

An Essay on Richard Wright's

Black Power – A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos

José Luiz Pereira da Costa, 2013

Eagerly, I was reading in the late days of 2006 the book, *Travels with Herodotus*¹, from the Polish newsman Ryszard Kapuscinski². Reaching to the 271 page I saw the following information: "Nevertheless, the joy of being a witness of the rebirth of a collectivity so different, it was at the same time a deception and disenchantment. For instance: It was in Dakar that I've read *Black Power*, a thrilling book from the American writer Richard Wright. In the early years of 1950, Wright, an Afro-American from Harlem, acting by the wish to return to the land of his ancestors – was an use to say then, "return to the bosom of the mother Africa" – takes the decision to visit Ghana³. At this time the Gold Coast struggles for her independence. They promote rally, rebellion and protest in many forms. Wright sees himself among all this. He gets used with the uses of various cities in the Country. He visits the markets of Accra and Takoradi; he converses with traders and peasants. But reaches to the conclusion that in spite of having the same skin of them all, *them* – the Africans – and *he* – an American, they are like foreigners: they do not have a common language, and all that it is important for him is completely indifferent for them, and vice-versa. As Wright go on in his travel in Africa the sensation of being a foreigner grows and became unbearable, as a curse or a nightmare.

A writer and poet from South Africa, Peter Abrahams⁴ helps in placing Wright in the context above, when he writes:

What Wright did not understand, what his whole background and training had made difficult for him to understand was that being black did not of itself qualify one for acceptance in tribal Africa. But how could he, when there are thousands of urban-bred Africans up and down the vast continent who do not themselves understand this? The more perceptive of the urban Africans are only now beginning to comprehend, but slowly.

In the instantaneous marvelous things that I'm enjoying and extensively using them, I've closed the book, marked the page with a post-it and immediately I've opened the marvelous cave of Internet. There was the Amazon.com showing Wright's book, but with the information that it was out of catalog. Yet, few copies of second hand were available, and could be obtained at the site. As the Amazon bookstore connects itself to a chain of small bookstores all over; in few days ahead the book *Black Power – A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos*, crossed the Ocean and was at the vestibule of my building in the hands of the postman. One of the previous owners of the book, maybe

¹ In Portuguese: "Minhas viagens com Heródoto – Entre a história e o jornalismo".

² 1932-2007

³ At this time still the Gold Coast, a British colony.

⁴ - Peter Henry Abrahams was born in 1919, Vrededorp , a slum near Johannesburg. He became a famous novel writer.

the only one, I will never know, printed his reactions in the book with various underlines, wide brackets besides the text, even a short poem resembling a list of compromises. He seems to me, worked in a place named *Studio2*. But who cares, the book was there, it had a good shape and, essentially, no page was missing.

But why I became so happy with the book, a reference in the book of another author? Because Richard Wright is to me the owner of the way to say that fascinates me among the Afro-American authors. I'm reading his texts in the last 20 years or so, this for sure. Nevertheless, I think that I've met his books by another 30 years or more in the past.

There was a time, it was the years 1950, when I had two good friends, Divino Teixeira, Mr., and Adão Cravem da Silva, Mr.. Divino was a compulsive reader of pocketbooks in English; for that, he pushed us to exchange those popular books. At this time, names as Langston Huges, Ralph Ellison, James Weldon Johnson and James Baldwin were very much popular. So I don't remember if at this time I have read Wright. I think yes, I did, but I'm not sure. When in the years 1980 I've read his *Native Son* there was always a feeling of *dèja-vú*.

In any way, my meeting or re-encounter with Wright was when I was reading an anthology of Afro-American authors, *Black Voices*⁵, by Abraham Chapman and there was the short story, in fact nearly a full novel, named *The Man Who Lived Underground*, and in the same anthology I discovered the poem:

Between the World and Me

And one morning while in the woods I stumbled suddenly upon the thing,
 Stumbled upon it in a grassy clearing guarded by scaly oaks and elms.
 And the sooty details of the scene rose, thrusting themselves between
 the world and me... .
 There was a design of white bones slumbering forgottenly upon a
 cushion of ashes.
 There was a charred stump of a sapling pointing a blunt finger
 accusingly at the sky.
 There were torn tree limbs, tiny veins of burnt leaves, and a scorched
 coil of greasy hemp;
 A vacant shoe, an empty tie, a ripped shirt, a lonely hat, and a pair of
 trousers stiff with black blood.
 And upon the trampled grass were buttons, dead matches, butt-ends
 of cigars and cigarettes, peanut shells, a drained gin-flask, and a
 whore's lipstick;
 Scattered traces of tar, restless arrays of feathers, and the lingering
 smell of gasoline.
 And through the morning air the sun poured yellow surprise
 into the eye sockets of a stony skull. .
 And while I stood my mind was frozen with a cold pity for

⁵ *Black Voices- An Anthology of Afro-American Literature, Editora Mentor, 1968, pg. 437*

the life that was gone.

The ground gripped my feet and my heart was circled by icy walls of fear

The sun died in the sky; a night wind muttered in the grass and fumbled the leaves in the trees; the woods poured forth the hungry yelping of hounds; the darkness screamed with thirsty voices; and the witnesses rose and lived:

The dry bones stirred, rattled, lifted, melting themselves into my bones.

The grey ashes formed flesh firm and black, entering into my flesh.

The gin-flask passed from mouth to mouth; cigars and cigarettes glowed, the whore smeared the lipstick red upon her lips,

And a thousand faces swirled around me, clamoring that my life be burned... .

And then they had me, stripped me, battering my teeth into my throat till I swallowed my own blood.

My voice was drowned in the roar of their voices, and my black wet body slipped and rolled in their hands as they bound me to the sapling.

And my skin clung to the bubbling hot tar, falling from me in limp patches.

And the down and quills of the white feathers sank into my raw flesh, and I moaned in my agony.

Then my blood was cooled mercifully, cooled by a baptism of gasoline.

And in a blaze of red I leaped to the sky as pain rose like water, boiling my limbs.

Panting, begging I clutched childlike, clutched to the hot sides of death.

Now I am dry bones and my face a stony skull staring in yellow surprise at the sun. . . .

Between the time when I've applied to Amazon for the book and the arrival of it, I went for the reading of other writings of the American Richard (Risard is the Polish name for Richard). Some years behind I've translated for my amusement a long series of Wright's works – shorts stories and a long portion of his autobiography.

Until that moment I had no idea how were the days of Wright when visiting the Gold Coast. Were his reactions arriving the land of portion of our common ancestors the same that I had twenty tree years after his experience? Wright arrived in a Country that was still possession of another. I've, nevertheless, arrived in a sovereign Country that to forget the past of humiliation radically takes measures as, for example, the change of the national name; no more a *Gold Coast* but Ghana. The stain of humiliation – Gold Coast, Ivory Coast, Pepper Coast, and Slave Coast – was removed and replaced by the name of a powerful African Empire in the early years of the second millennium: Ghana.

The available for me summary of *Black Power* all of them praised the quality of Wright's work. In spite the remark that was he experiencing a different type of literature than the one he was used to: instead of novels and short stories he was producing voyage literature.

While I was just guessing how would be the book on his way to me, I've wandered if *Black Power* would be the expression of a powerful writer bold to express the sores of his native society, which make him to exile himself in France to feel himself free – would he use his well-known hunger in reporting the colonial question in Africa; Wright's visited Nation was at that point still a colony of the British Empire. On the other hand, would he be the powerful writer in building raw and, in spite, beautiful images of his imagination?



Well, now I have read all *Black Power*, and I've made a long series of marks (not over the text, but using post-it). The marks carries my happiness, my perplexities, my disenchantments, and, above all, may I say, my comprehension to the way of seeing things by a writer born in the United States of America, no doubt, Mr. Richard Wright. Twenty three years after Wright, I've arrived in Ghana, but with the eyes of an Afro-Brazilian: apparently we saw the same things when Wright has crossed the customs at Takoradi harbor, and later on I have crossed the customs of the modern Kotoka Airport. For me was a bright sunny day in January 1976. But Wright wrote:

*Emerging from the customs shed, I saw Africa for the first time with frontal vision: **black life was everywhere**. My eyes were riveted upon a woman wearing a brightly colored length of cloth which held a baby strapped to her back; the infant's legs were sprawled about the woman's hips and thighs, and the tiny head of the baby lolled in sleep with sweat beading on its forehead. The cloth held the weight of the baby's body and was anchored straight across the woman's breasts, cutting deeply into the flesh. Another woman was washing in a pan set on the ground; she was bent at an angle of forty-five degrees in the broiling sun, her black child also sound asleep upon her back. The babies of other women were awake, their wide, innocent eyes avoiding the broad blank expanse of their mothers' backs, looking at the world from side to side. Then I was startled by a European family threading its way through the black crowd.*

"They are the minority here, hunh, Mr. Ansah?" I asked. He roared with laughter.

"It's good not to be a minority for once, eh?" he asked.

But, differently from Mr. Wright, my first arrival to Africa was in Dakar, Senegal, December 1974. Recording it in the newspaper I worked for, then I wrote:

The Senegal has become independent from France some ten years before my arrival. There was then, the French language and Parisian usages, making the Wolof city an exotic France. There was the cafés with tables in the street side walk; place for a morning café-au-lait, croissant and butter – avec a bottle of mineral water Evien or Perrier. There were places for a friendly talk and to drink bière a la

pression (*draft beer*). In Dakar, one could dinner attended by waiter dressing tuxedo, eating *entrecote grille avec pome vapeur, made in groundnut oil with black pepper ground in a long stile mill*. The wine would be an original Bordeaux (some people would say that the wine was cut indeed with grapes from Algeria) or to drink a young *Beaujolais*. Yet, on the evening, any one could see the tall, well dressed and coquet women, dressed in typically African textiles, but many of them with the style of French designers. These women dresses were called *bubu* – a long dress going until the feet, not long enough to hide beautiful Italian or Spanish shoes – as the basis for a daily show of style, colors and beauty. And, in the luxury hotels, as the *Méridien, N’Gor-Diarama* or *Sunugal* complex oldie European women could be seen wearing one peace bathing-suit showing their flat breasts.

For me, it was in Accra, in my first entrance to the Ghanaian Country, after my clearance at the local customs and sees me in front of the airport building, that, like Wright, I started seeing Africa in a first plane. Differently from Dakar, from that moment on, in every coming day, more and more ***black life was everywhere***. I could see any time a Society, differently from the Senegal one, which was put aside, being a Colony, of the quality of life enjoyed by the colonizers. Nevertheless, was this Society able by her effort to consolidate in a few bunches of years a qualified work labor, able to administrate, with some extent of difficulty, all that the Ghanaian State took to be run by herself.

When I arrived in Ghana mighty projects were concluded – and there was behind only 17 years from the Independence. Akosombo, the impressive dam, containing the waters from the Volta River, was able to generate electricity to supply all the Country. Long electric lines of high tension were stretched from Akosombo to the neighbor countries of Alto Volta and Dahomey. Takoradi, where Richard Wright arrived in Ghana, was no more the principal harbor; it was replaced by a modern port in Tema, near Accra – the only harbor with a dry dock in the whole Africa. This Tema port is connected to the capital Accra by a modern highway. Tema houses a large complex of aluminum production, because the large capacity of electricity generation from Akosombo. Several hotels is scattered in the Country, but there is in Accra the Ambassador and the Continental; in Tema, the Meridian, and others in Kumasi and Tamale. There is the Bank of Ghana, the Standard Commercial Bank, and for development the National Investment Bank, the Bank for Housing and Construction, the Social Security Bank and the Agricultural Development Bank. The overseas ship line is named Black Star Line – the star in the National Flag, and the air transport runs by the Ghana Airways. Local businessmen run large scale corporation, as Mankoadzi in tuna business, from the fishing in the ocean to the canning of the fish; or Markofi, assembling buses and Japanese cars. At this time, the major brewery is run by the government. And impressive, there is the University of Ghana, in Lagon, together with the polytechnic schools of Kumasi and Cape Coast, dropping in the work market young people capable to run the wide project of Kwame Nkrumah⁶ to nationalize the economy of Ghana. The enormous project of Nkrumah starts before the Independence, since he was elected

⁶ Francis Kwame Nkrumah, in 1951, based in the new Constitution of the Gold Coast Colony, written by the Ghanaian people, is elected the first Prime Minister. Yet, the struggle for the independence moves on until 1957, when it is obtained. Nkrumah stays as Prime Minister.

