athwart a room or whilst she is weeping at the death of her kin, she can narrowly avoid envisaging herself walking or weeping. From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually...And so she comes to consider the *surveyor* and the *surveyed* within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman. She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another. (46)

The concept of the *surveyor* and the *surveyed* is a widely used one in travel and travel writing theory. Pioneer travel writing theorist, Mary Louise Pratt dwells on this for quite some time in her seminal book, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and*

Transculturation (1992). The traveler (mostly a male and in the Imperial era) acted as the surveyor who had come to ‘study’ the ‘natives’ who are the passive surveyed *objects*, as against the active surveying *subjects*. In this process the travelers often end/ed up writing about people and places as being their ‘discoveries’. The very act of looking has been traditionally attributed to males and that being looked at, to females. *Imperial Eyes* explains that by performing the very act of *looking*, the ‘Imperial Seeing Man’ desires, objectifies and possesses the object of his gaze. This attribute has been common to a male traveler/writer than a female.

Tamara L. Hunt suggests that travel texts do act as “subtle agents of imperialism” (*Women and Colonial Gaze 2*) through an unequal power relation between the active male gazing subject and a passive female object of look. It might be attributed to the fact that the female almost continually carries her image of herself wherever she goes which has been long bestowed upon her by the society. In this regard, Pratt’s comparison and contrast of two imperial books can be taken into consideration, one by a female traveler and the other a male. In his travel account, *Lake Regions of Central Africa*, Richard Burton seems to carry the tag of the “monarch-of-all-I-survey” (*Imperial Eyes* 197) very well by his tendency to ‘discover’ places. Pratt then moves on to contrast this typical masculine outlook to Mary Kingsley’s travel accounts where she is very often the ram of jokes rather than act as the conquering hero.

In talking about the female look/gaze, Sigmund Freud and his theory of Medusa plays a significant part. He opines, woman who ‘looks’ (see “Medusa’s Head” 273) at a man intimidates to immobilize him, casts a castration anxiety and divest him of his self-command, to render him almost virtually to paralyze him. The direct sight from Medusa or any women at that, evokes the dread of castration in the male spectator, a dread that turns him to stone. Freud’s reading of Medusa locates the spectator’s dismay in a reaction to the sight of the female genitals, not to the return of a woman’s look; but details related with Medusa entail that her gaze may be an even more significant feature of the horror she incites. Following H. J. Rose’s account of Medusa in *The Handbook of Greek Mythology* (1984), Teresa de Lauretis observes:

Medusa’s power to cast the spell which in many cultures is actually called ‘the evil eye,’ is directly represented in her horribly ‘staring eyes,’ which are a

constant feature of her figurative and literary representations; while the serpents in their hair are a variable attribute of all three Gorgons. (110)

In many cultures the power of the evil eye is warded off with a depiction of an eye that gazes back, performing the same apotropaic function of threatening the evil spirit that Freud attributes to the genitals of both men and women. Perhaps the sight that makes the Medusa intimidating to the male spectator may be understood as the display of someone else's look-the knowledge that the other sees and consequently resists being abridged to an appropriable object. Thus, Medusa, through her gaze, defies the male gaze as the culture has created it: as the benefit of a male subject, a means of consigning women (or 'Woman') to the category of object (of representation, discourse, desire, etc.). Such rebelliousness is certainly disconcerting, upsetting the pleasure the male subject takes in gazing and the hierarchical relations by which he avows his supremacy.

Stephen Heath, in "Difference" (1978), illustrates a reading of Jacques Lacan's seminars on the gaze revealing the connections between the returning female gaze and castration anxiety puts the two remarks simultaneously to elucidate the ambivalent function of the look/gaze in castration anxiety: "The scopic drive may elude the term of castration but the look returns the other, castration, the other-evil-eye" (88). In other words, the subject's pleasure in looking (without being seen) may adjourn his essential conflict with the "fact" of castration, because such uninterrupted looking returns the subject to the sense of wholeness connected with the scopophilic pleasures of the "mirror stage" (see *Ecrits* 75-81) that Lacan talks about. But the gazing back from the position of the 'other' dislocates that sense of wholeness. Heath calls attention to the implied gendering of the gaze in Lacan's discourse, where, he monitors, the woman is absent as the subject of the gaze except when she "sees herself seeing herself" (i.e., sees herself as the object of a gaze). The returned, disquieting look that brings castration back into the portrait is thus a woman's: "What then of the look for the woman, of woman subjects in seeing? The reply given by psychoanalysis is from the phallus. If the woman looks, the spectacle provokes, castration is in the air, the Medusa's head is not far off; thus, she must not look, is absorbed herself on the side of the seen" (92). Squarely, the elixir to the male gaze, and one concourse to women salvaging their own sexuality, is the female gaze.

Having said that, it becomes clear that the conventional, avant-garde, omnipresent and marginalized presence of the female body and its gaze come into an active participation in the larger landscape of the society through the act of traveling. In this regard, the African American women travelers provide ample scope to study this viewpoint.

The texts included in this chapter, when studied in reference to the theories discussed so far, states that African American women travelers have been denied the privilege of movement and the power of seeing that comes with it for a very long time. However, once they travel, and look at the world, they produce various patterns of gazes which define and narrate the world in as much credible way/s as a male traveler does. Moreover, gender does not relegate their scope of seeing only to the private/domestic space, instead, they see and understand politics, religion, geography, economy, science, etc. in a remarkably sensible/practical way; in the process dissolve the boundary between gender demarcated surveyor-surveyed theory. Nancy Prince is a free slave who gains a status and attains the power of *narrating* 'others' as she 'moves'. Movement, thus, has been a significant act in introducing Nancy Prince to the larger social world and demystifying women's travel narrative which has been, for long, considered the genre of novelists-manqués. However, as she moves and produces gaze/s, she becomes an alarm for the male-white-society. Nevertheless, braving all odds, she cuts across continents and gives us a rapid, alluring narrative informing not only about people but also about race, economy, religion, history and geography of places. Maya Angelou and Carolyn Vines are far removed in time from Nancy Prince, but they also must carve out spaces for themselves in a male dominated society. Their gaze paints naked truths about the history and present of America in its racial, social, cultural and political agendas. Both move out of America while on a journey into the self and gaze back at their 'home'. Maya Angelou gets an opportunity to look at her roots while in Africa and create meaning out of the rendezvous. The gendered female gaze, thus, produces and proliferate layers of meaning in a prudently convincing way.

After going through the theories so far, it is interesting to observe (i) the gaze of African American women travel writer in correspondence to the long denial of agency by the male gaze; (ii) the concepts of cultural difference that African

American women travel writers launch and discussing the way/s in which gender does, or does not, shape perceptions; (iii) the underlying analogous hurdles of color and gender that the African American women travel writers have to undergo in spite of being situated in different contexts in different periods and which produce diverse discursive frameworks; (iv) how the African American women traveler's gaze tries to negotiate the relations to commodities as a way of trying to locate the gender difference more materially; (v) the disappearance of the traditional roles ascribed to females relegating them to a marginalized classified realm and how the texts speak for the female author's much spirited, practical and sensible walk on the public forum; and (vi) how the texts not just linger as petitions for feminist rights, but go on to establish the female gaze and voice as much credible and strong agencies in themselves, with or without the feminist strain.

II

5.2.1 Nancy Prince's *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince* (1853)

Traveling was an unusual endeavor for African Americans in pre-civil war America, and it was even more so for 'black' women, even if they were born free, as was the case with Nancy Prince, who a free 'black' woman evangelist, born in Massachusetts in 1799. As we read into her narrative, we find to be an astonishingly courageous transatlantic and transnational traveler for her times, Prince can be considered as one of the early names in the creation of what Gilroy calls the "Black Atlantic" (see Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* 1). She is seen using the ocean as a means to reach self-determination and attain independence as she travels to Russia and Jamaica. However, her travels are also a medium of providing herself with some economic assistance (which is also a route to be free/independent) as when she declares, "My object is not a vain desire to appear before the public; but, by sale, I hope to obtain the means to supply my necessities...but I am desirous not to avail myself of them, so long as I can support myself by my own endeavors" (Preface). Prince aspires not just to be free, but self-reliant too.

All along the way, Prince's movement from a free maid servant to an evangelist reformer is achieved through a continuous set of negotiations that entail her alternately taxing but also espousal of specific race, class and gender norms, circumstances of mobility, and blueprints of religious authority that materialized both within and outside of the "Black Atlantic" (if we include Russia). Thus, her narrative is enlightening for its manifestation of how different places that she visits refashion each of the constituent part of Prince's individuality, and how these refashioning impact upon her associations with all the communities she comes across. Therefore, through textual contours of her unique travel narrative, the reader gets to see her various patterns of gazes through the tropes of religion, people, places, administration, etc., all mediated through her gender-oriented consciousness which negotiates between public and private—between racial and national identification.

5.2.1.1 People

During her early life in America as a free maid servant, she finds herself amidst people who are mostly either slave traders or thugs who lure 'blacks' into slavery, prostitution and such vices. Prince on her part, is raised by a mother and incapable to cope with the economic and emotional burden of raising eight children on her own, Prince must spend much of her youth working as a domestic servant in white households. She finds employment for her brother George and oldest sister Silvia several times in the narrative, and in one such endeavor she comes across a group of people who sell off her sister to a harlot house at Boston. As she comes in search of her sister, one Mr. Brown comes forward to help her in her endeavor, whose color, however, is not made explicit. She writes, "He found where my sister resided, and taking with him a large cane, he accompanied me to the house, on Sabbath evening. My sister I found seated with a number of others round fire" (14). There ensues a fight between Prince and "the mother of harlots" (14) but Mr. Brown defends the former with his cane. This good man and later his daughters, help Prince and her sister get away from the crisis. As they go to hire a coach, Mr. Low, the driver of the Gloucester stage, who knows Prince belonging to the same town, refuses to give them a ride. Prince writes, "He refused unless we would ride upon the top. It was very cold; I had sent my mother my wages the week before....We were embarrassed, when a colored man. Unknown to us, penetrated our difficulty" (15). In their crisis, Prince and her

sister are helped by an unknown man of color but rejected by the known white man. The man takes two dollars from Prince to bargain and arrange for a coach and of the two dollars, he returns half a cent to Prince to pay for their toll. She gratefully remembers, "Ten thousand thanks to our colored friend, and to our heavenly father...The man who let it to us was very humane, although a stranger...I often thought of the contrast between our townsman, Mr. Low, and the stranger who was so kind to us" (16). Living in such a state of affairs for many years, also getting baptized in between, she determines to make something consequential out of her life.

In 1822, she meets the 'black' sailor and travel, Nero Prince, and gets married to him in 1823. With the marriage, Nancy shifts to a new place, the Tzarist Russia and thus, it is with her association to a man of status that a revival in her own status as a 'black' woman materialize. Moreover, it is with the marriage that she travels and goes out to see the 'other', thereby transgressing a major bar that the colonial travel narratives of the times had. Mr. Prince works as a court hand in the Russian court, and Prince notices that this court accommodates twenty other such colored people. She says, "They serve in turns, four at a time, except on some great occasions, when all are employed. Provision is made for the families within or without the palace" (23). For the first time in life, the 'black' woman is being served by a white populace. Her surprise and happiness knows no bounds.

