

INTRODUCTION

There is no foreign land: it is only the traveler that is foreign. (R.L. Stevenson, *The Silverado Squatters* 96)

To gaze is to have a powerful look, which can objectify the other person... subject him/her to a curious stare, categorize, define and take control over him/her. The gazing activity... carries a sense of being objectified, subordinated, or threatened by the look of another. (Brooker, *A Concise Glossary* 90)

The aim of this dissertation is to examine the patterns and variations of gazing in select African American travel writing published between 1789 and 2010: Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African, written by himself* (1789), Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* (1845), Nancy Prince's *The Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince* (1853), Richard Wright's *Black Power* (1954), *The Color Curtain* (1956), and Pagan Spain (1957), Martin Luther King Jr.'s "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi" (1959), W.E.B. DuBois's *The Autobiography of W.E.B. DuBois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century* (1968), Maya Angelou's *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (1986), and Carolyn Vines' *Black and Abroad* (2010). The texts chosen problematize the 'black' gaze in African American travel writing, and offer a platform to reexamine the idea of gaze in a broader prospect.

This thesis builds on, and departs from, earlier works in this area insofar as it proposes to identify and analyze the framing and the subsequent patterns of gazing in a 'black' traveler resulting from some specific shaping contours such as gender, race, color of skin, political and religious affiliations and education. This dissertation examines the possibility of working on differentiating the 'black' gaze from the typical *white-colonial-male* centric gaze, and thereby establishes the former as a valid institution in itself. Leaving aside this semantic problem, one could perhaps identify the proliferation of the point of view of a traveler, 'black' in this case, resulting from a clash between the ideologies carried from 'home' and the experiences incurred with people and places 'away'. Having said that, differentiating between a "black" and

‘white’ gaze and establishing ‘black’ travel writing as a legitimate area of study has had a long controversial history of doubts and contradictions.

As an interdisciplinary genre, travel writing, in recent times, has become an important area of study and research. It is an intricate genus which, until recently, had remained an undefined area of study. The older ‘voyages and travels’ gave way to the title Travel Writing roughly around the beginning of the twentieth century. Merging autobiography and reportage, the writings in this genre offers significant insights not merely into the places visited, people met therein and their cultures but also into the point of views of the writers themselves and their proliferation and, by annex, into the cultural contexts of both the subject (traveler) and the object (ones visited).

With the attachment of the name Travel Writing, the genre had lost its intellectual touch and came to chart simply the literary, journalistic or middle-brow/dilettante forms of travelogue. Critical insight and popular interest in the form was rekindled in the late 1970s with a bout of travel writings like Peter Matthiesen’s *The Snow Leopard* (1975), Paul Theroux’s *The Great Railway Bazaar: By Train Through Asia* (1975), Bruce Chatwin’s *In Patagonian Express* (1977), Robyn Davidson’s *Tracks* (1990), etc. Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism in the book titled, *Orientalism* (1978) also created a stir in the scenario for people to go on a binge of writing travel accounts. It is a revolutionary milestone in the scholarly study of how the western travelers and scholars created clichéd characters or stereotypes of the Middle-Eastern or Asian countries in their depiction of the so-called Orient. The genre, thus, raised important issues of imperialism, identity, diaspora, multiculturalism, nationalism, gender, globalization, colonialism and post colonialism, and it brought into center the dynamics of ‘transculturation’, the idea of the center and the margin, border crossings, hybridity, location and dislocation. The hitherto lack of interest in the genre of travel writing saw a sudden aficionado and therefore the popularity henceforth.

Travel writing reports or disseminates information about unfamiliar people and places. However, many patterns of arbitration come in between how the world really is, and how it is being reported or portrayed. Looking/gazing is a socially regulated act. There are social codes of seeing which vary in different cultural contexts. Jacques Lacan, for instance, says in his *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*

(1981): “In this matter of the visible, everything is a trap” (93). The people, their ways and the culture of the ‘other’ world comes filtered through two important porticos, firstly the lived experience gets transformed into a written one and thus, the ‘travel experience’ gets transformed into the ‘travel text’. Secondly, and most importantly, whatever a traveler experiences or writes is eventually filtered through the gaze, which is about how we look at the world. Gaze is the ideological filter that we carry along. Like a lens, gaze thus distorts or reframes the world that surrounds a traveler. Thus, in the words of Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, travelogues are essentially ‘fictions of factual representations’ (Holland and Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters* 10). The concept of *gaze* or point of view is a politically loaded one. In the light of this theory, studying the gaze of a ‘black’ person traveling across the world and penning down her/his views of people and places is a conscious and dubious task. It is contended here that the contributions made by the African American travel writers to create or revise the frames of gazing or seeing out at the world arises from and results in a politics of gazing and several ideological moorings, which, in turn, is predicated on attempts to form patterns of gazing. The act of gazing, thus, turns out to be a fuller activity amidst the ‘subject’ and ‘object’ and the selected texts can be considered to serve, what can be called, as ‘meta-theory’, apparatus to study the theory of gaze.