Prime Minister when the nation was still the Colony of Gold Coast. The action of Nkrumah was to create large national corporations capable to work in strategic sectors of the economy, not yet existent, as the ones before referred.

Yet, saying again as said Richard Wright, ***black life was everywhere***; in Accra one could see, not only along the streets, but inside of the institutions ***black life***. Inside of any bank, the teller was black. If one had some question to ask, the manager was black. If one needed to talk to the Governor of Bank of Ghana, this man would be a native son. The pilots of Ghana Airways, almost all, were black. Very much rare one find the commandant of an aircraft from GA being white; but even in these situations, the co-pilot was national. Finally, the professors of Ghana University and Technology Schools, they were as well Ghanaians.

On the other hand, in Dakar, a former French Colony, ***black life*** was not so evident. Banks with tellers and managers: they were French or white French born in Senegal, called as *pied noire*, black footed. In the aircrafts of *Air Afrique*, the pilots were all white, but the air attendants were black, to give some exquisite peculiarity to the flight ambience. Very much scarce was to find one black pilot in *Air Afrique*. The commercial companies in Dakar downtown were owned by French, *pied noire* or people from the Levant. I have met indeed few black entrepreneurs, struggling for a place among the consolidated French world.

Black Power, the edition I've received from Amazon, has a long introduction from Amritjit Singh⁷. Concerning the book and his author, Singh says:

I suggest that Black Power is one of the richest texts in the tradition of travel literature. Years before V S. Naipaul, Wright offers a model that still deserves attention for its intricate detail, its sense of drama, and its uncompromising honesty in communicating the observer's complicated responses. Unlike Naipaul, whose travel books tend to be brilliant trajectories of raw nerves and preconceived theories of whole and "half-made" societies, Wright finds a way of transcending his own personal reactions and ideological preferences to include a variety of other responses to the African landscape, about many of which he himself has serious reservations.

Amritjit Singh, at the same introduction, warns:

If in the mid-1950s, Black Power was for many a hard book to take, it remains a politically incorrect book even today. Also, Wright's approach to the problems of other societies and cultures predates the intense scrutiny to which Western essentialist epistemologies and developmental narratives have been subjected in recent years. Yet Wright strongly rejects exoticized or romanticized versions of other cultures to which many Western commentators on both the Left and the Right continue to subscribe. While Wright confronts the West with the disparity between the practice and rhetoric of its policies, he also challenges Africans to take hold of their destiny through a disciplined struggle to join the twentieth century. In his Fanon-like enthusiasm to create new, dynamic

⁷ Rhode Island College, professor. Was born in India, son of the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. He is lawyer of the American Civil Liberties Union.

communities, Wright does not foresee the dangers of industrial development for both the masses and the environment.

Notwithstanding, the nice images that Richard Wright can generate out of his imagination, they were there as in the fragment that follows:

We were in the Bay of Biscay and the ship pitched and rolled; I liked that, for it made me feel that I was really on the ocean. Heaving seas and tossing ships never made me ill. I always pictured in my mind the ship lurching forward and I could see the prow dipping, churning the sea, throwing up spray and foam as it lunged forward; and then I knew that the stern had to lift and, at the same moment, I knew that the huge ship had to roll to the right and I could feel it tilting-seeing it in my mind's eye-and then feeling the weight of the water of the ocean resisting and forcing it back into an upright position which it would hold for a moment, perilously balancing itself in the sliding waters; and I would wait for the ship to roll in the opposite direction, to the left; and I'd know that this same motion would have to be repeated endlessly, and I agreed with it, identifying myself with the ship and visualizing all of its motions as being necessary and natural, even when the pitching and rolling accompanied each other. . . .

Along the sea navigation, Richard Wright became companion on the dinner table of an Associate Justice for Nigeria's Supreme Court. It was easy to see that that was indeed the first contact that Richard Wright had with an African; but somehow, would show the way he would behave himself along his future stay in an African Country. The Judge in front of him, at the table, was pictured as follows:

At dinner I watched Mr. Justice take his wheat germ, his yeast tablets, his vitamins, and his laxative sticks. I struggled against an oblique sympathy that was dawning in me for the man. How England had mangled his soul! The truth was that the judge was living in the wrong century. His enslaved grandfather had desperately pulled himself out of servitude, had lifted himself above the tribal level, and, in doing so, he had been akin to the millions of Europeans and Americans of the nineteenth century who had so valiantly overthrown the remnants of feudalism. Mr. Justice represented the victory of enlightenment: he could read, he could vote, he was free; but he was adamant against the hungers of the new generation.

And why Richard Wright's behave? Because at the shared table there was the following dialogue:

Do you ever think of developing your country?" I asked him. "No; my talent doesn't run in that direction," he said. "What professions will your children follow?" "Law and medicine," he said promptly.

"Suppose your son wanted to be a mining engineer. . . ." "That would be difficult," he admitted.

"That's why we drove the English out of America," I told him. Mr. Justice, it all depends upon how free you want to be. I'm neither anti- nor pro-British, but if I lived under British rule and wanted to develop and exercise my natural and acquired powers and the British said no, I'd be anti-British. Tell me, do you believe that the American colonies were right in taking their independence?"

He grinned at me.

"It's not the same thing," he said. "We are different. These boys in Africa want to go too fast. You and I have been in touch with the Western world for two, three hundred years."

"Say, you know, if you were not black, I'd say that you were an Englishman. In fact, you are more English than many English I've met," I told him.

Reactions flickered across his face; then he decided to laugh. "I am English," he said.

"But you cannot live like the English," I reminded him. "What do you mean?"

"Do you have the British constitution in Sierra Leone?" "No; but –"

"Why not?"

"They are not ready!"

"What do you call ready? Are people civilized and ready to govern themselves when they become so desperate that they put a knife at the throat of their rulers? Must the native rulers of all of Britain's colonies be graduates from prisons?"

He rubbed his chin and grinned at me. "But it mustn't go too fast," he mumbled stubbornly.

"Who's to time this development?" I asked.

We had reached an impasse. As we ate I looked past his shoulder and he looked past mine. We were still friendly, but we knew that we could not agree. It was not ideology that separated us, but fundamental attitudes toward life.

"I like Americans," he said as he left the table; there was something wistful in his eyes."

The welcome that Mr. Wright was giving to his trip companion, Mr. Justice, as he called him along all the trip, considering the fact that he was facing a magistrate – a concerned person, gentleman, an African creature – in fact show coherence with his declared prepare for Africa, as he says:

"I'll go by ship, if I go", I said. "That would give me time enough to read up on the history of the country".

Over the Easter Sunday luncheon table, I mapped out my voyage. I wanted to see this Africa that was posing such acute questions for me and was conjuring up in my mind notions of the fabulous and remote: heat, jungle, rain, strange place names like Cape Coast, Elmina, Accra, Kumasi. . . . I wanted to see the crumbling slave castles where my ancestors had lain panting in hot despair. The more I thought of it, the more excited I became, and yet I could not rid myself of a vague sense of disquiet.

I excused myself from the table and consulted the Encyclopaedia Britannica and the description of the Gold Coast it gave was vivid, replete with dangerous reptiles, gold, and diamonds. There were only three short paragraphs about the people who were described as being of the "Negro race." The Gold Coast was about four degrees from the Equator and teemed with mineral and agricultural wealth. I returned to the table.

"Do you think I'll have any trouble getting in?"

"You'd better apply for your visa at once," Dorothy advised. "If you have any trouble, get in touch with the Prime Minister. Meanwhile, George'll tell Nkrumah that you want to come. . . ."

"Just what's the setup in the Gold Coast? Are foreign affairs in the hands of the British?"

"Yes; and finance and the police too," she said. "And the rest of the cabinet ministers are African?" "Yes."

"I'm going," I said. It was decided.

At the point I was, reading *Black Power*, I've remembered his autobiography, **Black Boy (American Hunger)**:

"One winter morning in the long-ago, four-year-old days of my life I found myself standing before a fireplace, warming my hands over a mound of glowing coals, listening to the wind whistle past the house outside. All morning my mother had been scolding me, telling me to keep still, warning me that I must make no noise. And I was angry, fretful, and impatient. In the next room Granny lay ill and under the day and night care of a doctor and I knew that I would be punished if I did not obey. I crossed restlessly to the window and pushed back the long fluffy white curtains – which I had been forbidden to touch – and looked yearningly out into the empty street. I was dreaming of running and playing and shouting, but the vivid image of Granny's old, white, wrinkled, grim face, framed by a halo of tumbling black hair, lying upon a huge feather pillow, made me afraid.

The house was quiet. Behind me my brother – a year younger than I – was playing placidly upon the floor with a toy. A bird wheeled past the window and I greeted it with a glad shout.

"You better hush," my brother said.

"You shut up," I said.

My mother stepped briskly into the room and closed the door behind her. She came to me and shook her finger in my face.

"You stop that yelling, you hear?" she whispered. "You know Granny's sick and you better keep quiet!"

I hung my head and sulked. She left and I ached with boredom.

"I told you so," my brother gloated.

"You shut up," I told him again.

I wandered listlessly about the room, trying to think of something to do, dreading the return of my mother, resentful of being neglected. The room held nothing of interest except the fire and finally I stood before the shimmering embers, fascinated by the quivering coals. An idea of a new kind of game grew and took root in my mind. Why not throw something into the fire and watch it burn? I looked about. There was only my picture book and my mother would beat me if I burned that. Then what? I hunted around until I saw the broom leaning in a closet. That's it . . . Who would bother about a few straws if I burned them? I pulled out the broom and tore out a batch of straws and tossed them into the fire and watched them smoke, turn black, blaze, and finally become white wisps of ghosts that vanished. Burning straws was a teasing kind of fun and I took more of them from the broom and cast them into the fire. My brother came to my side, his eyes drawn by the blazing straws.

"Don't do that," he said.

"How come?" I asked.

"You'll burn the whole broom," he said.

"You hush," I said.

"I'll tell," he said.

"And I'll hit you," I said.

My idea was growing, blooming. Now I was wondering just how the long fluffy white curtains would look if I lit a bunch of straws and held it under them. Would I try it? Sure. I pulled several straws from the broom and held them to the fire until they blazed; I rushed to the window and brought the flame in touch with the hems of the curtains. My brother shook his head.

"Naw," he said.

He spoke too late. Red circles were eating into the white cloth; then a flare of flames shot out. Startled, I hacked away. The fire soared to the ceiling and I trembled with fright. Soon a sheet of yellow lit the room. I was terrified; I wanted to scream but was afraid. I looked around for my brother; he was gone. One half of the room was now ablaze. Smoke was choking me and the fire was licking at my face, making me gasp.

I made for the kitchen; smoke was surging there too. Soon my mother would smell that smoke and see the fire and come and beat me. I had done something wrong, something which I could not hide or deny. Yes, I would run away and never come back. I ran out of the kitchen and into the back yard. Where could I go? Yes, under the house! Nobody would find me there. I crawled under the house and crept into a dark hollow of a brick chimney and balled myself into a tight knot. My mother must not find me and whip me for what I had done. Anyway, it was all an accident; I had not really intended to set the house afire. I had just wanted to see how the curtains would look when they burned. And neither did it occur to me that I was hiding under a burning house.