The 'blacks' are not segregated away even from the royal family. Prince gets to see and know the Emperor and the Empress at first hand. Talking of the Empress, she remarks:

She carries power and dignity in her countenance, and is well adapted to her station. And after her late amusements a night, she would be out at an early hour in the morning, visiting the abodes of the distressed, dressed in as common apparel as anyone here....Then she would go to the cabinet of his Majesty; there she would write and advise with him. (35)

The Empress, thus, is a symbol of female power and dignity to Prince. She learns that the color white is not always related to the subjugation of poor, but also to their upliftment, a fact that the Prince, while working as a maid in the houses of American whites, never discern. In fact, the Empress takes special note of the family of the court hands. She personally encourages Prince in her business of baby linen making and

children's garments. Very fondly does Prince writes, "The present Empress is a very active one, and inquired of me respecting my business, and gave me much encouragement by purchasing of me garments for herself and children" (39). This leads to an enhancement in Prince's fortunes as many royal ladies follow the Empress's steps. After a brief but satisfying stay in Russia, Prince, because her ill health, returns to America for some time. In the meantime, Mr. Prince dies, and Prince's return amongst the amicable Russians is out of her way.

In the year 1840, she is bound to Jamaica as a part of a missionary assignment. She observes that the colored people in Jamaica "are not the stupid set of beings they have been called; here surely we see industry; they are enterprising and quick in their perceptions, determined to possess themselves, and to possess property besides, and quite able to take care of themselves" (50). They are an inquisitive lot who are eager to know the reason behind the special interest that she shows towards them. She informs them about the general views regarding them in America and that her mission to do away with it, "We had heard in America that you are lazy, and that emancipation has been of no benefit to you; I wish to inform myself of the truth respecting you, and give a true account on my return" (50). The colored people are pleased with her and "gather" (50) around her, but the Jews and the Spanish look at her "very black" (50). Nevertheless, as a female 'black' missionary, she stands out bright in Jamaica, for she looks at the people with a motherly affection and does not fail to remember her own days of drudgery in America. Her gaze falls on many "young women and children, living in sin of every kind" (50-51). An interesting observation is that in the jail she sees seventeen men, but no female, indicating the state of affairs in the crime scene of the state; it seems gendered, in that women indulge in no vices, but men do.

After a long missionary enterprise in Jamaica, Prince returns to America in 1842. Enroute she has a disastrous sail for being overpowered by powerful gales, and the sordid segregation between 'black' and white even in such dire times, she is happy to set feet on land. Almost famished, she writes:

I went at once to those who professed to be friends, but found myself mistaken. I hardly knew what was best. I had put up at Mrs. Rawes'; she did

all she could to raise the twenty-five dollars that I must pay before I could take my baggage from the vessel...Mr. Nath'l Southard left his business at once, and took me to Mr. Lewis Tappan, and others; he raised the money, and went with me to the ship after my baggage. (81-82)

She is thus, helped by her “kind friends” (82) (color not specified) and did not leave her until the lady is safely lodged at the residence. She takes a room and starts sewing, the business she starts in Russia, and people are “very kind” (82) towards the ‘black’ female trying to make a life of her own.

5.2.1.2 Place

In her search for a Utopia, where she can reconstruct a meaningful agency for herself while providing a helping hand to the “wretched of the earth” (see Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* 1), Prince moves from America to Russia and Jamaica. In her travels, thus, she displays herself as a practical and bold woman in unknown places which serve as an ‘other’ to her. In the process, she reverses the oft linked image of *to-be-looked-atness* in relation to a woman’s body.

Throughout her stay in America as a domestic help, even though she does not engage in elaborate descriptions of places, it is cryptically painted as a dark and dismal dungeon for the ‘black’ bodies. In her hurried narrative style, it is seen that Prince is ever moving on a look out for a safe, enterprising and firm station for herself, so that she can provide for her family as well. Finally, in 1822, she determines “to do something” (20) for herself, learns a trade and decides to leave the American space. She is, perhaps, in search of societies in which women are not dependent on men for their economic well-being. She finally marries Nero Prince and leaves for Russia.

When she arrives in Saint Petersburg in 1824, she is taken care of “with no prejudice” (23), which is a shocking experience, given the harsh realities for African Americans in the United States at the time, and more so for ‘black’ women. Prince finds it to be a place of equality, irrespective of color and gender. It is a place where she is presented with a “watch & c.” (23) by the Emperor and Empress herself, and where the Empress carries “power and dignity” (35) and “advices” (35) the cabinet of ministers along

with the Emperor. She writes, in the court “there was no prejudice against color; there were all casts, and the people of all nations, each in their place” (24). In her reading of Prince’s narrative, Jennifer Bernhardt Steadman locates that “[Prince’s] journeys abroad, first to St. Petersburg, Russia, and twice to post-Emancipation Jamaica, are made in search of the safe domestic space that she cannot find in the racist northeastern United States” (*Traveling economies* 34). Russia provides a welcome change to Prince.

In choosing events from her life for the narrative, Prince, it seems, carefully and wisely decides on the ones which showcase her relentless and tough self, a garb uncommon for women to wear in her times, and for a ‘black’ woman at that, is almost out of proportions. She talks of the great St. Petersburg flood of 1824. A disastrous wrath of god, it destroys many lives and roughly kills the normal life of the city for many days. She recollects, “My situation was the more painful, being alone and not able to speak” (27). She is alone at her residence, unable to speak the language, while Mr. Prince is stuck in the Palace. She describes:

I made my way through a long yard, over the bodies of men and beasts, and when opposite their gate I sunk; I made one grasp, and the earth gave away; I grasped again, and fortunately got hold of the leg of a horse, that had been drowned...I was knocked down by the striking of a boat...lost my lantern...at last found the door that I aimed at. My family were safe and they accompanied me home. (27)

Thus, Prince’s sojourn in Russia is not just a search for a safe place for herself, but to create one. And the city/country reciprocates.

St. Petersburg also turns Prince into a business woman. In her economic independence, she becomes the emblem of power and freedom for the all the ‘black’ women. In her endeavor as an entrepreneur, the Empress proves very supportive. She writes, “The present Empress is a very active one, and inquired of me respecting my business, and gave me much encouragement by purchasing of me garments for herself and children” (39). Her trade blossoms and she even appoints “a journeywoman and apprentices” (39). Although her tailoring and boarding children at home still linger within the bounds of conventional feminine activities, the “public” temperament of these activities provides a remarkable contrast to the prevalent gender stereotypes of

women's place in the home, and Russia provides this space for merging of the private and public domains.

In 1833, the climate affects her lungs and the physicians advise her not to remain in Russia. She returns to America with an arrangement of Mr. Prince to follow her, however, he succumbs to his own ill health soon after Prince's departure.

Back in Boston, she sees fellow 'black's in utter destitute, conditions, she says, "were similar to my own" (41). Her female heart melts in pain as she sees many "poor little orphan destitute and afflicted, and on account of color shut out from all the asylums for poor children" (41). And thus, she proposes to her friends to raise a shelter for these wretched souls which might save them from the "contaminating evils that beset their path" (41). She does not approve of the many "women societies" (47) that she sees in America, which she thinks "destroy the world's convention" (47) and serve more as a "play house" (47). Prince could be an early humanitarian, and just a 'feminist' asserting her rights as a female.

With her reforming zeal and the missionary patent that she receives, she visits Jamaica. She finds it a progressive place where colored women earn their living. In the market of Jamaica, for instance, she writes, "I called, on my return, at the market, and counted the different stalls. For vegetables and poultry 196, all numbered and under cover; beside 70 on the ground; these are all attended by colored women" (49). Besides, there are also many stalls for fresh fish, pork and turtle, which are kept by "colored men and women" (49) alike.

Similarly, Prince finds a woman, Madam Mico, having left all her fortune for the instruction and benefit of the "colored people in the British Isles" (52) and ransom the English who were in bondage to Algerines. The Mico Institution stands big at the Jamaican social scenario.

Around 1841, several colored "Maroons" (59), who were banished from the island, arrived in Jamaica. In the meantime, Prince has been planning on establishing a Manual Labor school. However, the general excitement and confusion makes her uncomfortable, and the government proves a failure to provide any stability to her and the society either. Thus, she plans to return to America, but is somehow forced to

remain and experiment the school for three months. The coloreds consider her a woman of means and thus, follow her money more than her aim. Necessity and lack breeds evil, so the people plan on robbing her off all her belongings. Suddenly, Jamaica becomes a threat for her to the extent that she must remain undercover and comes “very near being shot” (63). Having taken refuge for a while in the Mico Institution for safety, she leaves for New York shortly afterwards.

For an uneducated woman of her times, she gives apt details about the geography of the West Indies. In her words, West Indies “is comprehended a large chain of islands, extending in a curve from the Florida shore on the northern peninsula of America, to the Gulf of Venezuela on the southern....The most considerable and valuable of the British West India Islands, lies between the 75th and the 79th degrees of west longitude from London, and between 17 and 18 north latitude” (64-65). She vividly describes the weather, temperature, climate, production of a place situated around the “tropic of cancer” (64). Like colonial travelers who have successfully charted the globe in their travel accounts, Prince also looks at places with a scientific gaze providing much information to her readers.

5.2.1.3 Religion/Rituals

When it comes to religion, she gives elaborate details about “This our professed Christian Land” (Introduction). Nancy Prince’s grandfather was a staunch member of the Congregational Church, and “a good man” (11) and Prince discovers early on an affinity for religion. He attended to his children and grandchildren and offered them lessons of virtues. Prince recollects, “He thought it was wrong for us to go to school where the teacher was not devoted to God. Thus, I early knew the difference between right and wrong” (11). The right and wrong, however, initiated on spiritualistically moral grounds.

As a domestic servant, at Salem, she considers it herself “fortunate to be with religious people” (11). She expects happy hours of “religious instruction” (11) besides a righteous working environment. However, the Christian family offers her with “severe” (11) workload, especially the washings and occasionally complain about her being “too slow” (11). She is hardly spoken to in kindness. It is beyond measure for

the fourteen-year-old girl's physic and mind, and thus, she says, "Hard labor and unkindness was too much for me; in three months, my health and strength were gone. I often looked at my employers, and thought to myself, is this your religion?" (11). Eventually, she learns that the girl who stayed at this household before her "went home to die" (12) due to rigorous working condition. Prince exclaims, "They had family prayers, morning and evening. Oh! Yes, they were sanctimonious!" (12). Prince appropriately provides a ironical picture of a 'Christian' family.

Prince leaves her mother's place at the age of eight to work to support herself and her family. However, America provides her with nothing but hopelessness. She writes, "Care after care oppressed me-my mother wandered about like a Jew-the young children who were in families were dissatisfied; all hope but in God was lost" (17). Finally, at the age of 20, she decides to surrender herself wholly to the Savior and put her entire trust in him. On May 6th, 1819, the Rev. Thomas Paul, baptizes her, and she becomes a 'true' Christian.

She marries Mr. Prince in 1824 and leaves for Russia. Enroute to Russia, they halt at Copenhagen for twelve days. The principal religion is Lutheran and Calvinistic, "but all persuasions are tolerated" (21). She finds the Danes and English to be "religious" (21) lot of people who are "attentive to strangers" (21). She is pleased to see that the "Sabbath is very strictly observed" (21). However, she notices an interesting aspect about the "religious" Danes that "like all other nations, they know how to take advantage" (21). Religion somehow gets misused and degenerated at the hands of people in every society.

They reach St. Petersburg and initially take lodging with Mrs. Robinson, who is a native of Prince's country. Prince spends six weeks with the family, wherein she attends two parties. She writes, "There were various amusements in which I did not partake, which caused them much disappointment. I told them my religion did not allow of dancing or dice playing" (22). She finds those people "very strict" (22) in their religious orientation too, who try hard to indulge Prince in their amusements, a part of their belief/way of life, but Prince manages to "preserve" (22) her own religious stand. It is a land where she finds that during the great inundation "the righteous were punished, while evil practices were forbidden, for there the sin of

licentiousness is very common” (40). Prince seems to condemn the ‘immoral’ activities of these strict religious set of people.