This dissertation makes use of the theory of gaze that is evidently visible in a travel narrative, and a ‘black’ travel narrative at that, is a source of wider and rarer range of studies in the mentioned theory. Travel writing has long been very imperative for understanding the West’s correlation with non-Western countries and cultures. In this regard, it is suggested that ‘black’ travel narratives accommodate the entire range of forms of gazing that might hook up or clash with the hitherto widely studied and circulated ‘white’ gaze. In narrative representations of a journey, these texts often foreground the need to transcend the color separation by taxing on one hand the colonial-white authority on travel and thereby travel narratives, and showing on the other hand how diverse and legitimate the gaze of an African American and thereby a ‘black’ person can be. The idea of the ‘patterns of gazing’ is in keeping with the concept of a traveler’s gaze which is never free from some sort of an implicit or overt ideology. Every text examined in this study, displays comprehensive and conscious narrative tropes that keep referring to the multiple patterns of gazing being formed

through each single traveler and the distinctive and/or 'black' qualities attributed to their ways of seeing. However, it is also seen that a single dominant gaze, amongst the many patterns of gazing that a traveler's gaze may perforate through, highlights the text. African American travelers look at the world through a proliferation of gazes, and hence the title.

Africans have been on the move ever since Europeans entered the 'Dark Continent' (See Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent* 9). But the difference lies in the fact that the movements of the white people were mostly for leisure or it had some political motive behind them, but the 'black' people always moved as slaves. Hence, there is a marked difference between the travel writing of the white and 'black' people, especially, African Americans.

This dissertation studies African American travel narratives taken from two recognized time frames. The first classified period is the nineteenth century and the second half of the eighteenth century. It was a time when European colonial powers ruled the world and the African slave trade was at its peak. Enslaved people's tales of captivity and dehumanization arose in African and New World cultural discourses. Thus, a different premise of slave narrative, i.e. 'Black-American Travel Narrative', was born. This premise of writing was socio-politically motivated. Most importantly, it was not a leisure class entertainment, but rather emancipatory in nature. The second classified period is that of the twentieth century till the first decade of the 21st century. It was a time when most of the 'blacks' were already emancipated and most of whom were renowned names across the globe. But, even with the huge temporal and situational distance between the two categories of travelers, the common thread of color binds them together. Hence, each one of them ends up emitting numerous, but almost similar kinds of gazes when on the move to distant places and cultures. This genre of travel writing draws its expression from the slave experience and the genre known as the slave narrative. However, the genre is still in a fluid process of redefinition from celebration of their emancipation as they travel to a more relaxed examination of the modern world.

The study undertaken in this thesis covers a temporal frame of a decade over two centuries (1789-2010) and a spatial frame of almost the entire globe (from America to

Indonesia). Here we are concerned with a study of the patterns of gazing issuing out of the travel narratives roughly in a chronological sense: from narratives starting with Olaudah Equiano's in the early 19th century to Carolyn Vine's in 2010. In this thesis, we have used the term African American in lieu of 'black' or which is the yesteryear's term for those with a dark/er shade of skin. In using the term African American, the usage, 'Afro-American' has also been bypassed with a view to give a complete credibility to Africa and its people in the long tradition of African American travel writing alongside the 'white' Americans. The oft recurring term, *gaze*, more or less synonymous with the phrase, is considered as 'point of view', though gaze in this thesis is a loaded term, with several political/ideological implications.

Chapter 1, titled "The Gaze of the Traveler and the Gaze of the Travelee" (i) studies the definitions of gaze in the seminal works of Berger, Pratt, Foucault and Said along with the historical development of the theory of gaze; (ii) demonstrates that gaze operates through some ideological filter or cultural baggage; (iii) contends that the inherent consciousness blends with the acquired knowledge in the course of the travel resulting in a broadening of consciousness/gaze; (iv) suggests that the act of gazing, thus, turns out to be a fuller activity amidst the "subject" and "object"; (v) offers a working definition of gaze and gazing that is crucial to any understanding of the travel writer's oscillation between images of subject and object; and (vi) recognizes and offers to study four perspectives on gaze and gazing in travel writing: color, nationality, religion, and gender.

Chapter 2, titled "I'Se Still Climbing: African American Travel Writing and he Claims of Color" (i) begins with the assumption that the travel writer's social world is saturated by narratives that categorize 'blacks' and whites into antithetical dimensions which finally lead to "ontological fortification"; (ii) explores the relationship between the color ('black' in this case) of a person and its effect/s on her/his gaze/viewpoint as explicated in the works of Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: an American Slave* (1845), Prince's *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince* (1853), Wright's *Pagan Spain* (1957) and *Black Power* (1954); and DuBois's *The Autobiography of W.E.B. DuBois* (1968); (iii) contends that color creates typical shared experiences and consciousness/es which generate perspectives much different than the age old white gaze; (iv) examines how 'blacks' undergo a typical "double

consciousness” and are able to look at the world both from the perspective of white and a ‘black’; (v) shows how the gaze of the colored traveler has the tendency to ‘gaze back’ asserting power and displaying mild demur; and (vi) provides scope to study the gendered perspective of the ‘black’ or African American consciousness in the next chapter.