In times of Great Depression, Richard Wright then a grown up person, facing poverty and difficulties to express his literary vein, got into the Communist Party of the United States of America. Wright's involvement with the Bolshevik world will be part of his literary creation. In *Black Power* introduction, Amritjit says:

Because of Wright's widely known history with the Communist Party, his publisher persuaded him to declare his position on communism in his prefatory note to Black Power. While the note clarifies Wright's position on communism and Marxist analysis, it might convey to some readers today the misleading impression that the book is concerned with issues that were relevant only during the Cold War. Black Power is in fact more concerned with issues of basic development, the absence of which in Africa today has become a major concern for the global community.

Reading another excerpt of *Black Boy*, one can understand the psychology of a man who travelled to Ghana, there stayed for a couple of months and leaving the Country produced the book *Black Power*:

In trying to grasp why Communists hated intellectuals, my mind was led back again to the accounts I had read of the Russian Revolution. There had existed in Old Russia millions of poor, ignorant people who were exploited by a few, educated, arrogant noblemen, and it became natural for the Russian Communists to associate betrayal with intellectualism. But there existed in the Western world an element that baffled and frightened the Communist party: the prevalence of self-achieved literacy. Even a Negro, entrapped by ignorance and exploitation – as I had been – could, if he had the will and the love for it, learn to read and

understand the world in which he lived. And it was these people that the Communists could not understand. The American Communists, enjoying legality, were using the methods forged by the underground Russian Bolshevik fire, and therefore had to have their followers willing to accept all explanations of reality, even when the actual situation did not call for it. The heritage of free thought, - which no man could escape if he read at all, the spirit of the Protestant ethic which one suckled, figuratively, with one's mother's milk, that selfgenerating energy that made a man feel, whether he realized it or not, that he had to work and redeem himself through his own acts, all this was forbidden, taboo. And yet this was the essence of that cultural heritage which the Communist party had sworn to carry forward, whole and intact, into the future. But the Communist party did not recognize the values that it had sworn to save when it saw them; the slightest sign of any independence of thought or feeling, even if it aided the party in its work, was enough to make one suspect, to brand one as a dangerous traitor.

Richard Wright has arrived in Africa on June 16th, 1953. Written at the chronology part of the book **Richard Wright, Late Works – Black Boy (American Hunger) and The Outsider**, in *The Library of America* collection, this period of his life it is recorded:

1953 - From June to August, Wright travels in the Gold Coast (then a British colony with limited self-government, after 1957 the independent country of Ghana) to collect material for a book on Africa. Boat stops briefly in Freetown, Sierra Leone, en route to Takoradi, from there travels by road 170 miles to Accra, his main stop. Meets Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah and other members of the pro-independence Convention People's Party, as well as Osei Agyeman Prempeh II, king of the Ashanti, and other traditional leaders. Excursions take him from Accra to Cape Coast, Christianborg, and Prampram; visits slave-trading fortresses and dungeons. Travels almost 3,000 miles in a chauffeur-driven car, touring the interior through Koforidua to Mampong, and the Secondi-Takoradi to Kumasi regions. In general, Wright is fascinated by Africans but is reinforced in his sense of self as a Western intellectual.

Richard Wright then met Ghana. He already had put his body and soul in Africa, even in brief contact, in Freetown together with his companion, Mr. Justice. Wright says:

I dressed hurriedly and went on deck; an African city, under a blanket of blue mist, lay spread out before me. The heat was heavy, close, wet; and the city – Takoradi – seethed with activity at even this early hour. On the wharf was a forest of derricks, raves, sheds, machines and, as I looked closer, I could see that they were being operated by black men – a fact that must have produced pain in the heart of Dr. Malan of South Africa, for he had sworn that black men were incapable of doing these things.

I studied the swirling crowd on the docks and found it hard to distinguish men from women, for practically everyone had a richly colored cloth draped about him, and almost everyone was barefooted except the policemen who, to my horror, were dressed in dark blue wool! I wondered how they could stand it. . . .

As I already said in this essay, Wright has crossed the customs at Takoradi – emotionally, this is the impression out of the reading of his book – going inside the Africa that he has decided to know. Then he could see by himself, **black life was everywhere**.

BLACK LIFE EVERYWHERE

There were then a couple of years in which, when in Accra, I used to attend social meetings or common men's meetings, invited by many of my friends there. At the evenings, in the room of the Managing Director, praised MD among his deputies, a group of friends used to be in a table with as many bottles of beer as was the group. By the way, in a very peculiar use, each one of the group received one bottle of beer, the ones of 750 ml, very much chilled. Considering the natural warm of the city, few moments on and the beer would be warm. But this was the way. The bottle, always seems to me, that it was like a personal and individual gift for each of the friends, since each one only used to drink from his own bottle. I will try to recall, so many years has gone from those golden years, some of the participants of this happy hour: The MD, Mr. Edward Afriye; his deputy, Mr. Maxwell Badu; the Legal Officer, Mr. Joe Lamptey; the Financial Director, Mr. J. E. Ababio; the chairman of the Board, General Addo. Occasionally, Mr. Sam Butchway, the Governor of Bank of Ghana. The meetings were a typically an assembly of men: we use to speak about the recent history of Ghana, and the African context; as well, matters concerning the activities that each one was attending professionally; about women. . . And we drink a lot of local beer. Then, all of us where in the age of the forties.

I was called Kofi Brazilian, friend of all at the table. There was always one or two that were not permanent visitors, and of every one of those I became as well a friend. I only could speak in English, not capable to understand any one of the local dialects. Not even the *twi* considered as a kind of *lingua franca*, I was able to speak,

Such group of men had origin in various tribes of Ghana – Ashantis, Gaas, Fantes or Dagombas from the North – but generally they could talk and understand each other using the *twi* language. So, was very much common, in those meeting who used to last two hours, after some beers, they started to talk only in *twi*. Another thing: if in the meeting there was, for instance, two Dagombas, in a certain moment, they could start speaking their own language and probably nobody else will understand it. They just put aside the colonizer language. But then, without any prejudice they just forgot that the Kofi Brazilian could not understand what was about. Indeed, not once, but several times, when a newcomer was at the table, not knowing me, he addressed to me in some of the local languages, until that with laughs someone would say that I was understanding nothing. I've attended funerals with big crowd, relatives and friends invited me to visit their hometowns. I saw marriages and initiation rites, many harvest carnivals. Several times I was in the "bush" as they used to call the deep inland villages. In those places often nobody speak English – they communicate themselves using their native local dialect. And when in front of me the only language they spoke was *twi* or something.

Was my good friend Dr. J. W. S. De Graft Johnson, a professor at the University of Cape Coast, which few year ahead became Vice-President of Ghana. We were at the same age and we had similar tastes. As few other, we became good friends. In a cup d'état he was sacked, arrested and humiliated, and moved to a self-exile in Britain, where he died. There was so many moments of friendship between us, but I recall in special when together with the Africa Division of Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Itamaraty) I organized, together with the Ghanaian Ambassador, Vishnu Kofi Wasiamal, and the Brazilian Ambassador in Ghana, Lily Tarris da Fontoura, a trip of De Graft to Brazil, as the Vice-President of Ghana. It was an official visit, so he could be in Brasilia, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Porto Alegre, my hometown. When the visit has ended,

my son Luis Eduardo, flow in the presidential jet of Ghana for a visit to his Country and be lodged at his family in Accra.

Johnson was a professor, but a politician as well. As for that, he always was moving visiting friends that will support his campaigns. And very much often, he invited me, on Saturdays, for this kind of round trip. And often I was just a showing peace, since all the time he kept speaking in local tongues. When we run again, in the car, he was very happy telling me what was about in the meetings. And I've never seen in it any kind of prejudice toward me.

Many the meetings I've attended with politicians and businessmen, and among them they often spoke in *twi*, but it never have bothered me, since that when my host considered that I should participate, they turned to English.

I could say that facing the same situation Wright would act differently, However my explanation before is to say that I was among friends, people that I was in touch for already some years. Mr. Richard Wright was just arriving in Ghana, and all people that he made contact knew that they were facing somebody that expresses his opinions in write. So, he wrote:

I sat in the car with the Prime Minister and we roared out into the countryside. A blue haze hung over the green stretches of forest. Much of the conversation that went on was in tribal language and it didn't seem to bother them that I couldn't understand; it may be that they talked their tribal tongue so that I wouldn't understand. . . . I felt that some of them regarded me as an outsider who'd scorn their habits, their manners, and their attitudes. I found the African an oblique, a hard-to-know man who seemed to take a kind of childish pride in trying to create a state of bewilderment in the minds of strangers. Only a man who himself had felt such bewilderment in the presence of strangers could have placed so high and false a value upon it. They seemed to feel that hat which they did not reveal to me I could never know, but nothing could have been more erroneous.

Richard Wright is introduced to Mr. Kofi Baako, to whom Nkrumah refers as his right arm. Baako presents a long dissertation about the Independence, what in the Chapter XV of *Black Power* briefly is developed by Wright. He says:

After Mr. Baako had gone I marveled how, in one historic leap, the Gold Coast African had thrown off his chains. Though the conditions of his life were harsh, ridden with fetish and superstition, he would eventually be free, for he was determined and tough. . . .

Then, Richard Wright understands Independence, the main objective of his visit to the Gold Coast – nevertheless, he raises his incapacity to comprehend the question Africa: *ridden with fetish and superstition*. Here Wright's Occidental convictions, based in his origins of Afro-American, born and rise in the deep South of his Country, places where the slaves and his descendants were sadly degraded. Wright's origins are in this South were Occidental religions started by the clandestine use of the Bible, but so intensive that no matter how much was his level of contest, there was no space to see in religion the uses of fetishes in the Africa he was just arriving.

W. E. Ward in 1935 publishes his book *A Short Story of the Gold Coast*⁸, (Richard Wright uses it as one of the reference book for *Black Power*), *tell as follows the origin for the Ashanti Nation*:

⁸ This rare book, out of print, is available at www.dacostaex.net/pcd.html

The beginning of the Ashanti nation really dates from the coming of the Golden Stool. One Friday, the story goes, Okomfo Anokye called a great meeting of the Ashanti people, at which Osei Tutu, the queen-mother Manu, the chief and the queen-mother of Kokofu, and many others were present; and there he brought down from the sky by his magic power, with darkness and thunder, and in a thick cloud of white dust, a wooden stool, partly covered with gold. He told Osei Tutu and all the people that the stool came from Onyame and contained the spirit (sunsum) of the whole Ashanti people.

Ward explains his own position:

This is another story like those about coming from holes in the ground. I do not believe all the details of Anokye's magic. But neither will I take the easy way of saying that here is not a word of truth in it. I do not know how much believe; and so I give the story for what it is worth. It would be a pity for it to be lost.

Mr. Richard Wright obsessively show his discomfort when called as “doctor”, word that among the common nationals mean only the way of calling any person wearing suit and tie, and lodged in a hotel – no matter if he was black or white. Wright, on the other hand, feels himself comfortable saying that he has no formal superior education: he is a self-made man in Literature. But the truth is that, even without any university formation, he spent his life reading an impressive variety of books – and books from the Occidental culture. Yet, saying without religion to follow, underlying his psychological structure, there was the religious feeling of his Protestant origins of Afro-American. Then, Mr. Wright, with the support of just few books read about Africa, was ready to move, with movements of go and return, inside of the dreamed and incognita Africa. Many years in the future, the Polish journalist, Ryszard Kapuscinski, would write:***

A certain afternoon, prior to my depart from Gorée, Jarda, another journalist that I met in Cairo, came to visit me. He was in Dakar, like me, for the African Black Arts Festival. We spent many hours visiting each one of the stands, trying to understand the various masks and sculptures from the people Bambaras, Macondes and Ifes. For both of us, all of them shown an aspect of horror. As we have seen, at night, bright from the light of burning ashes, they were terrifying.