Prince describes at length the way common people bury their dead. Generally, the first of August is a “great holiday” (24) when people come to the graveyard to pay respect to the departed souls, and in doing so they “drink and feast on the grave stones” (24). However, at a funeral, only those who are invited may attend the ceremony. She says, “After the friends arrive, a dish of rice, boiled hard, with raisins, is handed round; all are to take a spoonful, with the same spoon, and out of the same dish...The lid is not put on the coffin, the corpse being laid out in his or her best dress” (24). The women who attend the ceremony displays the “most dreadful appearance” (25) to Prince having come “dressed as if they are going to a ball room” (25). Amongst them too the rice bowl is passed and they too have it in the same manner. Then the lid is put on the coffin and procession takes it to the graveyard. As the coffin is lowered, “thence commence the yells; they drink, eat cake, ‘black’ bread, and finish their rice, when the party return back to dinner where everything is prepared during their absence” (25). Prince finds out that this unusual method of burying is called the “Greek mode” (25). She further finds out that if a newborn child dies without being baptized then it is buried separately, but if it dies after being baptized (which is done immediately after birth and the child is kept undressed till it is done) then, “although not more than two hours old, it is dressed and placed on the bench at the church with the seat” (25). Prince is amused to see these rituals which, however, she tries hard to grasp.

In a peculiar ceremony when an imperial member dies, “they are laid in state forty days” (26). A great building is constructed for their rest and criminals who revolted against them are put in prison cells opposite to the resting place, “thus combining the prison and the tomb” (26). As the masses walk by, the “miserable creatures (prisoners) are exposed to the careless gaze of unfeeling observers” (26). Prince finds it an inhuman a practice.

Prince talks of the various battles being fought between Russia and Turkey, Austria, Poland, etc. As a woman of religion, she considers it a sin. And thus, when the great cholera spreads in Russia, Austria, Madagascar and various places, she sees it as a plague “that God sent among the people...God often visits nations, families, and

persons, with judgments as well as mercies” (34). At one point, she writes, “The sins of my beloved country are not hid from his (God) notice” (43) and thus, she universalizes the justice of God and extends it to the white world in America too, a world that the Prince had to leave. While she is a professed Christian woman, she is incisively critical of the moral shortcomings of the white Christian world.

Her aim in coming to Jamaica is to nurture its Children like a mother into the blessings of God. She says, “I hoped that I might aid, in some small degree, to raise up and encourage the emancipated inhabitants, and teach young children to read and work, to fear God, and put trust in the Savior” (45). She is “sorry to see people blinded” (46) heavily, and thus resolves to spread light. And in doing this, her prime motive remains “elevation of the children” (47). However, in her endeavor, being a female, and mostly unprotected, she has to face threats from locals (who are blinded and mostly in pursuit of her money), people who are “full of deceit and lies” (62), and lack of cooperation from the white authorities (male).

Nevertheless, as her narrative suggests, blessed by the Holy Spirit, she prevails over the worldly worries and obstacle that beset her path. For a lonely woman on a crusade, she believes, it is the Lord who walks by her. She says, “God, who in his providence preserved me in perils by land, and perils by sea” (83). With a deep conviction, she completes her journey, “God speaks very loud, and while his judgments are on the earth, may the inhabitants learn righteousness!” (67). She has a deep conviction in God and believes in his merciful providence.

On her final journey to America, her ship is overhauled by strong gales. Having seated on a “trunk for thirty-six hour” with her “feet pressed against a barrel to prevent falling” (76), Prince categorically defies the conventional definitive roles assigned to females, and ‘black’ women at that have been far too long marginalized and relegated to the domestic space of immobile, silent servility. Prince formulates her own means of self-assertion. In her own words, “The myopic sight of the darkened eye can only be restored when the full range of the black woman’s voice, with its own special timbres and shadings, remains mute no longer” (xiv). Rather than instituting sentimentalism, Prince resists literary modes that pathologize ‘black’ women as

victims. Her narrative sanctions self-reliance and depicts African American women as figures of agency and accomplishment.

5.2.2 Maya Angelou's *All God's Children Needs Traveling Shoes* (1986)

Maya Angelou, we can state, aptly characterizes a strong female, someone who is seen to stand up not only for her own personal beliefs, but also for the beliefs of others, which have been, for long, predisposed by racial and gender boundaries, and lack of rights and inequalities alike. Born in a heavily racist America, she personally runs into with the evil of racism several times as when she is refused to be attended by a white dentist, analogous to the experience of 'black' narrator in Wole Soyinka's "Telephone Conversation" (1963) who has to get into an unpleasant conversation with a white landlady and describe himself and his color at length to rent a place. At the age of eight, she is raped by her mother's boyfriend, who was later killed by her uncles. Traumatized by the turn of events, she fell silent for years. In her travels and writings that trail her troubled years, we see her coming out not just as a female, but an African American female, who must have had the necessity to seek the knowledge to discover and determine her inner self, where matters such as gender, sex, race, culture, domestic upbringing etc. all are interconnected in the development. In the process, she yields a strong 'oppositional gaze' at the world which had, for long, been enterprised on what is known as the male 'scophophilia'. The African American feminist-marginalized experience has been envisaged in many of the postmodern works, but how it is transported, corresponded and affirmed are questions to be answered in detail. A study into Angelou's person, her views and convictions through *Travelling Shoes* is an attempt at answering these questions.

Angelou's journey to Africa, is her quest to don travelling shoes that will help her to search out a place to call home, a place where she will carve out a place for herself negotiating the feminine spaces of two worlds, the new America, and the 'tribal' Africa. In her words, "We had come home, and if home was not what we had expected, never mind, our need for belonging allowed us to ignore the obvious and to create real places or even illusory places, befitting our imagination" (18). Considering that she must be an active traveler, a person seizing the day for "new chances, for new beginnings," (Angelou, "On the Pulse of Morning" 1993), she boldly sets out for

Ghana. She commences on the journey fearlessly, not “yoked eternally” (“On the Pulse of Morning”) to any kind of brutishness that might discourage her. *Traveling Shoes* shows us how Angelou, endowed with incisive psychological and spiritual impending, seems to have journeyed from disillusioned self to an enlightened one and appeals to the modernist susceptibility longing for the perseverance of her nativism in African roots and dealing with the implied cultural, gender and social differences, ironies and paradoxes.

Before setting out on a systematic analysis of her gendered gaze at Africa and America, I would like to point out two major story lines that emerge out of the text. The first major story found in *Travelling Shoes*, which is an underpinning throughout, and one that most critics overlook, is Angelou’s love for her son. The volume begins with a replication of Guy’s car accident, the event that concluded *The Heart of a Woman* (1981). In *Travelling Shoes*, Guy recovers from his injuries and carries on to mature. A student at the University of Ghana, he seeks independence from his mother as he attempts to delineate his own separate goals. The second major story is Angelou’s investigation of her African and African American identities which framed and reframed as her American consciousness and encounters in Africa collide. She explores this conflict as a part of her growing up in America being a ‘black’ and more so being a woman.

She also examines it as it exists for the American expatriates living in Accra as well as for the groups of people—Bambara, Keta, Ahanta – who still adhere to the traditions of their ancestors. As *Travelling Shoes* ends, these issues are resolute when Angelou decides to go back to the ways and culture of America. Encircled by friends at the Accra airport, she leaves Guy in Africa to conclude his education. At the same time, she nearly abandons her newly clinched alliance with Mother Africa, claiming she is “not sad” (227) to be leaving Ghana. Throughout the narrative, she focuses on her son, whose growth into manhood had been explained alongside her own growth as a mother into self-recognition. She returns to the United States with a wholly comprehended identity as a ‘black’ American Woman.

Travelling Shoes is also noteworthy in what it records of W.E.B. DuBois, Shirley Graham, Malcolm X, besides African people, landscape etc. in general, for what it

unveils about Angelou's growing confrontation with her double consciousness, i.e., her American and African Selves. Talking about formation and growth of Angelou's dual selves, during her formative years, she is influenced in growing up by strong female presence around. One of the 'black' female figures that influences Angelou's development is her mother Vivian Baxter, who plays a critical role in her course of subject formation. Two other vital formative presences collaborate with Vivian to influence young Angelou's becoming, Grand-mother Annie Henderson and Mrs. Bertha Flowers. During the historical moment in which Angelou grows up, these women also seem to symbolize three images of 'black' female identity which the young Angelou must parley during her own subject formation. Angelou, the adult travel writer reveals uses these images and the identities they describe as constructs, however disrupting them to disintegrate the dualistic portrayals of 'black' women as embodied in the age-old images of only the Matriarch and the Jezebel. Out of the ruins of dismantled images and identities, binaries and oppositional edifices, Angelou's travel narratives open a discursive breathing space of political resistance and personal potential occurring from an organic, ever rising, hybridized subjectivity.

As Angelou looks around and attempts to define herself and her preconceptions of Africa as Motherland, she is forced to deal with her perceptions, as well as those of others, thus gaining insight into herself and her compatriots. Steadily she becomes aware of the confinement of those perceptions, thereby realizing that Africa provides escapes but not a full deliverance. As personal travel memoir, *Travelling Shoes* is noteworthy in what point of views it harnesses about W.E.B. DuBois, Shirley Graham, Malcolm X, besides African people, landscape etc. in general, for what it unveils about Angelou's growing confrontation with her double consciousness, i.e., her American and African Selves, especially in her gendered self.

5.2.2.1 People

As Maya Angelou settles in Africa and brings her son, Guy, to get admitted in the University of Ghana, we find her getting entwined in a massive misfortune with Guy's nearly fatal accident. This brings to us the first impression of Africans that the American mother carries. Used to the American refined and advanced world of services, she is skeptical of African doctors and their medical sophistry. However, her

role as a mother brings in much of the apprehension that she showcases. A mother's greatest fear is child's death. Angelou universalizes this fear in *Travelling Shoes*. She wonders, "We were black Americans in West Africa...there was no solace in knowing that the doctors and nurses hovering around were African" (1). Besides, her deep suffering over Guy's injury sets both the tone for this pensive travel narrative and greatly reinforces the strength of her character and the 'gendered' but strong gaze that emanates. As it is seen, to cope with her fear as a mother, she goes out and strengthens her ties with mother Africa by mixing and befriending her children.

Meanwhile, when in Africa, color is the first thing that is noticeable flashing across Angelou's American, but 'black' eyes while seeing people. She observes, "Their skins were the colors of my childhood cravings: peanut butter, licorice, chocolate and caramel" (20). She finds a replica of her childhood cravings (very feminine) in the skin tone of the Africans, which, she does not possess herself. She also notices that "theirs was the laughter of home, quick and without artifice" (20) while their talk sounds to her like "a melody as familiar as sweet potato pie" (20). As a 'black' women growing up in America, amidst tough racial environment and a traumatic childhood, and going literally inarticulate for years after being violated by a man, a natural laughter and animated talk are things surely much venerated by her. All this makes her feel as if she has finally "come home" (20) amidst her *own* people.