Chapter 3, titled “‘I Too Am America’: African American Travel Writing and the Claims of Nationality,” (i) examines the American national gaze in African-American travel writing when the critical site is outside America as is evident in the works of King, Jr.’s “My Trip to the Land of Gandhi” (1959), Wright’s *Color Curtain* (1957) and *Black Power* (1956) and Vine’s *Black and Abroad* (2010); (ii) argues that nation determines one’s gaze but it cannot operate as an exclusive determinant; (iii) analyses the basic argument that one’s views of the world are grounded not only in the ideology of belonging but also of difference or otherness; (iv) elucidates that the site of travel becomes an instrument through which the travel writer (‘black’/African American in the present context) re-examines his/her own views about race, writing, and difference with the predominance of particular racial/nationalistic gaze; (v) examines how the whiteness or the American eye in the gaze of African-Americans is not physical but cultural; and (vi) emphasizes the fact that race refers not to a given category but to a politically defined anthropological category.

Chapter 4, titled “‘All God’s Chillen Had Wings’: African American Travel Writing and the Claims of Faith,” (i) aims at analyzing the functioning of religious ideology on a traveler and its effects on the traveler’s gaze at the viewing culture and that religion and travel borrow from and legitimize each other as manifest in Equiano’s *The life and Travels of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavvas Vassa, the African* (1789) and Wright’s *Black Power* (1954), *Color Curtain* (1956) ; (ii) examines how religious ideology produces, consumes and circulates patterns of gazes, in effect creating multiple selves by the same traveler/travel writer; (iii) explores how religious or sacred gaze is a term that sanctions the particular pattern of ideas, attitudes, and customs that enlightens religious way of seeing as it occurs within a given cultural, historical and temporal setting; (iv) studies how and when religion becomes an epistemological divide; (v) examines how ideology, religion and politics get

intertwined in travel writing; and (vi) shows how mobility and religion inform and invert each other in a world where color, gender and religion are embedded.

Chapter 5, titled “I’m Gonna be a Gypsy Woman: African American Travel Writing and the Claims of Gender,” (i) examines how gender acts as an important determinant of gaze and looks at the African-American female writer’s gaze as a critical area of enquiry as is manifest in the texts of Nancy Prince’s *A Narrative of 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); (ii) contends that African American female travel writing is further marginalized in the corpus of ‘black’ travel writing, recognizing and exploring which opens up a horizon of meaningful patterns of gazing and institutes the former as a serious area of research; (iii) explores how looking as a problematic act of male voyeurism is directed back at the world in female travel writing; (iv) seeks to examine how women traveler writers, subtly or overtly, eradicates the patriarchal notion of female sexual subjectivity and makes meaning instead of bearing one by producing an “oppositional gaze”; and (v) shows how African American women’s travel narratives provide opportunities to the female African American subject to adapt a conscious ‘black’ female subjectivity. The writer uses various modes of self-fashioning to admit new ways of recognizing the subject-object relationship in and out of America. Travel writing and gender offer a complex but rich and textured relationship.

In critically examining the texts chosen, their cultural contact zones and subsequent representation of the African American gaze, this study

- i. examines the gaze/consciousness of an African-American traveler and its eventual proliferation when she/he happens to move from one place to another and encounter different people and places;
- ii. understands that the gaze or viewpoint not only propagates, but also gets modified into mostly three ways: additive, diminutive and persistent, where the first two are commonly distinguishable;
- iii. contends that the process of gazing leads to the subject, i.e. the traveler, often becoming the object of gaze. And thus, a study of the two-way traffic of gaze is attempted at;

- iv. aims at exploring how the self-fashioning of the traveling subject, whether White or 'black' is grounded in her/his "native" cultural baggage which may include educational background, history, racial/nationalistic affiliations, experiences, gender, religion, etc; and
- v. proposes that it is impossible for a traveler to be completely free from the cultural baggage (prejudice, predefinition, bias, stereotypes), that she/he carries.

The relevance of the study lies in helping reassess the African American Travel Writing in the light of its multi-patterned gaze at their roots, the place of their newfound identity, and at the old world. Further, the study recognizes that African American travel writing provides critical insights into reassessing the theory of travel writing in general and the theory of gaze in particular. When the 'blacks' in America did have the freedom to travel, they appropriated different forms of identity while looking at the world from changed vantage points. This resulted in distinctive kinds of travel writing, different from their white-authored counterparts. The analysis and study of their travel narratives, even if occasionally they were Europhilic like Prince, Douglass or Wright, helps refashion and rearticulate arguments against the dehumanizing effects of slavery and racial discrimination that long held the African Americans as sites of muted resistance.

The polyvocality of the gaze of a traveler gets firmly established with the politics of gaze operating on both ideological and experiential level and helps understand the subject's viewpoint of the world in a much lucid approach. Having said that, it becomes apparent that, as gazing invariably is a part of producing or consuming hierarchies, African American travel writing is an apt area of enquiry for the subject. African American travel writing thus, establishes itself as a compelling genre of writing and enquiry. 'Black' traveling subjects are therefore presented as conscious beings with ideologies and understandings, rather than mere two-dimensional creatures. They successfully establish, sustain or challenge perceptions about people, places and culture.