Jarda and I were discussing about the difficulties that we would face to write a brief article, with few words, about African art. Inside of a different world for us, completely unknown for us, we felt our incapacity to translate for the readers, using only our own concepts and vocabulary. Absolutely sure about our difficulties, the sensation that we were feeling was of full impotence.

If we have lived at Herodoto's times I and Jada would be Citas, because that was the people who lived in the part of Europe where we were born. Riding speed horses that so much enchanted the Greeks, we would be riding joyfully across the woods and forests, throwing arrows and drinking kumis; Herodoto would be concerned about us, would ask for our way of life, our religions, our way of dressing and eating. Thereafter, Herodoto would write precisely the way how we have attracted the Persian for the trap of our harsh winter, of implacable cold, defeated their Army, and the King Dario, pursued by our cavalry hardly escaped with life.

Let's read what wrote Richard Wright:

I was astonished to see women, stripped to the waist, their elongated breasts flopping wildly, do a sort of weaving, circular motion with their bodies, a kind of

queer shuffling dance which expressed their joy in a quiet, physical manner. It was as if they were talking with the movements of their legs, arms, necks, and Torsos; as if words were no longer adequate as a means of communication; as if sounds could no longer approximate their feelings; as if only the total movement of their entire bodies could indicate in some measure their acquiescence, their surrender, their approval.

And then I remembered: I'd seen these same snakelike, veering dances before. . . . Where? Oh, God, yes; in America, in storefront churches, in Holy Roller Tabernacles, in God's Temples, in unpainted wooden prayer-meeting houses on the plantations of the Deep South. . . . And here I was seeing it all again against a background of a surging nationalistic political movement! How could that be?

When I'd come to Africa, I didn't know what I'd find, what I'd see; the only prepossession I'd had was that I'd doubted that I'd be able to walk into the African's cultural house and feel at home and know my way around. Yet, what I was now looking at in this powerfully improvised dance of these women, I'd seen before in America! How was that possible? And, what was more, this African dance today was as astonishing and dumbfounding to me as it had been when I'd seen it in America.

Never in my life had I been able to dance more than a few elementary steps, and the carrying of even the simplest tune had always been beyond me. So, what had bewildered me about Negro dance expression in the United States now bewildered me in the same way in Africa.

I'd long contended that the American Negro, because of what he had undergone in the United States, had been basically altered, that his consciousness had been filled with a new content, that "racial" qualities were but myths of prejudiced minds. Then, if that were true, how could I account for what I now saw? And what I now saw was an exact duplicate of what I'd seen for so many long years in the United States.

I did not find an answer to that question that afternoon as I stared out of the window of the Prime Minister's car. But the question was lodged firmly in my mind, enthroned there so strongly that it would never leave until I had, at least to my satisfaction, solved the riddle of why black people were able to retain, despite vast distances, centuries of time, and the imposition of li n cultures, such basic and fundamental patterns of behavior I response.

We rode on through the cheering throngs. Whenever the car slowed, the black faces, laughing and excited, with heads thrown back, with white teeth showing, would press close to the windows of the car and give vent to:

"Free-dooooom!"

But my emotions were preoccupied with another problem. I low much am I am part of this? How much was I part of it when I saw it in America? Why could I not feel this? Why that peculiar, awkward restraint when I tried to dance or sing? The answers to choose questions did not come until after I penetrated deep into the African jungle. . . . On we rode. The crowds surged, danced, sang and shouted, but I was thinking of my mother, of my father, of my brother. . . . I was frankly stunned at what I saw; there was no rejection or condemnation; there was no joy or sorrow; I was just stupefied. Was it possible that I was looking at myself laughing, dancing, singing, gliding with my hips to

express my joy ... ? Had I denied all this in me? If so, then why was it that when I'd tried to sing, as a child, I'd not been able to? Why had my hands and feet, all my life, failed to keep time? It was useless to say that I'd inhibited myself, for my inability to do these simple things predated any desire, conscious or unconscious, on my part. I had wanted to, because it had always been a part of my environment, but I had never been able to!

I wrote a letter to my grand friend in Ghana, Mr. Edward Afriye⁹ telling him that I have read the book *Black Power*. I told him that the reason why I was informing him about the reading of a book, not a special things, was because a name appeared that called my attention: Kwame Afriye. I asked him if this person was related to him. He told me in answer that Kwame was his elder brother, dead three years before (2004). Because of this, I made a clip from the Chapter XIII of *Black Power*, and forwarded it via Internet. I wished that he shared with me the record of his brother in a book with material related to the Independence of the Gold Coast. For me, this was a big thing.

Mr. Afriye gave his answer:

My reaction for the book Black Power will be, maybe, because I've never read it all. So, I can't give my opinion about it. But once I've read a summary from a book about Brazil – time when I have never before been in Brazil. The summary listed so many bad things that I just throw it in the fire. I have the same feeling about Black Power. In Ghana, years 1950, the people could not even think that two men walking together would be homosexuals. Nevertheless, this was the vision that this man got here. Only this makes me to put him aside, as a person that chooses only to show bad things. Since I have never read the book, I can't give any opinion. Regards, Eddie.

Actually, in the note I've attached to the clip on *Black Power*, I was not asking for a judgment of one book that, quite surely, my friend had never read. I was glad to send you an information concerning somebody I guessed could be his relative. The answer of Mr. Afriye, doubtless, shows the mark of grief that the book makes in the Country who has received him with open arms, but, to be precise, all persons with some sense of fear. There was a lady, Mrs. Annah Cudjoe, secretary for the Propaganda, of Women's Department of the CPP - Convention People's Party, who authorized by the Prime Minister received Mr. Richard Wright. He explains:

So often had the Africans been deceived that distrust had become enthroned in the very processes of their thoughts. I could feel Mrs. Hannah Cudjoe's distrust of me; it came from no specific cause; it was general. I was a stranger, a foreigner, and, therefore, must be spoken to cautiously, with weighed words. Distrust was in full operation before any objective event had occurred to justify it. A stranger confronting an African and feeling this distrust would begin to react to it and he'd feel himself becoming defensively distrustful himself. Distrust bred distrust; he'd begin to watch for evasion; he'd begin to question a flattering phrase. So, with no basis in immediate reality, both sides would begin regarding the other warily, searching for hidden meanings in the most innocent statements. In the end, what had begun as a stranger's apprehension of the African's wariness would terminate in a distrust created out of nowhere, conjured up out of nothing. This fear, this suspicion of nothing in particular came to be the most predictable hallmark of the African mentality that I met in all the Gold Coast, from the Prime

⁹ Dead in July, 2011.

Minister down to the humblest "mammy" selling kenke on the street corners. . . .

The event which has upset so much my friend, Mr. Afriye, it is on the Black Power:

One evening I accompanied a young, American-educated African to an outdoor dance arena, the Weekend in Havana. The specialty of this establishment, as with all the dance spots in the Gold Coast, was a shuffling, lazy kind of somnambulistic dance step called High Life. Curiously enough, even here I observed that tendency of the African sexes to segregate themselves. Little knots of women – they all wore European dress to these social affairs clustered together. I was informed that this avoidance of the opposite sex was but an extension of the rituals of the tribal African family life; in the home men and women slept under different roofs and ate their meals separately, even when they were married. And so ingrained had those habits become that even when they were participating in non-African activities they tended to keep to their fundamental patterns of behavior. Perhaps it made them feel move at ease, quieted a sense of guilt for deserting their traditional ways ... ?

I compelled myself, out of politeness to my host, to watch the dancing. Nothing could have been move boring to my temperament than such spectacles and I sat with a fixed smile on my face, nursing a bottle of beer, wishing I was somewhere else. I'd seen better and more spirited dancing among the Negroes of New York's Harlem and Chicago's South Side, but since it was expected of me to watch Africans demonstrate that they could imitate Europeans or Americans, I thought that I'd better pretend to be interested.

Then my eyes caught sight of something that all but pulled me tip out of my seat. Two young men walked slowly across a corner of the dance floor, each with his arm tenderly about the waist of the other, their eyes holding a contented, dreamy gaze. . . . What was that? Had I misjudged the African capacity for the assimilation of Western emotional conditionings? But maybe those two boys were from Oxford or Cambridge ... ? They didn't look like it. I wanted to question my friend about this, but I feared appearing too indelicate. But, just as I repressed my impetuosity, the two young men glided gracefully out upon the dance floor and moved with all the sexual suggestiveness of a mixed couple to the catchy music. Again I inhibited myself, not wishing to wade too abruptly into such matters with people whose reactions I could never predict. After all, I was a stranger in a strange land. I sat quietly, watching, wondering. Had the British brought homosexuality to Africa? Had the vices of the English public-school system somehow seeped through here? Just as the African had taken inordinately to alcohol, had he taken to this too? Then I was startled to see two more young men, holding hands, walk leisurely across the dance floor, heading, it seemed, for the bar. A deep, calm togetherness seemed to exist between them. Was this more evidence of that innocence of instinct that I had previously observed? I could no longer restrain my curiosity. I leaned toward my host and whispered:

"Look here. What's going on?"

"I don't get you," he said; but I saw an ironic twitch on his lips as he suppressed a smile.

"If what I see happening here tonight between young men happened in New York, the police would raid the place and throw the people in jail. . . ."

My friend guffawed.

"What do you think you see?" he demanded.

"I think I see some pretty overt homosexual behavior," I said quietly.

"You don't," he said flatly.

"Then what am I looking at?"

"You're looking at nice, manly tribal young men who love dancing," he explained in a somewhat aloof voice.

"Look, I'm no moralist; I don't care what they are," I said. "But I want to make sure."

"And I'm making no moral defense of Gold Coast boys," he said. "But you don't see any homosexuality. Listen, I wanted you to come here to see this. I could have called your attention to it, but I was waiting for you to notice it-"

"How could I escape it?" I asked him. "Now, why are they acting like that?"

"It's a bit complicated," my host explained as the music jumped all over the dance floor. "These young boys are still mainly tribal. They speak English; they go to school, to church; and they work as clerks, perhaps, in European offices. But their deepest reactions are still basically tribal, not European. Now, in tribal dances men dance with men, women dance with women, or they all dance together, or each person alone, if he wants to. . . . Tribal dancing is not uniquely sexual. Sometimes they dance for a god, to please him, to coax him, to tell him something. Sometimes they dance to please each other. Long habituation to this kind of dancing makes them, when they dance in public to Western tunes and rhythms which are replete with sexuality, still follow their tribal conditioning. There is no homosexuality here. In most tribal dancing men get used to touching or holding other men; they think nothing of it; and they'd be morally shocked, hurt, if they thought that you saw something perverse in it. So you have here a strange synthesis of seemingly disparate elements – young boys dancing together, embracing ardently, holding hands, with no thought of sex. They are brothers."

"I see," I said.

Each hour events were driving home to me that Africa was another world, another sphere of being. For it to become natural to me, I'd have to learn to accept without thought a whole new range of assumptions. Intellectually, I understood my friend's all too clear explanation of why boys liked to hold hands and dance together, yet the sight of it provoked in me a sense of uneasiness on levels of emotion deeper than I could control.