When she and other 'black' Americans arrive in Accra airport, contrary to what was expected, their arrival has "little impact" (20) on the Ghanaians. The African people did not take much notice of them to just about dismantle the romantic notion of *home coming* and the 'black' Americans on their turn have "little tolerance for understanding being ignored" (22). Angelou writes, "We ogled the Ghanaians and few of them even noticed. The newcomers hid disappointment in quick repartee, in jokes and clenched jaws" (20). The Ghanaians are rather busy celebrating and displaying their newfound five-year-old independence by "adorning their flag" (20) and supporting and encouraging their president.

Nevertheless, the American 'blacks' merge in. Angelou, as we see, tries it hard to fit in by observing and embracing the feminine styles, hair and dress in particular. She depicts the popular movement of the 1960s in which 'blacks' in America attempts at

identification with the Pan African Movement and with West African hair styles, clothing, language, music and other manifestations of African culture. She says, “I wanted my hair fixed Ghanaian fashion and didn’t want to spend time in a hot beauty shop. I made an appointment for a home visitor” (39). In this revealing episode, Angelou is at first horror-struck when her beautician, comfort Adday, styles her hair into ugly strands like the “pickaninnies” (40) in old photos. The beautician, apparently amused, goes on to reshape, tighten, and cut Angelou’s hair so that by the end of the sitting her customer looks just like a Ghanaian woman. Assimilation with a particular set of people is not just about some cosmetic or beautification surgery, and Angelou feels, “For some unknown reason the beautician had chosen to teach me a lesson on the foolishness of trying to ‘go native’” (40). This woman also gives her an initial impression about what it is to be a woman in African culture. On coming to know that Angelou has one child, the beautician seems disappointed as she says, “one child is no child” (40). To this, Angelou could not respond. The beautician, who is also a stenographer, even goes on to say that she does not engage in much physical labor, but makes her fingers do the works, for she says, “I have to save myself for later. For children. Then when I get ready, for a husband” (40). Angelou keeps silent.

Nevertheless, after all the talk and cut, comfort Adday says that since Angelou gave her so many reasons to laugh throughout the sitting that she might as well not charge her. However, Angelou has, by now, very well captured the vein that runs across in Africa about her women. When it comes to finances, Ghanaian women are very practical and calculative. In just six months she learns that “Ghanaian women might take in orphans, give generously to the poor, and feed every person when came to their houses...allow their men certain sexual freedom” (41), but in money matters she knows “Ghana women no play, oh” (41), a dictum that has been thrown to her “hundreds of times” (41). Angelou pays, and it is, but received whole-heartedly.

The social position and dispensation of women in Africa becomes further lucid to Angelou’s American consciousness when she comes across Sheikhal, the most romantically depicted men in *Traveling shoes*. He imports thoroughbred horses and largest quantity of beef to Ghana. As she sits in a restaurant at Accra, she is approached by one called Mamali, who ushers in a dinner invitation for that night on behalf of Sheikhal, who is seated on another table; both complete strangers to

Angelou. She is very briskly asked her name and marital status. Quickly follows the invitation. A divorced, lonely Angelou, trying to cope with and merge into Africa, accepts the invitation. However, being a woman makes her vulnerable at this juncture and thus, she is bent on making Shekhali meet her apartment friends. She says, “It was most important that Shekhali see my friends and understand that they were intelligent, worldly Americans who could call out the American Army to rescue me” (70). Finally, her rendezvous with Shekhali starts. Angelou is not always so discouraging when drawn by African men. Recollecting her loving portrayals of dancing partner R.L. Poole in *Gather Together in My Name* (1974) and of Fiance Thomas Allen and Allen’s rival Vus Make, in *The Heart of a Woman*, it is perceptible that she has enjoyed her physical closeness with ‘black’ men.

Shekhali picks up Angelou from her apartment and they head towards a restaurant. She describes him as “sublimely handsome” (74), very tall, with dark skin and elegant robes. Angelou has fallen prey to his straight charms and the manly quality that he attains in his childhood as he relates the story of his tough youth. The female gaze falls hard at him and ponders, “it was that balance of maleness and manliness which intrigued me. I had long known that there were worlds of difference between males and men as there were between females and women. Genitalia indicated sex, but work, discipline, courage and love were needed for the creation of men and women” (74). In a bid to know Angelou, the first query he makes is about children. He asks, “don’t you want children? You must not wait long, for a woman can live without a husband, but everyone must have at least one child” (73). Shekhali reiterates a point that Comfort Adday has already mentioned to Angelou, the issue of children. For Africans, children hold a very special place in the domestic and social stratum. And the more children a woman has, the more reverential social standing she has. However, the American lady has a child and is contented. Nevertheless, after the meal, she consents to go to his apartment and soon after that Shekhali proposes marriage, but there is a hitch. As is routine among Muslim men in West Africa, he, by now, has eight children from two women, and only one of them is his wife. He wants Maya to be his second wife, “I will build you a beautiful house and you will be happy...you and my wife will have no more babies. You are kind and educated. My wife is also kind, but she is like me, she has no education. My family will accept you” (78). He expects her to learn his language, and teach his children proper French and

English, in short acting like a legally married tutor. She laughs but politely denies. She recollects, “My emotions, raised on the romance of Hollywood films, might have faltered had he pleaded love, but his offer had the crispness of a business negotiation” (78). She says that her upbringing had not been one in which she was taught any kind of “pretended reticence” (76) and thus, she could not “sit with easy hands and an impassive face” (76) and watch her future planned. She also disappoints the characteristic African male by refusing and returning his gift of a refrigerator and denying accepting monetary assistance in paying her rent. She writes, “When I explained that I was a woman used to working and paying my own bills, he stared at me in a questioning silence” (77). He simply wants her to adapt to the marriage customs of Mali and reject her “white woman way” (105) of being impatient and almost turn into an African traditional lady. He tells her that it is because of him that she will be respected which entails that in Africa she is not an American, but just a woman, and a ‘black’ at that.

On another occasion, Grace Nuamah, a well-known Ghanaian dancer and colleague of Angelou, takes her to one Abatanu’s house, another African male that she describes at length. She finds that “his suaveness was too practiced and his sophistication too professional” (101). It seems, in a bid to impress the American woman, his moves become too starched, in fact, as she says, “The man’s manner so put me off that I answered politely, but directly” (101). He turns out to be an anti-thesis of the romantic, but natural Shekhali to Angelou’s eyes. The meeting and the lunch ended amid awkward silences, and Angelou turns Grace and asks her the reason for the staging of the episode, which unfolds into another amusing yarn.

Few weeks prior to this episode, Grace had lost her salary envelope which led to almost a communal mourning for a couple of days at the Institute. For, as we have already seen that for Ghanaian women, money is no play. This envelop is incidentally found by Angelou in her cabin, and returning which meant her becoming almost a revered personality. She instantly becomes the most loved *sister* around. As for Angelou, the woman trying to get a hold in Africa, this is a strong point earned. Grace is now willing to pay her back in a sumptuous way and ends up finding a match for her. For African women, it seems, being in a marriage is the very conditioning of life in which she grows up and Grace could but end up engaging in a match-making

extravaganza, to which the American woman could not but bring disappointment and Grace ends up saying, “An African woman would have appreciated the gift and accepted it” (102). This situation offers a very palpable difference between the illustration of an African women and an American ‘black’ woman. Grace ends thus, “Sister, I knew Americans were different, but” (102). Marriage is not on Angelou’s mind as an end in itself.

Assimilation amongst the African people becomes a not-so-smooth sail for Angelou, especially in the towns or cities. However, in the plain, sinuous village life, she gets the first touch of being close to ‘home’. While at Dunkwa, the gold-mining village, she says, “My skin color, features and the Ghana cloth I wore made me look like any young Ghanaian woman. I could pass if I didn’t talk too much” (109). To one villager she declares that she is a stranger and wants lodging for the night, which not many could apprehend. It is because “to many Africans only whites could be strangers. All Africans belonged somewhere, to some clan” (110). There is a deep sense of clanship amongst the Africans across the world.

Angelou also belongs to some tribe, but ties to which have been long torn and lost. She informs that she is not from the village, thus a stranger. To this the villager’s reaction terrified Angelou, “For a second fear darted in her eyes. There was the possibility that I was a witch or some unhappy ghost from the country of the dead” (110). Angelou quickly announces that she is from Accra. The villager immediately takes her around in the village and shouts, “Look what I have found. One Nkran has no place to sleep tonight” (111) and as if the whole tribe comes forward to offer her a resting place and know her, only to claim her as one of them eventually.

Angelou remarks, “For the first time since my arrival, I was very nearly home. Not a Ghanaian, but at least accepted as an African. The sensation was worth a lie” (113). She is taken in as a *sister* or a *daughter* and every effort is made not to make her feel a stranger anymore. The next morning, she is taken to a bath house where about twenty women bathed together in a walled enclosure. There she is introduced thus, “This is our Bambara sister” (115). Sisterhood finds cohesion in the rawest of ambiances. However, here the matter of children spirals up again and the women are disappointed at knowing that Angelou bears just one child. She quickly joins in, “One, but I’m

trying” (115) to which the women laugh and shout in unison, “Try hard, sister. Keep trying” (115). Motherhood and children are two most important aspects about Africa that Angelou finds out. On one occasion an African tells her, “Africa is herself a mother. The mother of mankind. We Africans take motherhood as the most sacred condition human beings can achieve” (124). Thus, it seems that the more children a woman has, the more motherly or sacred she is. In such a milieu, Angelou’s stature as a mother is definitely myopic.

Dissimilar as she might be, but most of Angelou’s encounters with African women and men are positive ones that add up to her growing intoxication with Africa as she tries to discover her own heritage. At a village called Keta, she almost comes across her roots. When introduced to the sister of Angelou’s guide, the lady could not but think that Angelou is one of them. Angelou ends up showing her American driving license to prove her American nationality. The woman suddenly dons a melancholic garb, lifts both her arms together, clasps her fingers and puts them on top of her head. Angelou remembers, “when I was a child, if my brother or I put our hands on our heads as the woman before me was doing, my grandmother would stop in her work and come to remove our hands and warn us that the gesture brought bad luck” (223). Angelou could trace vestiges Africa in the memories of her childhood.

Some things, thus, never end; they travel in the memory of the culture over lands and seas. Nevertheless, the melancholic gesture of the women brings in the context of slavery and how daughters like Angelou (and sons too) were filched away mercilessly. The community feeling and the iron grip of clanship in the tribal Africa is so strong that these women end up crying for Angelou, a long-lost *sister*. One of them says, “And you, Sister, you look so much like them, even the tone of your voice is like theirs. They are sure you are descended from those stolen mothers and fathers. That is why they mourn. Not for you but for their lost people” (225). Angelou on the other hand, notices, “she had the wide face and slanted eyes of my grandmother. Her lips were large and beautifully shaped like my grandmother’s, and her cheek bones were high like those of my grandmother” (222). And thus, a sadness descends upon her, “simultaneously somber and wonderful” (225) recognizing the fact that “the middle passage and the auction block had not erased us” (225). Angelou looks at these

people, and finds a sense of belonging in their eyes, belonging not just to one race or place, but to Africa, the mother Africa.

In this episode, another facet of African women comes out. The women in the villages are much more independent and into trade and entrepreneurship than women in the towns. The Keta market has stalls, majority of which are owned by female sellers. She observes female vendors, “leaned over the shelf where tomatoes, onions, and peppers were arranged in an artistic display” (223). At the ‘universal’ level, her characterization of women in every way is a kind of self-representation on the part of a sensitive woman, as one brought up by strong and impacting mother figures in her grandmother and mother.

Looking at Ghana’s politics, as a woman, she has her own strong and independent views about giants like Nkrumah, DuBois and Malcolm X. However, one small mention of women in politics do comes across which shows Africa making huge strides at this front. She notices, “Ghana was flourishing. The National Council of Ghana Women, which included representatives of all the clans, was beginning to prove that centuries-old tribal mistrust could be erased with intelligence and determination” (85). This leads us to have a look at the perspective of Angelou at three most important ‘black’ national-political figures who help create the Pan-African movement.

Angelou is able to find an American commune in Ghana where she can articulate her shifting impressions of the country and of her place in it. The small group of African American Expatriates, the Revolutionist Returnees, recognizes her struggles – the contradictory feelings of being ‘home’ yet concurrently being ‘home-less’, cut off from America without concrete roots in their espoused ‘black’ nation. Of her assorted friendships with the African Americans, she is closest to author and journalist Julian Mayfield. Like Angelou, Mayfield and his wife, Ana Livia, are well-known with a movement that would facilitate future African Americans to live yet again on African soil. Angelou is also a friend of the revered American writer, W.E.B. DuBois, who has been invited to come over to Africa as a part of the returnee movement in rebuilding Africa. She and the rest of her African American friends wants DuBois to “live forever” (133) whom they see as the first ‘black’ intellectual. With DuBois as an

accessible model, Angelou regenerates her own leadership qualities, which were at their pinnacle when she had been Northern coordinator of Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference, but which had reasonably shrunk due to Guy's near fatal accident and her commitment to Vus Make.

Angelou looks at DuBois's wife with a resentful eye, comparing her to Africa's tallest mountain, Kilimanjaro. She calls Shirley Graham DuBois to be an "elusive as smoke in a high wind" (151). To her, a person who is addressed as "little mother" (151) by Kwame Nkrumah, could have easily arranged for the much-required meeting between Malcolm X and Nkrumah at Ghana. Angelou thus, extends her gaze at Mrs. DuBois, but keeps her thoughts to herself.

Geographically far from America and disillusioned by Dr. King's nonviolent strategies, she says, "I became more resolute in rejecting nonviolence and more adamant in denying Martin Luther King" (134). Angelou nonetheless makes a commitment to his 1963 march on Washington showcasing her shifting perspective from *I* to *we* while in Africa. Regardless of her own controlled partaking in the protest, Angelou renews her feeble bonds with King, an obligation that helps prepare her psychologically for her later adherence to Malcolm X, so flamboyantly described a few pages later in the text.

Angelou sees Malcolm X to be a "golden man" (141) with "light-heartedness" (141). In 1964, enroute from a pilgrimage to the holy Islamic cities of Mecca and Jiddah, the 'black' Muslim leader experiences a political alteration. Although he still alleged that America is a racist country, he no longer held the certainty that whites were intrinsically evil. For Malcolm X, the return visit from Mecca to Cairo to Ghana is proposed to earn support from 'black' world leaders for his society of African unity, a nationalist group not directly governed by the Nation of Islam. Once again Angelou articulates her bitterness at Shirley Graham's status among the Ghanaians, having formerly compared her to Kilimanjaro. Malcolm X directly labels her comments "very childish, dangerously immature" (158). Nipped by his scolding, she is in tears. After his leaving from Ghana, she avoids any personal gaze at Malcolm X's chastisement using the communal rather than the singular pronoun to explain the

sadly changed state of the so-called Revolutionist Returnees. They are reduced to “a little group of ‘black’ folks, looking for a home” (160) after Malcolm’s parting.

5.2.2.2 Place

Angelou comes to Africa as a part of the returnee revolutionary movement. She remarks, “Less than one hundred years after slavery was abolished, some descendants of those early slaves taken from Africa, returned, weighted with a heavy hope, to a continent which they could not remember, to a home which had shamefully little memory of them” (19). As such, she comes with lots of hopes, aspirations and expectations in her eyes. However, she admits that Africa, as a place, is very little remembered or known of by returnees like her. They look at the place as a dream of a motherland to be reunited with after ages of undergoing unfairness. In her travel to and sojourn in Africa, she examines her indistinct feeling about ‘going home’ and faces unforeseen truths about women and society/’black’ society, an American woman in Africa, a ‘black’ American in Africa, and a single mother in Africa. Besides, over all these tropes, there looms large the metaphor of the Returnee Revolutionary chronicle. Coming to Africa as a tourist, like Richard Wright, is one thing. But coming over as one who has high romantic aspirations of ‘home coming’ for a final settlement is another thing. Moreover, the most important factor that seems to guide the major turn of events when seeing and confronting people, places and African culture is her being a woman, and a single mother at that.

Ghana, as a place, is certainly is not as expensive as American cities, but nevertheless, Angelou must account and divide her money very carefully amongst different avenues that she takes care of. She is paid a measly seventy-five pounds at the University of Ghana, which comes to roughly around two hundred US dollars. She says, “In San Francisco, my mother spent that amount on two pairs of shoes. Then I would think, seventy-five pounds, what luck!” (32). She thinks that a grown man could live on even fifteen pounds, but for a woman who supports her son at the University and trying to cope up with the new environment in a new country altogether, even seventy-five pounds don’t help much. However, here comes the formative influences of her mother to her rescue. Her mother had to singly support her children in a very tough environment. Angelou learns the survival strategy that she so much needed in

her growing days in America and now in her African sojourn. When Angelou comes out of her mother's cocoon at the age of seventeen, she is told, "I'm not worried about you. You'll do your best, and you might succeed. And remember, as long as you're making a living for yourself you can take care of your baby. It's no trouble to pack double" (33). Reminding herself of this, she decides to find an extra work and carefully divides her salary into paying Guy's fees, her own home rent, food, etc.

Ghanaian homes are always open to her and she is accepted as not just a guest, but a *sister*. At one village, she must suddenly halt for the night. As a stranger, and a female at that, she feels no threat or even the slightest amount of concern. She is instantly considered as a "Bambara relative" (114), since no 'black' in Africa is a stranger. When she asks her hosts not to fret much about her, one of the villagers says, "It is nothing Sister. We don't want our Bambara relative to think herself a stranger anymore" (114). After a comfortable stay, in the morning she is taken to bath in a common enclave with many other women. There is laughter, there is womanly talk and happiness in those moments. Momentarily though, Angelou feels at home, with her own sisters or mothers or aunts. She says, "For the first time since my arrival, I was nearly home. Not a Ghanaian, but at least accepted as an African (woman)...I felt the distance narrow between my past and present" (112-13). The roots that she searches for is everywhere in Africa (Ghana).

Ghana, the motherland of Angelou, provides a stable base to Guy, which she could not provide him in America, her frequent shifting of jobs required Guy to keep changing his schools. Thus, his personality and grades suffered. However, the initial accident at Ghana matures him as he starts seeing life from a new perspective. Besides, the independent University life helps him come out of his sheltered cocoon. But Angelou happily remarks, "Guy was my responsibility and my joy" (228). Moreover, Angelou sees no racialism in Ghana which helps both lead "separate and reasonably good lives" (166). However, at this point, Angelou's life enters another woman, not physically though, whom she views as a "cradle robber" (166). This woman is American, one year elder to Angelou and working in Ghana as a diplomat and is Guy's love of life. Guy has reached such a stage in life where Angelou fails to make him see her point of view and thus, she ends up confronting a matured man in Ghana who had been a small mama's boy when they had arrived from America. To

Angelou, Ghana, at this point, feels claustrophobic having all of a sudden been torn away with the natal thread, and she goes away to Europe for some time, but didn't think of returning to America at that point.

Nevertheless, if Africa is a mother, then even after years of sufferings and donning scars on her body, she happily welcomes her children. Angelou believes, "Africa's maternal welcome was painfully obvious" (42). The ambivalent conclusion of *Travelling Shoes* involves her departure not only from Ghana but from that mother and her son as well. As her sojourn in Africa gets over, she waits at the Accra airport for the plane to take her back to America. Using the phrase "second leave-taking" (209), she suggests that her anticipated voyage from Africa to America is an ironic resonance of the voyage long ago, when West African slaves were chained and hauled away from their mother (Africa) and families. She parallels her departure from Africa with her departure from Guy, the emotional center of her narratives, the son who in *Singin' and Swingin' and Getting' Merry Like Christmas* (1976) is left in America with his grandmother so that she could tour Europe with Porgy and Bess. Angelou sees this second leaving as a mother leaving her son with another mother, i.e., Africa and a daughter leaving behind the mother of all Africans, i.e., Africa.

The reversals at the end of *Travelling Shoes* also suggest the perceptible end of Angelou's mother/son plot. Guy stands spaced out from her, enclosed by his African friends. In this last depiction of Guy in the narratives, Angelou roots him in the culture of Ghana, thus returning him to the place of his ancestors, the motherland Africa, and she is solemnly happy about it. Africa magically transforms him from an uncooperative son to a newly born American African, free to persist his education at the University of Ghana while Angelou is free to explore her potential as performer, poet, spokesperson and autobiographer and traveler.

While placed in another country, Angelou develops a strong sense of 'home' and accomplishes a rediscovery of 'homeland'. Most importantly, in her journey as a mother, she discovers her son as a matured man and then loses him into the lap of another woman. However, as she heads towards America, she is happy to leave him behind in the cradle of mother Africa. In coming to terms with herself as a strong, independent 'black' woman, there is, as noted, much quiet reflection and

introspection. She discovers not only who she is, but where she belongs. The quest is complete. Her circle to herself is closed in experiencing Ghana which brings to her an understanding of what “home” is and where she belongs.

5.2.3 Carolyn Vines: *Black and Abroad* (2010)

In a crucial line in *Black and Abroad*, Carolyn Vines recalls her mother’s constant reminder “How many times had my mother informed me: “Carolyn, you’re poor, black, and a girl”” (58). Having lived under constant restricting supervisions, she encourages ‘black’ women to search for meaningful relationships to reject the limitations and identities forced upon them by society. She herself plays an emblematic role in doing so by traveling and finally settling abroad (Holland). Despite a childhood which is distinctive of a ‘black’, poor child in America, with a poor mother to take care of the entire family, she offers inspiration to all ‘black’ women regardless of age as she grew up. Carolyn has a childhood much like Nancy Prince with a mother and many siblings in a hard-economic environment and a brutal racist society. Racism and women-centric discriminations are, in fact, common to all the three authors selected for this chapter.

Black and Abroad describes how after moving from New Orleans Carolyn finds herself in the land of wooden shoes, windmills and endless gray skies. As she moves away from the vestiges of her tragic childhood and the “color crazy” America’s obsession with race, she is plunged into the depths of homesickness and depression. She travels through motherhood and a career change, and her determination is put to the test. On the way to self-discovery, she ends up finding soul sisters and love is inspired to travel beyond the limits imposed upon her by race. In an interview by Washington Post, “Limitations on ‘black’ female sexuality”, Ms. Vines states, “arguably the most intimate marker of identity, are subliminal and blatant. The media and entertainment industry are examples of the former. They have told us that we’re either too matronly or too loud and sassy to be in a legitimate relationship. The ‘black’ community at large has threatened aggression (stares, comments, violence) or ostracism if our sexuality is disloyal to ‘black’ men and we choose to date outside the race” (heavenonearthsystem.blogspot.in). Carolyn Vines’ book has helped to bring the ‘black’ woman’s experience to life for millions of readers. Her subtle yet strong words

in the book seem to come out as a strong female gaze at a world where women still play in the marginal zone.