Later that evening the dance gradually reverted more and more to African patterns. The drums in the orchestra took over the tunes and beat out wild, throbbing notes. Around two o'clock in the morning there were but a few mixed couples on the floor – mostly everyone was dancing alone, his eyes half closed, his lips, hanging slightly open, his right hand pressed to his heart, i though lost in the sheer physical joy of movement. Presumably each person was dancing for himself or whatever friend or god he felt was near him, or for whoever wished to observe his ecstasy. The African seemed to feel that whenever he experienced son thing vital, he had to share it; his joy had to arouse joy in others, even though those "others" were unseen. It was to that which w not present to sight or touch, sometimes, that the African seemed to want to talk, to plead, to trust. There was in him a tinge of otherworldliness even when he danced to sexy jazz tunes; he seemed chronically addicted to a form of physical lyricism. He spoke with physical

movement, protested with a stiffening of his neck, argued with his legs, cajoled with his arms, said yes with his hips, and no with a slow roll of his head. . . .

James H. Cone, professor of Theology, wrote the essay *"The Gospel and the Liberation of the Poor"*, many years after Wright *Black Power*, can see at the Church of the American Blacks, what was said by the companion of Wright when attended a ball in an Accra popular arena. He said that *the tribal dance is not only a sexual issue; they dance to please a deity, to be nice to her and sometimes to tell to her something.*

Professor Cone wrote:

The Holy Spirit's presence with the people is a liberating experience. Black people who have been humiliated and oppressed by the structures of white society six days of the week, gather together each Sunday morning in order to experience another definition of their humanity. The transition from Saturday to Sunday is not just a chronological change from the seventh to the first day of the week. It is rather a rupture in time, a Kairos-event which produces a radical transformation in the people's identity. The janitor becomes the chairperson of the Deacon Board; the maid becomes the president of Stewardess Board Number I. Everybody becomes Mr. and Mrs., or Brother and Sister. The last becomes first, making a radical change in New York, 1969. The perception of self and one's calling in the society. Every person becomes somebody, and one can see the people's recognition of their new found identity by the way they walk and talk and "carry themselves." They walk with a rhythm of an assurance that they know where they are going, and they talk as if they know the truth about which they speak. It is this experience of being radically transformed by the power of the Spirit that defines the primary style of black worship. This transformation is found not only in the titles of Deacons, Stewardesses, Trustees, and Ushers, but also in the excitement of the entire congregation at worship. To be at the end of time where one has been given a new name requires a passionate response with the felt power of the Spirit in one's heart.

In the act of worship itself, the experience of liberation becomes a constituent of the community's being. In this context, liberation is not exclusively a political event but also an eschatological happening. It is the power of God's Spirit invading the lives of the people, "buildin' them up where they are torn down and proppin' them up on every leanin' side." When a song is sung right and the sermon is delivered in response to the Spirit, the people experience the eschatological presence of God in their midst. Liberation is no longer a future event, but a present happening in the worship itself. That is why it is hard to sit still in a black worship service. For the people claim that "if you don't put anything into the service, you sure won't get anything out of it." Black worship demands involvement. Sometimes a sister does not plan to participate too passionately, but before she knows what is happening "a little fire starts to burning and a little prayer-wheel starts to turning in her heart." In response to the Spirit and its liberating presence, she begins to move to the Spirit's power. How and when she moves depends upon the way the Spirit touches her soul and engages her in the dynamics of the community at worship. She may acknowledge the Spirit's presence with a song.

*Everytime I feel the spirit
Moving in my heart I will pray.
Every time I feel the spirit
Moving in my heart I will pray.*

*Upon the mountain my Lord spoke.
Out of His mouth came fire and smoke.
In the valley on my knees,*

Asked my Lord, Have mercy, please.

*Everytime I feel the spirit
Moving in my heart I will pray....*

Song is only one possible response to the Spirit's presence. God's Spirit also may cause a person to preach, pray, or testify. "I believe I will testify for what the Lord has done for me" is an often-heard response in the black church. But more often the presence of the Spirit elicits what W. E. B. Dubois called the "Frenzy" and what the people call the "shout," which refers not to sound but to bodily movement. "When the Lord gets ready," the people claim, "you've got to move," that is, to "stand up and let the world know that you are not ashamed to be known as a child of God."

Occidental like ourselves, in Brazil, we tend, as did Wright in his book, to make stereotypes. As for that, I recall what, like Wright, I saw in a restaurant in Accra, making it the support for a character in two of my writes:

Circling the group, moving as a coquet lady; speaking like in falsetto; moving with grace the eyes, in a man's meeting, in Brazil Francis Kwakw would be called "fresco"(queer).

But then, at the table, one voice has lifted and said: There are place in the tribe life for persons like him, pointing to Francis. There are so many activities that they can do with proficiency. They are born with some capabilities that the common men can't do, mainly when certain initiation rites. They deserve respect as granted to the fetish man. They are not necessarily homosexuals".

In another of my writes, based in anthropologic research I've put:

"Azonye said good bye and moved to her house. Adu took the decision to tell the news to his father, the general commander of the Benin Army. At the house of his father, Adu was moving as a common man – his voice was no more a falsetto and facing the father we was almost like an ordinary person – he was not showing nothing of the way he uses to move, as, for instance, when he was talking to Azonye. While telling to his father de adventures of the King of Benin, in flirtation with a foreign woman, the old general in no moment thought about the homosexuality of his son; he was paying full attention to what Adu was telling to him. In fact, the old general considered as natural, part of his culture the way Adu was – he indeed was one chosen by the deities.

Richard Wright in his short story, *The Man Who Lived Underground*, works on fantastic literature in a tone that conflicts to what he saw and will face:

"Though lying dead upon the table, he was standing in some mysterious way at his side, warding off the people, guarding his body, and laughing to himself as he observed the situation. They're scared of me, he thought."

Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960), make of his life a continuous research about the Afro-Americans in South of the USA and Haiti. His book, *Mules and Men* uses all the second part to examine the woodu (hoodoo), what somehow bothers Wright in Africa. Both Zora and Richard were born in deep South of USA, the late in a plantation near to Roxie, Mississippi and Zora in Notalsuga, county of Macon, Alabama. Both as well have experienced the common problems for the Negroes in places where they were born, and the same, both got success in the literary movement of their time, the Harlem Renaissance.

I'll record some excerpt of his *Men and Mules*¹⁰:

New Orleans is now and has ever been the hoodoo capital of America. Great names in rites that vie with those of Hayti in deeds that keep alive the powers of Africa.

Hoodoo, or Voodoo, as pronounced by the whites, is burning with a flame in America, with all the intensity of a suppressed religion. It has its thousands of secret adherents. It adapts itself like Christianity to its locale, reclaiming some of its borrowed characteristics to itself. Such as fire-worship as signified in the Christian church by the altar and the candles. And the belief in the power of water to sanctify as in baptism.

Belief in magic is older than writing. So nobody knows how it started.

.....

I was once talking to Mrs. Rachel Silas of Sanford, Florida, so I asked her where I could find a good hoodoo doctor.

"Do you believe in dat ole fageyism, chile? Ah don't see how nobody could do none of dat work, do you?" She laughed unnecessarily. "Ah been hearin' 'bout dat mess ever since Ah been big enough tuh know mahself, but shucks! Ah don't believe nobody kin do me no harm lessen they git somethin' in mah mouth."

"Don't fool yourself," I answered with assurance. "People can do things to vou. I done seen things happen."

Richard Wright Tired for not obtaining the answers he was looking for in Africa, where he was already for a couple of weeks, in a meeting with the Secretary for the Prime Minister sustained the following dialogue:

"I feel like the Africans have put their juju on me," I muttered, trying obliquely to let her know that I was dissatisfied.

She whirled in her swivel chair and stared me.

"You must be careful of that," she said in a deadly serious tone. "What?" I exclaimed, coming fully aroused now. "There's something to juju," she said to me sternly.

I wanted to howl with laughter, but a Prime Minister's office was not the place to act like that.

"You're kidding," I said.

She shook her finger solemnly in my face and said: "Watch it!"

"My God, you don't believe that," I said.

"There's more to it than you think," she snapped.

I sank weakly into a chair and stared at her. I'd met this cool, intelligent, and efficient woman in London and Paris and we'd had long discussions about the state of the world; and I had respected her opinions. And now, here in this heat and humidity, she was hinting to me that juju was real and not just a psychological delusion.

"What do they do to people down here?" I asked her. I walked slowly out of the office, feeling defeated. Lord, juju ... ? Let 'em bring on their juju. . . . If you didn't believe in it, it could never influence you. . . . And that juju was real was being

¹⁰ Hurston – *Folklore, Memories & Other Writings. Mules and Men. Tell My Horse. Dust Tracks on a Road. Selected Articles. The Library of America, 1995.*

hinted to me in the Prime Minister's office! Oh, no! Oh, no!

Later on, Wright gets an appointment to a person, Dr. Ampofo, that he considers as part of the bourgeoisie:

He was most gracious and showed me his beautiful new home which, he said, had been designed and built by his wife. He next showed me a collection of his wood carvings which he himself had carved. He had a medical degree; he was the head of a huge African family; he had acted in the movies; and he conducted a thriving business in timber... .

With drinks at our elbows, the doctor and I got to work at List.

"Do you mind talking about yourself?"

"Not at all," he said.

He'd come to Mampong in 1919 after four years of schooling in his father's village; he had lived in Mampong until 1922, then he'd attended boarding school at the Annum Presbyterian Senior School until 1926. He related how he and his friends had had to walk for three days and nights to reach this school, for there was no transportation in those days. His schooling continued at Cape Coast in the Mfantshipim's Boys' Secondary School. In 1930 he got a scholarship to study art for his B.A., but, halfway through, he gave it up for science. He won a competitive scholarship for study in England, and in 1932 he went to Edinburgh and completed his studies, obtaining his medical degree in 1939.

After this kind of introduction, Wright moves to what was of his truly interest in that moment: to get the opinion of a prominent citizen of the Gold Coast, concerning the Independence. He then makes a chain of considerations to reach what he was indeed searching for answer – the juju:

Dr. Ampofo immediately gave his position concerning Nkrumah:

He is on his way to wipe out the identity of people like me. It's not democracy. I know he has the masses with him, but it's not democracy. The real center of power in our society was in the hands of the chiefs, but Nkrumah has smashed all that.

Yet about juju, in visiting a gold mining site:

I was told that juju interferes with the working day of the mine in the mines to a surprising degree. If a boy has a curse put on him by another boy, the cursed boy becomes terrified and must forthwith leave for his tribe to become purified. No persuasion of his more learned brothers or Europeans is of any avail. When ill though the company maintains a hospital, many African workers prefer their own native witch doctors, believing their illnesses to be the results of spells cast by someone. They do not trust the "white man's" medicine. And, often, it is only when they are so ill that they cannot resist that many of the miners in this area will accept modern medical treatment.

REMINISCENCES

Then I've arrived to the end of *Black Power*. Confusion is in my mind. First of all, I must bind me to the book. I've lived almost the same experience of Wright, with the difference of nearly twenty years, when most of what Wright has seen and lived, have changed completely. He arrived at the Gold Coast – I've arrived in Ghana. I was there in a commercial venture, but I could not leave aside all the years that I was a journalist, and have write about an Africa still colony of Europe, and struggling for independence. But I was writing in Brazil, based in material coming from international news sources. I was reading books, written by some visitors of Africa, and scarce Africans themselves.

So, in a certain way, I was facing the same perplexities of Richard Wright. Arriving in Africa I could see that I was in a completely different world, and if I wanted to know it I would have to accept it as it was. I would be pretentious if, even in a small group of new friends, I wanted to change anything. No judgments, no professorial behavior. Just a visitor with open eyes to learn. As said earlier Ryszard Kapuscinski, "*Inside of a different world for us, completely unknown for us, we felt our incapacity to translate for the readers, using only our own concepts and vocabulary.*" In my essay, here, I have included excerpt from Wright's autobiography, precisely where he tells his behavior as a very small boy, burning his house. For sure, I was completely different from him, as far as I can remember of things on a so distant part of my life.