As it is seen, Vine's gaze at the world is fashioned largely by the experiences of her deprived childhood and the occasional color discriminations she had to face throughout her stay in America. This, without contestations, is the first formative ideology or way of seeing for any African American. Moreover, a father's absence, the death of her brother, her mother's delirium, the hypocritical American 'black' and white layered society and her mother's teachings on color also played substantial parts in making Carolyn gaze at the world, as she does. All these have the gender element drifting below and guiding the course of Carolyn's life amidst all the emblematic gendered experiences that she goes through. Her mother's conditioning words goes:

You are a strong, independent 'black' woman who has supported herself all her adult life without the help of any man. Are you gonna let this man, this ... this ... foreigner, who doesn't know Jack about what it's like to be a 'black' woman in America...doesn't he know that 'black' American women don't have the option of throwing caution to the wind, packing up and running away to a exotic country – with a white man no less? Doesn't he know that 'black' people need other 'black' people around? (2)

This quote shows the scared, lost and somewhat disillusioned status of as an African American woman even in the twenty first century. It is, as if, Vines has no home yet she wants to make the whole world her home, a place to live in comfortably with no inhibitions as Virginia Woolf once says in *Three Guineas* (1938), “as a woman, I have no country. As a woman, I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world” (197). The position of African-American women in the country, as it is known, has already been despondent; 'black' women's travel writing, for that matter, calls for a lot of pre-meditation. In the western culture, and as a matter of fact in any culture, it is the man who sets out on voyages while the woman waits, as Penelope waits for Odysseus in “Odyssey” (15th century). The male crosses margins and travels out of and into spaces, while the female is mapped – she is a topos, a place on man's itinerary. Home is the safe, domesticated and feminized space.

Having said that, one can understand Vine's anxiety about who will do her hair in Holland; it is a country predominantly of the whites and unlike America, she might not find a 'black' parlor in almost every street. So, Vine's opening mediation sets the premise for the narrative; the presumed anxieties of the life of a 'black' Woman, in a principally white world; and her fights against every odd set for her by her own race as well as by the whites to frame a new identity of her own.

On another level, the narrative revolves around the plot of Vines and her long-term white-Dutch boyfriend, Vinz, whom she meets in America, and who has now a job offer from his home, Holland. The narrative is thus, largely about Carolyn's anxiety about the tough decision of leaving her "settled" life in America and moving over to Holland with Vinz. During her anxiety and the final settlement in Holland, Vines provides interesting perspectives oriented by her gendered-self and consciousness directed at people, places and cultures of America, a racially prejudiced place but her 'home'. Whereas, Spain serves as a study sojourn; and Holland, (a former colonial leader) is her final habitat.

5.2.3.1 People

It is interesting to look at Vines and Vinz's relationship through Vines' consciousness which knows "A white man would never want a 'black' woman for anything other than a piece of her round ass" (111). Her outlook towards life has been created by a strong 'black' mother (besides the general race-based environment of America), who has not been at the positive receiving end of two 'black' husbands that she has had. Nevertheless, it is this mother who has a very firm formative influence on Vines (comparable to Maya Angelou) most of which Vines is proud of, whereas there are few which Vines so wishes were not instilled in her. Throughout the narrative, her mother's presence in the form her wisdoms and teachings can be perceived, and which act as a veil through which Vines looks at the world for a long time till she gathers her own set of experienced and comprehended knowledge. In a way, the American experiences and mother's seasonings operate as the 'antecedent literarios' for Vines as she begins her travel. There are basically three things that her mother forwards to her children: survival strategy in direst of the situations; desegregation and aligning with the white world; that 'black' figures will only be delusive in nature.

Vines reflects, “If we appeared in ‘white’ movies at all...we were cast as prostitutes or drug addicts” (111); and her mother tells them that they simply “can’t be as good as the white” but “better” (63). Vines figures out that it must have been a preparatory step in making them “live in what she called ‘a white man’s world’” (63) and thus, strengthening them to step into the larger world.

Survival is the key word that, perhaps, any ‘black’ woman in America learns early in life. She writes, “The black community had been hard at work to ensure that we kept up the image of hard work and sacrifice. Indeed, our mothers and grandmothers and great-grandmothers literally worked their fingers to the bone because they had to. America gave them no other choice” (225), and thus the ‘black’ female heroes all around to enthuse Vines. She observes that “despite falling into a deep depression following the death of her oldest child and only boy, my mother had to work; somebody had to pay the rent” (75). Her mother, thus, had been a rock, but beneath that firm stature, like million other ‘black’ women, she hid some tempestuous pain. In the first six months in Holland, when Vines feels her identity as a strong, independent woman almost dies, to the point that she even doubts her own blackness, she thinks of her mother, an “embodiment of strength and independence” (90) and feels ashamed of pitying herself.

Of Vines’s falling for a white man, from a different continent altogether, and placing her entire conviction on him, she deep down believes that her mother’s racial views might be the explanation. The most influential female in her mother’s life, Vines’s grandmother, instilled a great hatred of “dark-skinned people with nappy hair” (77), which, Vines says, “my mother tried to pass that same nonsense along to my sisters and me” (77). While her mother experiences “discrimination from the white people at school, her family taught her to discriminate against blacks” (78), and thus, she grows up believing that that she is “better” (78) than most ‘blacks’ and is taught to be like the whites, but only better. In her high school days, Vines is made to join Northview Jr. High in “the rich, white part of the town” (81) in a bid to create a semblage between the ‘black’ and white world.

As she grows up, Vines is very clear in her mind that she can just date anybody, irrespective of color. She though color didn’t matter to her, “but it did” (116). She

says, “My fear was that I’d end up marrying a ‘black’ man...who I wasn’t attracted to just because he was ‘black’...when it came down to it, I preferred white men. I never considered it a prejudice, but simply a preference” (116). She finds “white men attractive” (112) and wonders if she has “racialised” (112) love too. To this choice of partner, she admits her mother’s influence, “She’d married two black men, one of them my father. Unfortunately, she’d projected her bad experiences onto all ‘black’ men” (116). But her collected experiences, mostly unpleasant, in America with ‘black’ men have also left their imprint. On one occasion, at DuPont circle, she is rollerblading with a motley crew of five white boys. Meanwhile, a ‘black’ homeless man comes across and, she writes:

He raised his hand, which had taken on the shape of a handgun and pointed it at my head. He pulled the trigger...He’d refused to see further than the idea that a ‘black’ woman had the nerve to even socialize with white men. But what made him, or any ‘black’ man who’d ever given me a dirty look, think that I’d be with him-even socially-if I hadn’t been with the white men? (113-14).

Color bigotry, if it can be called so, has been passed on to Vines, or any ‘black’ consciousness at that, for generations. However, when she has a child, she is seen making it clear that “I’d never instill the same rhetoric about race that my mother had instilled in me” (143). Moreover, she also understands that, her children, being of bicolor and bi-cultural roots can’t be simply aligned to one side. As it can be understood, Vine’s mother’s parenting has been more of a “necessary parenting” (142) than “black parenting” (142), which Vines could perceive after so many years when she herself laps a baby around. As Vines learns very late in her life that she has been brought up by a depressed, bipolar and schizophrenic mother, she forgives her for all the “lack of agency” roughness with which she had brought them up. She earns the “divine gift of forgiveness” (162) as she discovers a new way to look at life.

It is an instant love affair that transpires between the two, Vines and Vinz, the next major character in her narrative. It happens as she is pursuing her graduation and he is on a foreign internship project in America. It is comprehensible that both are aware of the consequence of such a heavily colored relationship. However, as it comes out, Vines is the one who gets almost obscured in about a decade long contemplation and reflection on the pros and cons of such a relationship, right until she becomes the mother of Vinz’s child and is happily settled in Holland. She thinks, “I looked into the

mirror and saw our reflection. I wondered how two people from such different backgrounds could come together so harmoniously. Looking at my brown skin and curly hair contrasted to his white skin and blond hair, I marveled that we had lasted as long as we had” (36). She understands that Vinz didn’t have to go through the struggles in life that she had to. To her, his childhood has been “idyllic” (36), with a stable family of mother, father and older sisters. Economically too they had least to bother about. Thus, she doesn’t see him as a very tough person who can cope with the unpleasantness of a practical ‘colored’ world. She ponders, “Was he ready for the evil stares we’d eventually get from people who didn’t agree with our lifestyle choice....Could he handle the aggression that lurked in a country as race conscious as America?” (37). Nevertheless, they plunge in and get along, and in due course she realizes that Vinz is just getting better with her. She says, “My lover had actually become my friend” (22). Gradually her skepticism about her relation vanishes.

As they have their siesta at the American South in New Orleans where Vinz is offered a job, the claustrophobic racial environment plants another view of Vinz in her ever thoughtful mind, “Who do you think you are? This white man is not gonna marry you” (35). To make matters worse, after a while, Vinz declares that he would be moving over to Holland, to his homeland. Vinz’s whole world is turned upside down. She almost gets belligerent:

Doesn’t he know that black American women don’t have the option of throwing caution to the wind, packing up and running away to an exotic country.... He wanted to go home to his family, to his friends, to his culture. What about me? I had packed up my life the year before to move with him to New Orleans, and now he was asking me to do it all over again. Did it not occur to him that I’d spent decades cultivating, family that had known me for a lifetime and a culture that had defined me? (3-4)

She is silent as she receives this piece of message, but she admits, “The initial shock of receiving that fateful invitation from the love of my life was slowly turning into anger for putting me in this vulnerable position” (5). She understands that monetarily and emotionally she is profoundly reliant on Vinz in a racially charged American social milieu. Other than moving over with him, she would hardly be left with any wise choice. And then, comes the most conventional fearful statement that a ‘black’

girl might hate to expect from a white partner. Vinz says, “Why don’t you go back to D.C. while I look for a job in Holland?” (41). Vines feels, “There it was, the old I’ll-go-first-and-send-for-you-later routine” (41). Thus, whether in reality or not, Vines definitely experiences vulnerability, at least in her mind. She is not sure whether this is a ploy on the white boyfriend’s part to do away with his ‘black’ girlfriend.

Nevertheless, amidst all her speculations and ideas about the relationship, they happily settle down in Holland, first at their sister’s place and then at an apartment of their own. After a few months of their settlement, Vines, to expunge her insecurity, to think, proposes Vinz in the most romantically possible way in the city of romance, Paris. She is anxious and skeptical in every possible way as to what will be Vinz’s decision, for, as she says, “Deep down I was testing this white man to see just how far he was willing to go with a ‘black’ woman. I needed to prove that my interracial relationship meant more to him than having great sex with an exotic woman” (111). He accepts and soon after they get married. They have a beautiful baby girl while Vinz stands by his wife, cuts the umbilical cord and kisses her forehead. She writes, “Then, after being by my side for the entire twenty-one hours of labor and delivery, Vinz left our bedroom and came back with a glass of whiskey....He took Chloe in his arms, sat on the side of the bed and just looked at her, smiling” (151). Vinz, has been thus, an honest lover, a responsible husband and a reliable human being to Vines, a ‘black’ woman, and demystifying all the color-based impressions bestowed on a ‘black’-white relationship, a relationship which proves a debacle to so many ‘black’ woman across the world. And still she could not but be happily stunned at the fact that “Vinz had brought home a black woman...a foreign one at that” (228). Vinz is a clear blow to the color frenzied world.

Of what one can make out about Americans from Vinz’s narrative is that, broadly, there are three sets of people, the whites, the ‘black’ men and the ‘black’ women. In the already segregated society created by the whites, the ‘black’ men further relegate the ‘black’ women into the margins. As it is seen, the narrative provides a reading of the racialized love scenario that America produces, which is mostly lopsided for the ‘black’ women. She says, “During the 70s and 80s, when I was growing up, if we appeared in ‘white’ movies at all, we weren’t depicted as healthy, monogamous,

loving partners. We were cast as prostitutes or drug addicts” (111). With such a backdrop Vinz is a winning saga for Vines.

A ‘black’ female has always been seen outside of a good, healthy romantic relationship. Vines, thus, wonders, if Vinz has really fallen for her or her “piece of round ass” (111). She thus, sees Hollywood as a major spearhead in creating such distasteful stereotypes about ‘black’ women. However, she observes that the ‘black’ males weren’t “any better about legitimizing a relationship like mine” (111). A woman having relation outside the ‘black’ community is considered a “sell-out” (111). And thus, the ‘black’ male is legitimized in to pushing himself “into the arms of white and Asian women” (112). At one point, Vines is threatened for having friends in a white circle of gay boys, which didn’t have any avenues for romantic harvests. She writes, “People doubted my heterosexuality because they’d never seen me with a ‘black’ man. And since I wasn’t with a ‘black’ man, there must’ve been something wrong with me” (116). Such is the vicious milieu for ‘black’ women to grow up in America.

In the African American community, it is acceptable for a ‘black’ man to move around with a white woman, but “black women in America were given two choices: marry a black man or stay single. In fact, it’s rare to see a black woman walking down the street arm in arm with a white man” (116). Vines is disconcerted with this unfairness and she doesn’t see any point in marrying a ‘black’ man who “could be in jail, unemployed, on drugs or out there making baby after baby and not taking care of them” (116). She also grows “tired of random black men undressing” her “with their lecherous eyes” (191). She feels “as though they had every right to that violation simply because I was a sister” (191). ‘Black’ men occasionally whistle and talk to ‘black’ women as though they were being “claimed as communal property” (191) by virtue of their skin color. To this, she writes, “I had desexualized myself hoping that ‘black’ men would turn their unwanted attention from me.... And went into a self-imposed exile from the ‘black’ community and took refuge in the white” (191-92). It is altogether a welcome change for her, but she nevertheless plunges into it.

However, Vines knows it very plain that when she, the ‘sell-out’, has a baby, the white people in America would accept her child “depending on her ability to pass, as

long as she never touted her blackness” and the ‘black’ people would similarly demand the “child’s loyalty to the race and then ostracize her for being too light skinned to really understand the authentic black experience” (144). Vines is thus, apprehensive of bringing her child to a world so pathetically demarcated on superfluous assumptions.

It is to note the American’s gaze that befall white females. She writes, “When America looked at a white woman...it saw a cuddly creature that needed protection. She wasn’t expected to work or over-exert herself with the demands of housework. Hell, she wasn’t even expected to raise her kids by herself. White men wanted her, ‘black’ men wanted her and black women wanted to be her” (207). For far too long, ‘black’ women have been seen running “white women’s households and then went home to their own. Historically ‘black’ women in America had always combined motherhood and work. They never had the luxury of a choice” (207-8). Vines desires to be like a white woman in what they represent: career orientation, a good mother and a satisfying housewife.

While in Holland, as she has her set of fearful contemplations about the racial climate in Holland, she comes across a very different set of people. In the words of Vinz, “People in Holland won’t care that you’re black and I’m white. My family’s white, and they liked you” (39), and she finds out, “From day one, they treated me as a part of their family, never asking me to lift a finger to do anything. They didn’t care that I was a black American, for that matter” (51). The Dutch thus, provide a pleasant change of scene for her.

For most of the Dutch people, Vines isn’t a ‘black’ woman at first, rather, she is a woman who has come to their country, and they bestow interest in knowing about her; she chooses to finally settle down in Holland. Here, she feels more secure than being with the ‘black’ men in America. She writes, “The Dutch looked further than my biology. The limiting stereotypes attached to being ‘black’ female wasn’t there. For the first time in my life, I’d been able to focus on things other than skin color, like the feats Dutch people could perform on their bikes” (146). For the first time, Vines could pass her observations on ‘normal’ things in life.

In fact, Unlike Americans, Dutch children are not raised with race consciousness. It does not signify that racism and racial prejudice are absent from the Dutch mentality, but “they don’t learn t use it as a point of departure to explain or justify inequalities. It is not their point of reference in understanding history or economics or even politics...it does not shape their worldview. That they’d integrate people of African descent, at least on a small scale” (216-17), and it is very “impressive” (217) to Vine’s eye. They, thus, whole-heartedly accepts Vines as not just their son’s girlfriend, but as a daughter-in-law. Besides, Vines regularly sees “white Dutch men with their black girlfriends, wives and children...I’d not seen as many mixed couples in America as I’d seen in the short time I’d been in Holland” (229-30), and thus making it a congenial haven for ‘black’ women to live.

When it came to their wedding plan, she finds out an interesting aspect about the Dutch people, “The Dutch are a very “cash and carry” people, which means they didn’t rely on credit. They bought when they could afford, and that had, thank goodness, rubbed off on me” (120). On planning their honeymoon, Vinz’s sister informs the guests to provide money in lieu of the “toasters, towels and other trifles” that pas as wedding gifts. Vines finds it very “tacky” (121) to ask for money, but Vinz explains it to be a Dutch tradition. Dutch are a very close-knit people and instead of being claustrophobic, their closeness emanates warmth.

At the time when Vines is on with her labor, her mother-in-law informs her that she is to deliver at home, that Dutch mothers deliver at home. She writes, “I thought she was crazy...or a hippie” (152). But she understands the allure after the delivery, when she ponders, “There were no doctors invading my body with their needles, no sterile hospital smell. I was surrounded by my own stuff. I could shower in my own bathroom, fewer than ten paces from my bedroom...I’ had my first child the Dutch way: in my own bed, with a midwife and my husband at my side” (152). Even though Holland stands behind America on the measure of modernization, but the average Dutch is more welcome to Vines than any American.

However, contestations and back lashing did find their way from the “modern” world into the University ambiance where Vines works. As she resumes her job after a few months of Chole’s birth, she is, without any doubt, happy, but eventually she realizes

that she is too much exhausted by the end of the day, to the extent that she could not even finish the text that she teaches in the class and thus, ends up standing on a self-humiliated podium amongst the students. She thus, quits one part of her job, the teaching course, for the semester and asks the Head to find a replacement. And the backlash begins. Most of her colleagues stop talking to her. She writes, “Backlash was bad enough, but a slap in the face was much more than I could bear” (202), however, she notices that it is the women group which is more indulged in hostile responses:

None of my male colleagues had anything to say about my decision to screw up my career. It was the women, the mothers, the working mothers who turned their backs on me. And they were all into gender equality... While I was strong and successful, I belonged to that elite club of scholars who touted feminine knowledge and female empowerment. Choosing motherhood and my own emotional balance over advancing in my career were obviously not in the club's bylaws, so when I needed guidance and support, I found my membership had been revoked. (204)

Despite these hostilities, she says, “But I stayed. For years I'd witnessed my mother going back and forth to a job she despised because she had to. I stayed because of the lessons she'd drilled into me” (205). However, the grave circumstances recover soon.

Vines finds an interesting facet about the Dutch people who are generally “mild-mannered” (94), but occasionally go almost crazy while on their bikes. She witnesses, “They failed to obey the basic rules of engagement: they cycled through red lights, made turns without signaling and threatened to run down poor, unsuspecting pedestrians making the mistake of using the crosswalk” (94). She feels as if there is a “super-gene” (94) embedded in Dutch people. As a woman, herself, she is dumbfounded to see women transporting their newborns on their chests wrapped up in cloth carriers” (94) and feels weird but great seeing a lame girl cycling with one leg and holding her crutch in one hand. Dutch culture, compliments Vines's blackness, her league with ‘survival’; she stays, and stays well.

The New Orleans siesta of Vines with Vinz provides a sharp contrast, though. Vinz is offered a job there and Vines joins in as she is “intrigued by that city and its chaotic past” (22). She asks Vinz that what she could expect here as a ‘black’ woman living with a white man, to which, Vinz plainly replies, “You'll be OK” (23). After their

arrival, it becomes the duty of Vines to look for a comfortable house. She comes across many charming houses and is “intrigued” by the novelty of southern living with its low rent for houses. On one occasion, she has a talk to one house owner over the phone, who calls her a “darling” (28) and asks her to come over the next day to have a look at the house. So far, so good. However, she writes, “The next day found me ringing the doorbell to what I’d hoped would be our new home. The owner opened the door and his face fell...he thought the voice on the other end of the line belonged to a white woman” (28). After a very “limp” (28) handshake, he rushes in to show the house hurriedly, and then whisks her towards the door and begins to rationalize as to why this place wouldn’t suit her at all, “He proposed I look for a place in some other area of the city (I couldn’t recall the name, but it must have been the black side of the town)” (29). The South makes its ugly face apparent.

What is remarkable about Vines’ narrative is her sensitivity to speech and sound variations across regions even as she is acutely aware of racism. The average New Orleans accent and the embarrassment caused by her inability to follow it become the subject of self-deprecating recall. Out on a dinner one night, they inquire one person about a good hotel to which his response was too cold almost on the verge of a reprimand, “Ya’ll can’t walk around here saying *New Orleans*. Around here it’s *N’Awlins*” (26). They are finally directed to one restaurant, and seated where they ask the waitress to suggest a good starter. She suggested “Bald shrimp” (26), which Vines could not figure out, but Vines rounds on some variety of southern shrimp dish. She writes, “When the waitress returned, I asked her exactly what bald shrimp was. Her response that it was “just shrimp” didn’t clear up the mystery so I asked her how it was prepared. I couldn’t make out why she looked at me so oddly before answering, “You boil the water and put shrimp in it” (27). The light bulb goes on and it dawns on both, “Ohhh...boiled shrimp” (27). Nevertheless, they enjoyed their meal.

Talking about language, Vines observes that the Spanish, or at least the madrilenes, or people from Madrid, are “language snobs” (13). Vines could speak Spanish fluently, even then the Spanish are neither impressed nor do they have the slightest “qualms” (13) about correcting her accent every now and then. She wonders, if this a ‘black’ thing, but eventually she finds out that it is a “Spanish thing” (13) extending to any race.

The Spanish are an easy-going lot of people for whom “tomorrow apparently means “in a few days” (15). However, the madrilenes are not the “warmest of people, even though they affectionately greeted each other with a peck on each cheek” (15). Vines finds the average New Yorker to be “nicer” (15). Americans are seen as fake. On one occasion Vines is told, “You meet an American and immediately they introduce you as a friend”, to which Vines replies defensively, “I think you are confusing friendliness with an offer of friendship...anyway, what’s so wrong with being friendly?” (16). As she walks down the street, she finds that her smiles are never returned. She enquires about this phenomenon and one of her colleagues answer, “Why would you smile at a stranger?” (16). She keeps quiet.

The average Spanish is economically deprived. Vines could hardly maintain herself and look after her own needs while in Madrid. She writes, “I could only laugh when Claudia told me once that right before payday, she had had to choose between buying newspaper and a cup of coffee. I told her that I had had to stand at the counter to drink my *café con leche* because “sitting at a table cost and extra hundred *pesetas*” (18). And thus, Vines is constantly at lookout for low cost entertainments.

Similarly, Mexicans lead a frugally prudent and simple life. What is more endearing to Vines, is the fact that like the Spanish and Dutch, the Mexicans don’t tower on her color or gender either. When she walks down the narrow, curving streets, passing small houses, she would hear someone mutter, “*morena*”, meaning brown girl or hurling a quiet, “*buenos dias, bonita*” (196). As she would wait for a bus in town, the locals stared and uttered, “*Psst*”, to get attention from the *morena*, the foreigner. Those stares and hurlings are never offensive though, she remarks, “They didn’t seem to care that I was ‘black’. They were curious about me, that’s all” (196). She is just a newcomer to their home, and all they would like is to draw a little attention of the stranger, seeing past the ‘blackness’ and the fact that she is a ‘black female’. Vines stay amidst the Mexicans has been short but winning.