Considering the personality and Wright's behavior at the Gold Coast, may be easy to understand the reaction of my friend Afriye, saying: *I haven't read and I haven't liked it.* But for sure, indeed there is more than just his affirmation of ignorance concerning the book. I can imagine, in a society consolidated along the centuries using oral communication, where events run mouth to mouth across the generations, and stories are carried on in births, initiation rites, weddings, funerals, about the presence of an American which disdain juju and the chieftaincy system; which suggests Occidental methods of statistics; is incapable to comprehend the Ashanti hierarchy, and above all considers two men walking holding hands as homosexuals.

My friend Afriye says that he dislikes book's summary because of a summary about Brazil that has disgusted him. But at the short note he sent to me concerning *Black Power* he doesn't say how he heard about the book. I may guess, nevertheless, that it has happened in one of those hometown village meetings, probably in a funeral, since this is a serious motive for the large families and innumerable friends gather to have long wished meetings. Yet, the name of Afriye's elder brother was in the book. Presumably, Kwame Afriye knew and read the book. And, most of all, probably Kwame has heard the opinion of his boss, Kwame Nkrumah, who has invited Richard Wright to visit the Gold Coast. I may guess, as well, that the entire Colony high hierarchy, not only Nkrumah, had access to the book, making the circle of people giving opinions about *Black Power* naturally spread like circles of a stone thrown in the water. To produce the book Wright stayed in the Country for two months and the base for the final production was his reading of few books, some articles on *Britannica Encyclopedia*, and his personal background. Even if by his virtuosity in writing he could touch readers at the Gold Coast – is important to remark that, at this time, eighty percent, or more, of the population was illiterate – the readers universe was very little, but for sure powerful. This people wouldn't be capable to understand why he was not capable to understand the obvious for the reader: The African way of Life.

One of the sore points in Wright's *Black Power* is homosexuality. My personal experience and the way I see reaches to the difference between affection and evil talk. The North Americans I know, and they are often shown in movies and literature, carry not the habit to hug women, less men. So I can image a boy, from a plantation in a small County in Arkansas, deep South of the USA, far distant of the habit to embrace people, elsewhere, when saw in Africa men holding hands no other conclusion reached he but: "*pretty overt homosexual behavior*". Richard Wright broke his ties with the poor and ignorant South, moving to the North, New York with the open gate for the southern migrants, wishing to express their art and talent. The same Wright that broke, as he did with the South, his ties with the Communist Party, searching space in Paris – far from

discrimination and Marxism. But he could not broke his ties with some kind of prejudice, as the image of men walking or dancing together: It must be homosexuality.

I have found strange or peculiar when in Dakar, on my first trip to Africa, to see tall Wolof men walking at the William Ponty, Gorée School, holding hands. But there was no need for a longer stay in Dakar – I was there, at that time, for two weeks – to feel myself natural and comfortable, walking holding hands of the new African friends or colleagues. At home, in Brazil, it is absolutely common and normal two friends to walk, one with the arm over the shoulder of his friend, in a kind of half hug. So, what is the difference between this natural behave and the African holding hands? In Ghana where I collected so many good friends – some I've considered as my brothers – walking holding hands was a natural habit. Between the Brazilian hug or half hug and the African hand holding, there is no difference at all.

Massa, want chop?

This question it is in *pidgin* English, the English that illiterate people uses every day when in contact with the ones who can't speak their native language. Exactly the same *Massa, want chop?* Came into my daily world when I was lodged at the Guest House for foreigners, managed by stewards. My steward was Alassan, and that was the way he used to call me for the meals. Richard Wright Describes, in his way, the ambience that I've found at the night when the Bank for Housing and Construction has inaugurated and made of me the first guest, its brand new guest house. If we chance small details, as for example, the shoes: At Wright time, colonial times, his steward moved in the house barefoot. My steward, Alassan, wore shoes. Wright recorded as follows his meeting with his steward:

I turned and saw a steward, dressed in white, black of face, barefooted, his lips hanging open expectantly.

"What is it?"

"Massa want chop?"

"What?"

"Chop? Hot chop? Cold chop?"

I hadn't understood anything; it was my first experience with pidgin English and I shook my head and confessed: "I don't understand."

"Chop, Massa." He went through the motions of eating, carrying his hand to his mouth and chewing vigorously. "Dinner?"

"Yasa, Massa. When you want."

My steward has a name – Alassan, I said before. As another steward that Wright would meet, both came from the Northern region of the Country. They were as well Muslims. Alassan already knew the alphabet, wore shoes and in spite of speaking constantly in pidgin English, he was very much fluent in the Colonizer language. Alassan, as well, accepted a kind of syncretism, mingling what he learned at the Madrassas in his North with the millenary animism. In his boy's quarters – place in the back yard where was placed a dependence for steward's families – one could see the fetishes in herbs and potions, mainly in goats' horns, thought how to use by the village Marabout. Some digestion troubles faced by his foreigner guest, Alassan helped giving some herbs tea.

My steward, Alassan, was I kind of griot – a story teller – filling with his charm the night with no television or broadcast from Brazil. In a short story which I named "*Heitor e Alassan*" (*Heitor and Alassan*), I explore this side of Alassan.

Richard Wright tells us about his meeting with his steward born in Gold Coast

North. Reading his lines, I can hear the sound of the English coming out of the mouth of my Alassan:

I went to dinner and, after we had eaten, Mr. Shirer called in his cook. He was a tall man of about forty, jet black, slightly bald and skinny. Mr. Shirer told him that I was an American of African descent, that I'd come back to see the land of my ancestors, that I wished to ask him about his life. He had been a little nervous, but now he smiled, sat on a little stool, and nodded.

"Black man's country mighty sweet, sar," he told me; Mr. Shirer was translating.

"Where are you from?" I asked him.

The North, sar."

"Why are you in Accra now?"

Tin cooking for Mr. Shirer, sar."

"You are away from your tribe. Do you miss your sisters and brothers?"

"Oh, yes, sar! It's hard to be away from my tribe. But I go back as often as I can. This is not my home, sar! My home is with my tribe."

What do you do to keep up your spirit while you are away from your tribe?"

"I observe all the customs, sar. I sacrifice a sheep or a goat at times of feasts or celebrations and I implore my ancestors to watch over me. If I die, I want to be taken back to my tribe and buried with my ancestors.

I questioned him about his dying so far from the land of his ancestors and his expression darkened. It was obvious that it was something that distressed him acutely. He told me:

"A stranger died far from home, sar. We buried him, but not like we bury our own. We dug a grave in a pathway pointing toward his home. Then we sacrificed a sheep and let the blood drip on the grave and we said a prayer to the spirits. We said:

"Spirits and gods, this man had every intention of going home to die. You can see that, for his grave points in the direction of his home.' So you see, sar, his ancestors must forgive him. He wanted to do right, but he didn't have a chance."

And do you think that that prayer fixed everything?"

Oh, yes, sar."

"Now, tell me ... Do you ever think of going far away, to America, for example?"

"Oh, no, sar! Never!" he said, shaking his head slowly. "I couldn't leave the land of my ancestors. There is land here for me to cultivate and watch over."

(As he spoke I wondered what terror must have been in the hearts of the slaves who had been, through the centuries, shipped to the New World? It is highly possible that the psychological suffering far outweighed the physical!)

"Now, suppose a great calamity overcame a man? What would that signify?"

His eyes widened and he shook his head, staring at me as though he thought that I was mad.

"Why, sar, it means that a witch has got 'im," he told me with conviction.

"And he'd have to go to a witch doctor and get sonic thing to counteract the evil eye."

"So when someone dies, it is caused by someone else?"

"Of course, sar. If he is old and has had many children, then he dies a natural death. But if he is young, it is certain that someone has killed him, done something to him. For a young man or young woman, there is no natural death. It is only when you are old and have had many children that your ancestors call you to join them."

"What do you think happened to the millions of your black brothers who were sold into slavery and shipped to America?"

He was thoughtful for a long time, then he answered, speaking, slowly:

They were being punished, sar. 'Their dead fathers had m - thought for theta. Their ancestors did not afford protection for them, abandoned them, did not defend them as they should have -"

"Why?"

"It's hard to tell, sar.

"Is there anything that those slaves could have done to avoid being sold into slavery?" I asked him.

"Oh, yes, sar!" he said, brightening. "Listen, sar, if you are bound in chains, helpless, and if you swear an oath, your ancestors will turn into lions or tigers or leopards and come to your aid. Why, you could ride one of those lions or tigers or leopard . six hundred miles in one night. Now, sar, these lions or tigers or leopards that your ancestors turn into are not the kind of animal that a hunter shoots at in the forest. No, sar. . . . They are magical animals. . . . You can't see them. But you can hear them crying' at night. And if you hear one of those magical animals crying at night, it means something bad will happen. It might even mean that the fetish priest will die."

I next asked him:

"Now, look at me. You can see from the color of my skin that I'm of African descent. Now, after all of these years, why do you think I've come back to the land of my ancestors? Do you think that they called me back for some reason?"

Again the tall, serious cook was deeply thoughtful; he scratched his head and said soberly:

"It's hard to tell, sar. Such a long time has passed." He looked at me and shook his head pityingly. "I'm afraid, sar, that your ancestors do not know you now. If your ancestors knew you, why, they'd help you. And, of course, it may be that your ancestors know you and you don't know them, so much time has passed, you see, sar. Now if, by accident, you happened to go back into the section where your ancestors are buried, they'd perhaps know you but you wouldn't know them. Now, if, while you are in Africa, your ancestors should recognize you, then something strange will happen to you and then, by that token, you'd know that you were in touch with your ancestors."

"What sort of strange thing would happen to me?"

"It's hard to tell, sar," he said.

I gave him a few shillings for "drink" and told him good-bye. I sat brooding. Mr. Shirer watched me and then broke into a soft laugh.

"Does that interview satisfy you?"

"Yes," I told him. "Is he typical?"

"Quite typical," he said. "You see, in my work in the Department of Welfare, I have a lot of trouble with beliefs of this sort. This concern with ancestors makes

it difficult for the government to launch schemes of resettlement. For example, if, in a certain region, the land is poor and if it's thought that it's better for a tribe to move into a new area, the people will resist, because they do not want to leave the ground on which their ancestors lived and died. To the grave of his ancestors a than will go each year and kill a chicken and drop the blood on the earth, hoping that this will appease his ancestors, hoping that his ancestors will rest in peace and not come into this world and take him to keep them company in the world of spirits. The ground in which his ancestors are buried is charged with spirits whose influence is both good and bad. Therefore, to leave a spot in which ancestors are buried creates terror in some African tribes. . . . They feel that they are leaving their very souls behind them. It is only after making many sacrifices to the earth, to the dead ancestors, that they are able to leave at all."

The illiterate cook had given me, by implication, answers to many questions. It was now obvious why Africans had sold so many millions of their black brothers into slavery. To be a slave was proof that one had done something bad, that one was being punished, that one was guilty; if one was guilty, one was a slave; if one was not guilty, one would not be in the position of a slave to be sold into slavery meant that your ancestors had consigned you to perdition! To treat a slave harshly was a way of obeying the spiritual laws of the universe! Hence, he who has misfortune merits it. Failure is a sign of badness; winning is a sign of goodness and, indicates that the man who wins has a good cause. If you take something from a man who has lost, whose luck has deserted, you are doing right and adding to your own power and goodness. . . ."I wonder," I said to Mr. Shirer as I sipped my coffee, "what would happen to that cook if he died here in Accra?"

"Let's see what he has to say about that," Mr. Shirer said. "I'll ask him; I'll call him back-"

"Oh, don't bother – "

"He'll be glad to tell you," Mr. Shirer said, rising and going to the door and calling the cook.

He entered again, wiping his hands on his apron. The question was put to him by Mr. Shirer and the cook answered:

"Oh, that's easy, sar. My son would take me back and bury me in the land of my ancestors."

"But what if your son were not here?" I suggested relentlessly.

That one bothered him. He studied the floor for some minutes, and then he said:

"Then my friends would bury me and then they'd watch my grave for those black ants who are called God's slaves. Now, you take one of those ants when lie is crawling over my grave, wrap that ant in a bundle of three stones, and then take that bundle to the land. where my ancestors are buried and bury it and my soul will be there. I'll be with my ancestors then."

These, of course, are but dreams, daylight dreams, dreams dreamed with the eyes wide open! Was it that the jungle, so rich, so fertile, was it that life, so warm, so filled with ready food, so effortless, prompted men to dream dreams like this? Or was it the opposite? These dreams belong to the African; they existed before the coming of the white man. . . . One thing was certain: their sense of reality was but a dream. It may be, of course, that dreams are the staunchest kind

of reality. . . . It may be that such beliefs fit the soul of man better than railroads, mass production, wars. . . . And the African is not alone in holding that these dreams are true. All men, in some form or other, love these dreams. Maybe men are happier when they are wrapped in warm dreams of being with their fathers when they die ... ?

Then, I remembered my Steward, Alassan. Wright does not record the name of his servant, but remarked that he came from the North, maybe Bolgatanga, or maybe Tamale, in any case, in the same region where long ago a man that called Usman Dom Fodio, in a jihad, spread out the visions of Muhammad. And the remembrance of my steward brought me to use an excerpt of “*Alassan and Heitor*”, the short story I’ve written.

The guest house, the residence for foreigners, is a Big House, with two floors, inside of a large plot it has as well ornamental palm trees and flowers everywhere. Differently from what Wright saw in colonial times, when “flowers booming” were a rare exception, as in the house of Dr. Ampofo, he has visited in Mampong. The Bank guest house, as many other Big Houses at the Airport Residential Area, show beautiful green areas. At the bottom of the house there it is an annex named Boy’s Quarters, place where live together with his son, Kofi (Friday) and a young wife – the cook Alassan. Slim in completion, limping slightly, in a way that only paying attention to it, one would see, since he moves agile like a dancer always on the stage. Alassan is in his forties. Awake before all in the house, since when guests came down for breakfast, the table is ready. The cook is more than this – and this is remarkable: always finding means to make happy his temporary bosses, producing copies of them home food – since he took care of the full routine of a Big House: clean de floor and the bathrooms; clean the shirts, underwear, socks, bedclothes, and in absence of alarm clock, awake the ones needing to work early in the morning.

Interesting use is that, even with a woman living with him at the Boy’s Quarter, she never would do the jobs of Alassan in the Big House – even the ones for us very much feminine. On the other hand, Alassan would never do, at his home, any of the tasks he uses to do, seemingly, in a pleasant way.

Alassan is for the foreigners a special character: He carries in his face long scarifications starting besides of his mouth, in both sides, passing through his cheekbone to reach the base of his eyes, in a tribal mark. Other aspect of his character was the capability to solve small problems for him, but indeed by troubles for the guests. Often those troubles came from the ingestion of food made with different ingredients, mainly the palm tree oil. Abundance of sea fruits and troubles with the electricity system, making the food in the freezers sometimes became out of consumption date. Besides it, for many of them, there was the distance from home, bringing homesickness, depressions and anxieties.

The imaginary line that split into two the plot with the Big House and the Boy’s Quarter make almost the same with the Steward. He was a vigorous head of family could be seen, when in contact with both the wife and little Friday, crawling from one side and another in the sand of the plot. But indubitably, his subservience to the guests was just apparently.

Another face of Alassan was his capability to tell stories. Meanwhile he move from the kitchen to the dining room always was offering his ideas. After diner

commonly there was a kind of *soirée*. This session was somehow difficult, since there was the pidgin English of Alassan and the fact that most of the Brazilians in the house have a modest knowledge of the English language. But this seems not to bother neither Alassan, nor the audience, paying full attention to stories from his tribe, or about the others parts of Ghana that he has lived.

Born in the North of Gold Coast, from tribes who had suffered the influence from the nomads moving across the Sahara, with the Mahometan creed, he as preserved all his life the belief in Prophet's voice. But living in other parts of de Colony, as in the Forest, the Ashanti large community, Alassan became sensible to the Ashanti creed. Probably he was born to deal with herbs and illness; the reason why in his compound there was herbal medicines in goat's horns. In his talks, Alassan reminded the visit of a group of Chinese technicians, when he learnt that in China de herbal medicine is something very much serious, having faculties for the teaching of this type of doctors, to act in the far distant villages of the immense and crowded country. Alassan at this time, he advocates the need of poor countries, as he considered his actual Ghana, and Brazil as well, to intensify the use of traditional medicine.

Alassan likes to speak about the Africa he knows and that he generalizes for the whole Africa. In spite having been born in the Savannah Belt, near the Sahara, he admires the Forest. In various opportunities, in the evening's *soirées*, he told stories related to the house of the deity Asamando, and the Forest supreme god, Odomankoma. He spokes about other kind of deities, goblins, animals and fetishes. He spokes about trees and rivers with life, capable to award or punish the ones inside the Forest. And from the culture Ashanti he made no scarifications on his son Friday, since this people do not accept mutilations in the body, as the circumcision or scarification in the face, as the one Alassan carries for the whole life."

Concerning this essay, Richard Wright is reaching to the end of his Gold Coast journey. He has moved around the Colony, like a newsman made several interviews, collected what he for sure considered his demand – so, he considers himself, in writing a book, to have a readymade receipt for the man who was leading his Country, and by his example, large portions of Africa, to the self-government. Prior to the book, indeed a kind of preface for *Black Power* Wright addresses a letter to Kwame Nkrumah, that open saying:

Dear Kwame Nkrumah:

My journey's done. My labors in your vineyard are over. The ship that bears me from Africa's receding shore holds a heart that fights against those soft, sentimental feelings for the suffering of our people. The kind of thinking that must be done cannot be done by men whose hearts are swamped with emotion.

Before, nevertheless, of reading Wright's letter to Nkrumah, I've decided to include here just a drop of his sensible writing, when he will describe the same experience both of us had once in the past: the slaves warehouses. I was in one of them, in Gorée, Senegal, and Wright and me, with no significance difference in time, at the castle El Mina – this huge sad monument of human madness and greed, across which innumerable portion of human being was sent, mercilessly, from their homeland, family and culture, to the harvest lands of Americas.

Richard Wright paint in words:

I reached Elmina just as the sun was setting and its long red rays lit the awe-inspiring battlements of the castle with a somber but resplendent majesty. It is by far the most impressive castle or fort on the Atlantic shore of the Gold Coast. Built originally by the Portuguese in 1482 with stones prepared in Portugal, it is approached by a drawbridge which, when lifted, foiled any attack from either natives or Europeans in the old days.

I crossed the vast courtyard and entered the auction room in which countless slaves had been sold. One had to know how to pick a good slave in those days, for slave traders were tricky men. They shaved all the hair off the Africans, oiled their bodies, making the ill look as good as the healthy. I stood in a tiny enclosure which had slits in the wall; it was here that African chiefs would hide themselves while their captives were being bid for by Europeans. The chiefs didn't want their victims to know who was selling them. . . . I saw the dungeons where the slaves had been kept-huge, bare rooms with stone floors.

No one will ever know the number or identity of the black men, women, and children who passed through these walls, but there is no doubt but that the men who dealt in this human flesh waxed rich. Even today the castle bears marks of crumbling luxury; there are marble sills at many of the doorways; there are lofty, spacious rooms which you know at a glance no slaves had ever entered. The mighty guns that still point toward the horizon and the misty landscape must have cost heaps of gold dust; and the mere upkeep of such an establishment must have necessitated a staggering turnover in human flesh each year. . . .

Some of the walls are thirty feet thick. Towers rise two hundred feet in the air. What spacious dreams! What august faith! How elegantly laid-out the castle is! What bold and plunging lines! What, yes, taste. . . . King Prempeh I was kept in a large bare room in one of the towers by the British. I stood gazing into that room and wondered what could have passed through his mind. . . . How he must have prayed to his ancestors for help!

Rumor among the natives has it that there is a vast treasure trove buried somewhere in the depths of the castle fortress. I don't think there is; but the native, remembering the horrible tales of what went on within these walls, likes to think that there is gold dust here, thousands of tons of it. If there is any treasure hidden in these vast walls, I'm sure that it has a sheen that outshines gold-a tiny, pear-shaped tear that formed on the cheek of some black woman torn away from her children, a tear that gleams here still, caught in the feeble rays of the dungeon's light-a shy tear that vanishes at the sound of approaching footsteps, but reappears when all is quiet, hanging there on that black cheek, unredeemed, unappeased – a tear that was hastily brushed off when her arm was grabbed and she was led toward those narrow, dank steps that guided her to the tunnel that directed her feet to the waiting ship that would bear her across the heaving, mist-shrouded Atlantic. . . .

I have been several times at the *Elmina*, the way in this Ghana days both the castle and the small village that surround it is known. After the last time I was there, in the years 1980, I wrote a short story based in a brief incident: I feel myself held in one of the ancient dungeon of the castle. I will reproduce herein the part three:

Five years had gone, since the day he was caught inside the elevator of his Faculty. Along this period his home library was being filled with book concerning

the slave trade. Some of them he bought in his travels, mainly in England where he found books of rare value cultural and technical. The second-hand bookstores were a source of good material, specially essays and academic thesis. Books arrived, coming from friends or colleagues living abroad. In five years he accumulated a section of this kind of literature, in fact his new reading passion, among the books of his professorial curriculum.

Suddenly the destiny, because one of his technical works, which arrived in one agricultural school of Ghana, turned his reading in a true possibility. It happened by an invitation from the World Food Programme (WFP), to present some of his thesis at the Cape Coast School of Agriculture.

As he has arrived in Accra in a Saturday afternoon, his host fellows organized a sightseen, Sunday, outside of the Capital.

The sightseen a routine for the Ghanaian professors would be travel across the beautiful coastal line of Ghana. To make the excursion pleasant, they have invited a professor of History, Mr. Isaac Ephson.

Then they have started the trip directing themselves to the Mine.

—The Mine? Asked Tupinamba, the Brazilian professor.

—The Mine! – With emphasis Ephson confirmed. And showing fair play and knowledge of History, from his faculty classes, asked to Tupinamba:

- Do you travel as well carrying the instructions Dom Juan III gave to Lopo Soares?*
- And what was that? Answered Tupinamba, surrounded by the new and apparently formal new friends.*
- There is a story saying that when the Portuguese friend of the king, Lopo Soares, went to say good bye to his majesty, before travelling to the African Coast, the sovereign would have said: “Soares, I’m sending you to the mine, don’t be fool enough to return from there still a poor man.”*

Tupinamba smile just by courtesy; but the Ghanaian companions laugh because in spite being an old story, somehow it reminds them of the ways Europeans treated Africa, before the years of Independence. Telling the story, the professor of History wanted that the Brazilian joined the sad feeling engraved in the soul of Africans.

Before they have departed from Accra, they saw the Christiansburg Castle, now the Presidential Office. Then they passed in front of the Ussher Castle, bearing today the French name of Crève Couer, now a public jail. Both edifications are from the seventeenth century.

While the vehicle moved along the coast, Ephson was showing and explaining to Tupinamba what was left by Portuguese, French, British and Dutch, each one to defend, by his turn, one against the other, the lands they have grabbed.

They passed in front of the Cape Coast Castle, in the town, bearing the same name, where on next Monday Tupinamba would start his lectures. This castle was there since 1662. They haven’t stopped for a visit. There will be time for Tupinamba while in the city.