A short Cuban visit makes Vines feel like “going to a family reunion, “I didn’t know half the people there, but I knew we were related. What’s more, with each passing day, I’d come to notice that most of the Cubans actually looked like me” (136). No amount of explanation would convince the locals that she is not one of them. She is

touched, “Cuba had actually claimed me as one of its own, something America had never done” (137) and she cherishes her Cuban visit everlastingly.

She chooses Cuba as their honeymoon destination for her love of Cuban literature and the long-held dream of experiencing Cuba’s culture at first hand. An incident of missing passport on the part of Vines highlights a few characteristics of the Cuban people. As they get down from the bus and enter the hotel, the receptionist asks for their passport. Vine’s one is missing. She had last shown it to the bus driver. Her fear knows no bound, “I was an American citizen in Cuba illegally. With no proof of my identity....Visions of Vinz having to leave the country while I stayed and gave birth to our first child in some musty old prison left a bad taste in my mouth” (130-31). On their wedding, Vines is already five months’ expectant. This crisis unquestionably shudders the mother in her more than herself as a female. However, the hotel authorities contact the bus driver and he finds it lying on Vine’s seat. The driver arranges a cab for the passport to be delivered to the owner. She concludes the day developing warmth for the Cubans, “I couldn’t believe the honesty and the goodwill of three people who went out of their way to help me. It set the pace for our honeymoon” (131). She is happy to have chosen Cuba as their honeymoon destination.

Thereafter, a five days Havana visit takes them amidst people who display scarcity and poverty. She notices, “Locals were more than happy to give us directions to this restaurant or that museum. The only thing they expected in return was one-dollar tip” (138). As soon as the locals find out that they are tourists, they become interested only in procuring money. Similar is the case amongst Mexicans. At airport, a man carries her bag even without asked for. Stopping outside, he sticks to his spot and does not walk away. She says, “When I looked at him again,, he said, holding out his hand, “My teep?” (194). Nevertheless, she is touched by the “poverty and warmth of the people....what struck me about Mexico was its warmth, not climate-wise but people wise” (194-95) and she just could not make “heads or tails of dirty children, dressed in rags, asking total strangers for money” (194). She is moved and wonders about the rampant poverty in this part of the world.

It is, thus, a diverse lot of people in divergent cultures that she comes across. Each set of people provides her with new experiences and perceptions about them thereby broadening her horizon of gaze and revisiting and strengthening her female self and consciousness.

5.2.3.2 Place

Carolyn grows up in Indianapolis and then spends a long time in D.C. However, it is New Orleans as a place in America that she describes at length. As a major seat of slavery, “in its heyday in the eighteenth century, New Orleans had been pretty progressive” (25). However, it has gone through a lot in the many years and Vines sees it coping up, “We’d driven plenty of small towns, which were generally well equipped with sidewalks and spotlights” (24). However, ironically, she finds New Orleans to be “the perfect setting for all that perversion” (25) that has been shown in the movie, *Angel Heart*, “voodoo rituals, interracial liaisons and just plain indecency” (25). She exclaims that having watched lots of movies has charged her imagination, which as a female is her dispensation. Her first impression is, “Everything was worn, from the shabby buildings to the raggedy streets. Even the grass seemed dingy to me.... the wrought iron grill work decorating Spanish style houses and the high-falutin’ streets named after city’s French founding father didn’t quiet manage to cover up the thick stench of stale beer nor the mask of racial hierarchy” (26). Besides, Vines also finds it a place of hot and humid climate which runs on for nine months of a year. It is referred to as “northern Caribbean” (31) for its intense heat and its slave revolutions. Further, like the Caribbean, it also has a strict racial hierarchy, where “Creoles, or local whites, reigned supreme on the social ladder. The more foreign-including northerners-and darker the person, the lower his/her rung on the ladder” (32). Vines notices that the society pushes those people to the margins who have unmistakable African features. Vinz finally tells her, “That’s the South, Carolyn” (24). Vines tries to gulp down this bitter truth.

Holland, as it has been noted, has a remarkably different and pleasant atmosphere altogether, especially for a ‘black’ woman; in the words of Vinz to her, “It’s Holland, Carolyn, not America” (50). However, on the rungs of modernization, Vines finds the place obsolete. On one occasion, having been invited to a dinner at Vinz’s friend’s

place, Vines feels vulnerable as she does not understand the language, besides, being a 'black' woman, she is persistently conscious of herself. She says, "Whenever he (Vinz) got up to refill our glasses or to chat with a friend, I freaked out. I'd pretend to be looking urgently for anything in my purse or utterly fascinated with the books in the bookcase" (48). Following this, she has to attend the toilet and empty her bowels which end in an unpleasant situation, "I wailed as I looked frantically at the white tank installed on the tiled wall behind the toilet bowl for the metal lever we Americans press gently to flush the toilet bowl for button" (46). But to her utter dismay and fright, she cannot find it. She feels ashamed of leaving a trail behind in her bathroom of her boyfriend's friend and that too in an alien country altogether. She stands there cursing and admonishing, "I condemn Vinz for having brought me to this god-forsaken country. I damned the Dutch culture for having devised ways to flush a toilet than there are ways to skin a cat" (49). Very timidly she comes out and in a hushed tone she asks one of the women as to where the flush is. The woman starts towards the bathroom at which Vines almost shouts and utters a powerful NO. However, she quickly follows the instructions, "I walked back into the WC and saw it: the chain. Of course...the chain that I had thought was a part of the tank. I yanked it with everything I had and the waters of relief flushed over me. And then, in the words of Terry McMillan, I exhaled" (50). Similarly, she hears something called a "dustbin" (51) in Holland, and she cannot make out what it is. Moreover, she also finds trouble in storing dresses and apparels as the Dutch houses don't have built-in closets. There are humorous scenes when Vines gets angry over Dutch TV channels showing everything, even foreign movies dubbed in their native tongue.

However, she is not disappointed by "the absence of a shopping mall *a la Americaine*" (61) in the Dutch markets. But she is very amused at seeing cute little boutique shops. The female gaze hops for shops, and shops there are, smaller though.

However, she comes across one thing that perturbs her in Holland. She says, "Before moving to Holland, I had earned my own money and paid my own bills. I had my own apartment. I had my own life...I knew who I was. Being in Holland was forcing me to question everything that I thought defined me as an adult. Being in Holland, I sometimes felt powerless" (69). No doubt, she has a home here too, and a boyfriend to support her, but the new place and its alien ways are too much a "cultural shock" for

her making her perturbed. But “Holland is a country in which workers have rights” (252) and this goes in support of Vines during her maternity. Nevertheless, she makes the most positive remark about Holland, “While it still wasn’t home, Holland had ceased to be a foreign country to me during the first year...I was feeling more welcome after one year in Holland that I’d felt during most of my life in America” (98). Holland becomes a space where escape from modern unease and restrictive gender politics is possible for Vines. With time, she finds herself out of the stereotyping claws of the world and in a society, where she can be just herself, neither a ‘black’, nor a woman even at times and most importantly free from the patronizing or clawing looks of the society/males.

In contrast, Cuba is found to be a heavily militarized state. But the colonial vestiges in its beautiful buildings still speak of its former beauty. She says, “I understood why, in its heyday, colonial Cuba had been dubbed the pearl of the Caribbean. It had to be the most beautiful place on earth” (132). However, Vines observes that “poverty was remarkable there, off the beaten path” (132). Hitchhiking is the normal mode of transportation. As a ‘black’ woman, she can relate to the Cuban culture though. There are three common issues that the Cuban space and ‘black’ woman in America can pass on between them: “skin color, hair grade and their place in socio-cultural hierarchy” (137). As it has been noted before, coming to Cuba is like a “homecoming” for Vines.

Mexico as a place, with all its poverty and deprivation, teaches an important lesson to strengthen her position as and understanding of a ‘black’ woman. All her childhood, she has seen and experienced blackness associated with poverty, and all things white are rich. She moved around the markets on her sister’s back as they could not afford a shoe. Growing up in a family, supported by a single ‘black’ mother, Vines’ psyche had almost ingrained that blackness calls for nothing other than poverty.

Nevertheless, in Mexico, she says, “I saw for the first time that blackness didn’t automatically mean the same as poverty, which empowered me to question, for the first time, what I’d learned about being a ‘black’ woman in the world” (196). Thus, she feels, “The world had opened its doors to me, and I’d walked through” (198) and experiences a gush of Mexican fresh air.

Thus, Vines, a ‘black’ American woman with a disconcerting childhood, with the absence of a father figure looks at the world through her mother’s gospels, until she travels and finds herself in diverse places, cultures and with a wide-range of people of every gender and color. As she moves away from the shadow of her childhood and the American obsession with race, she travels and looks at the world as a woman, neither ‘black’, nor white. She carves out a special identity for herself beyond what was demarcated for her in the claustrophobic American milieu by the white and ‘blacks’ alike.

III

This study finds out that the travel narratives of a free slave belonging to the nineteenth century; a poet, author and civil-rights activist of the twentieth century; and a PhD scholar, teacher and housewife of the twenty-first century resist gender boundaries first in the act of traveling itself and then writing about their travel. In the process, they produce patterns of gazes that merge the boundaries of the personal and the public space and not just stress on the personal and on relationships. Nancy Prince, a servant, braves the male-white world and talks about the geography, religion and culture of people as diverse as the Russians and the Jamaicans. Her narrative does not deal with documenting the ‘everyday’ but transcends beyond and provides major information about the people and places of her times. Her decision to leave the country is a decision for mobility, and in this, she does not remain a mere receiver of meaning, but creates herself as she is almost seen translating the original ‘American Dream’ into a ‘Russian Dream’ in a world which does not know color and gender discriminations.

Women’s travel narratives are also ways in which one can see how gender does shape perceptions in introducing concepts of cultural differences, but not necessarily limit those perceptions to a demarcated boundary of the ‘feminine’. Both Maya Angelou and Carolyn Vines undergo the crucifixion of the gazes, both male and female, while in Ghana and Holland respectively. Gender does shape perceptions, if not of the ‘subjects’, but of the ‘objects’, as we see in this case. However, Angelou and Vines successfully negotiate these shifting boundaries between the subject and the object

positions while reflecting the differences in cultures and instituting each as legitimate and evocative in their own contexts.

The study thus comes to a point where it is obligatory to rethink the concept of 'female gaze'. The theory of the female gaze, which has its own distinctive consciousness, is due to the subject's reception in a particular space at a particular time. As Beauvoir opines that a woman is not born but becomes, thus, a gaze is not born, but is gets devised. However, the three travel writers studied in this chapter successfully disembark on the long-drawn debate by engaging in complex negotiations between the domestic and the public domains. They become explorers rather than remain merely travelers and in the process, they create new opportunities for themselves. However, as they loosen the bonds of their own social roles, they create strong new ones in which they ascertain the female gaze and voice as credible and strong agencies in themselves, standing within or without the feminine space.

Three African American traveling women, belonging to three different centuries, show a remarkable capacity for absorbing modernity and tradition in their social and sexual selves. Their approach to life is guided by the fact that they are African and American and women. Their ability to examine the world owes as much to the fact that they are 'watched' women as to the fact that they are 'watching' women.

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