Along the way they saw various fishermen villages. They’ve bought along the road stuffs as bananas, long ones as Tupinamba has never seen before, crabs in bunch and a grass cutter – he would know is a very popular and tasty animal in Ghana, when cooked with exquisite herbs.

Then, they entered in a small village, and Tupinamba astonished saw his car moving besides a crowd, and there was a group carrying in the shoulders a coffin. And behind the skiff, first: men carrying boxes of beer; second: a brass band making the crowd act like in a carnival. Everybody was moving their bodies at the sound of the band.

After the mortuary procession the car arrived to a creek or a sea arm, with a small wooden bridge.

- *We are in Elmina! The Mine! – Professor Ephson said gladly.*

The information was not big news, since in the books he read along five years made of him a connoisseur, in theory, the issues related to slave trade. Nevertheless, to look to the impressive castle in solid stone, as defying the time, was indeed a grand impact on him. Moreover, finally he could see, with naked eyes, the spot from where came great portion of the Brazilian Afro-Descendants, the ones called in Portuguese, “Negros Minas”. It was indeed an extraordinary event for the Brazilian Afro-Descendant, the professor Tupinamba.

- *The Castle – professor Ephson explained – was built by the Portuguese to shelter their ships wandering across the world, and to be, as well, a deposit for the gold extracted in the region around. Considering it all, the decision was to build a solid and impressive castle, as big as the powerful Portugal at that time, able to make fear to the other Europeans. Then they have built the castle São Jorge da Mina, with stones coming from the distant Portugal. But the castle was changing masters, and the last ones were the British, so the castle got the name of Elmina.*

In the process, Tupinamba heard the story about Africa and Brazil. Ephson explained that the last night in land by Pedro Alvares Cabral, before the discovery of Brazil, was in that castle.

Then, as an astonished boy, Tupinamba moved from a chamber to another chamber, to a canteen, to a bedroom. – This is the bedroom where Cabral slept! – Gladly, said Ephson.

Was lead to jails, solitaires, canteens for officials and sailors, he examined instruments of torture, fetters and its iron balls, fixed in slaves’ ankles. Tupinamba asked to his colleagues to hold him inside of one jail, barely with air, to feel, somehow, the sensation of one slave inside the dungeon. But there was no panic, he could put aside his claustrophobia, that five years ago, put him in terrible panic, inside of a disarranged elevator. This time, the hands that closed him inside the dark space, in a few time, opened the door. Extremely gentle, the Ghanaian professors, each one, was trying to show somehow, to Tupinamba, what has been done to their ancestors, by the slave hunter and trader.

Then, suddenly it has happen:

It was only two minutes, the space in time that the Ghanaian professors left his Brazilian colleague alone inside of a huge room, very high from the floor to the ceiling, near of what only few small square holes was there for air entrance. Along the floor ditches stretches; ditches that one day collected human excrement; and here and there, lays iron balls and chains that the corrosive sea air in spite the centuries could not destroy. The huge room has only two gates: the entrance one, Ephson taught him. And explained more: the second gate was called the no return one. This second gate ended in a small quay where pulling their chains and seeing being thrown in the sea what was left of their dignity, the slave boarded the slave

ship.

The vision Tupinamba had at that moment was helped only by a pale light coming from the second gate, at that moment with no door or any obstacle. It was a pale light in purple from a sun nesting in the far horizon.

Then reality came in full, with shades of gray and black: the panel which his imagination, five years ago, joining dots, drew: the stones in the floor was the same that his hands fumbled centuries ago. The sound of the tide choking against the walls of the Elmina was the same heard by generations that crossed the first gate, all oppressed fearing the unknown, by the anguish of being alone and by the overwhelming feeling of the imminence to lose everything. Tupinamba's sense of smell which in the past recorded only the odor of corrosive sea air and mould, could not find the smell of beings no more in that room. Suddenly, from his memories as single and terrible flurry came the smell of humanity.

The man and the woman Tupinamba has never seen, felt them intensively as in the past. Their plangent voices came to his mind, in the moment, from a distant past, but not immemorial. Then lighted in Tupinamba one detail: He understood just when his colleagues came to rescue him from the room of the no return door that the woman and the man of his fantastic meeting five years ago [at the school elevator] speak precisely has used to do in his boyhood two kind old persons with whom he lived together for a short time – his longevous great-grandparent.

RICHARD WRIGHT'S FAREWELL

Dear Kwame Nkrumah:

My journey's done. My labors in your vineyard are over. The ship that bears me from Africa's receding shore holds a heart that fights against those soft, sentimental feelings for the sufferings of our people. The kind of thinking that must be done cannot be done by men whose hearts are swamped with emotion.

While roaming at random through the compounds, market places, villages, and cities of your country, I felt an odd kind of at-homeness, a solidarity that stemmed not from ties of blood or race, or from my being of African descent, but from the quality of deep hope and suffering embedded in the lives of your people, from the hard facts of oppression that cut across time, space, and culture. I must confess that I, an American Negro, was filled with consternation at what Europe had done to this Africa. . . .

Yet, as grim as the picture is, its grimness is somewhat relieved by the fact that African conditions are not wholly unique. The suffering that your people bear has been borne triumphantly before, and your fellow countrymen have shared that burdensome experience of having had their destinies dictated by alien powers, from above, an experience that has knit together so many of the world's millions in a common consciousness, a common cause.

Kwame, let me put it bluntly: Western lay and academic circles utter many a hard saying against Africa. In defending their subjugation of Africa, they contend that Africa has no culture, no history, no background, etc. I'm not impressed by these gentlemen, lay or academic. In matters of history they have been more often wrong than right, and even when they have been right, it has been more by

accident than design, or they have been right only after facts have already been so clearly established that not even a fool could go wrong.

I found only one intangible but vitally important element in the heritage of tribal culture that militated against cohesiveness of action: African culture has not developed the personalities of the people to a degree that their egos are stout, hard, sharply defined; there is too much cloudiness in the African's mentality, a kind of sodden vagueness that makes for lack of confidence, an absence of focus that renders that mentality incapable of grasping the workaday world. And until confidence is established at the center of African personality, until there is an inner reorganization of that personality, there can be no question of marching from the tribal order to the twentieth century. . . . At the moment, this subjective task is more important than economics!

Manifestly, as in all such situations, the commencement of the injection of this confidence must come from without, but it cannot and will not come from the West. (Let's hope I'm wrong about that!)

Have no illusions regarding Western attitudes. Westerners, high and low, feel that their codes, ideals, and conceptions of humanity do not apply to black men. If until today Africa was static, it was because Europeans deliberately wanted to keep her that way. They do not even treat the question of Africa's redemption seriously; to them it is a source of amusement; and those few Europeans who do manage to become serious about Africa are more often prompted by psychological reasons than anything else. The greatest millstone about the neck of Africa for the past three hundred years has been the psychologically crippled white seeking his own perverse personal salvation. . . .

Against this background one refrain echoes again and again in my mind: You must be hard! While in Africa one question kept hammering at me: Do the Africans possess the necessary hardness for the task ahead?

If the path that you and your people had to tread were an old and tried one, one worn somewhat smooth by the past trappings of many people; had Europe, during the past centuries, dealt with Africans differently, had they laid the foundations of the West so securely that the Africans could now hold Western values as basic assumptions – had all this happened, the question of "hardness" would not have presented itself to me. (I know that some Europeans are going to say: "Ah, look, a black man advocates stern measures for Africa! Didn't we tell you that they needed such as that?") But Kwame, the truth is that nothing could have been more brutally horrible than the "slow and sound" educational development that turned into a kind of teasing torture, which Europe has imposed so profitably upon Africa since the fifteenth century. . . .

The accomplishment of this change in the African attitude would be difficult under the best of circumstances; but to attain that goal in an Africa beset with a gummy tribalism presents a formidable problem: the psychological legacy of imperialism that lingers on represents the antithesis of the desired end; unlike the situations attending the eruptions of the masses in Russia, China, and India, you do not have the Western-educated Africans with you; in terms of mechanization, you must start from scratch; you have a populace ridden with a 90 per cent illiteracy; communication and transportation are poor. . . .

Balancing these drawbacks are some favorable features: West Africa,

thanks to climate, is predominantly black! You can pour a libation to the nameless powers that there are no white settlers to be driven out, no knotty land problem to be solved by knocking together the heads of a landed black bourgeoisie. And, though the cultural traditions of the people have been shattered by European business and religious interests, they were so negatively shattered that the hunger to create a Weltanschauung is still there, virginal and unimpaired.

If, amidst such conditions, you elect, at this late date in world's history, to follow the paths of social and political evolution such as characterize the history of the institutions of the Western powers, your progress will go at a snail's pace and both of your flanks will be constantly exposed and threatened..

On the one hand, just as you organized against the British, so will other Nkrumahs organize against you. What Nkrumah has done, other Nkrumahs can do. You have made promises to the masses; in your heart of hearts I know that you wish hotly to keep those promises, for you are sincere. . . . But suppose the Communists outbid you? Suppose a sullen mood sets in? Would not that give the Communists their opportunity?

On the other hand, I cannot, as a man of African descent brought up in the West, recommend with good faith the agitated doctrines and promises of the hard-faced men of the West. Kwame, until they have set their own houses in order with their own restless populations, until they have solved their racial and economic problems, they can never – no matter what they may say to you at any given moment!-deal honestly with you. Given the opportunity, they'll pounce at any time upon Africa to solve their own hard-pressing social and political problems, just as you well know that they have pounced in the past. And, also, I'm convinced that the cultural conditioning of the Africans will make it difficult for them to adjust quickly to values that are solely Western, values that have mocked and shamed them so much in the past, values that go against the grain of so much in the African heart. . . . After all, you have already been down that road.

Your safety, your security lie in plunging full speed ahead!

But, how? What methods? Means? What instrumentalities? Ay, there's the rub. . . . The neurotically fluttering attempts of missionaries, the money lust of businessmen, the cool contempt of European soldiers and politicians, the bungling cynicism of statesmen splitting up families and cultures and indigenous national groupings at their pleasure – all of these have left the task of the redemption of Africa to you and yours, to us. . . . And what a task! What a challenge! What an opportunity for creation ... !

One simple conviction stands straight up in me: Our people must be made to walk, forced draft, into the twentieth century! The direction of their lives, the duties that they must perform to overcome the stagnancy of tribalism, the sacrifices that must yet be made-all of this must be placed under firm social discipline!

I say to you publicly and frankly: The burden of suffering that must be borne, impose it upon one generation! Do not, with the false kindness of the missionaries and businessmen, drag out this agony for another five hundred years while your villages rot and your people's minds sink into the morass of a subjective darkness. . . . Be merciful by being stern! If I lived under your regime, I'd ask for this hardness, this coldness. . . .

Make no mistake, Kwame, they are going to come at you with words about democracy; you are going to be pinned to the wall and warned about decency; plump-faced men will mumble academic phrases about "sound" development; gentlemen of the cloth will speak unctuously of values and standards; in short, a barrage of concentrated arguments will be hurled at you to persuade you to temper the pace and drive off your movement. . . .

But you know as well as I that the logic of your actions is being determined by the conditions of the lives of your people. If, for one moment, you take your eyes off that fact, you'll soon be just another African in a cloth on the streets of Accra! You've got to find your own paths, your own values. . . . Above all, feel free to improvise! The political cat can be skinned in many fashions; the building of that bridge between tribal man and the twentieth century can be done in a score of ways. . . .

You might offer ideology as an instrument of organization; but, evidently, you have no basis for that in Africa at this time. You might, by borrowing money from the West, industrialize your people in a cash-and-carry system, but, in doing so, you will be but lifting them from tribal to industrial slavery, for tied to Western money is Western control, Western ideas. . . . Kwame, there is nothing on earth more afraid than a million dollars; and, if a million dollars means fear, a billion dollars is the quintessence of panic. . . .

Russia will not help you, unless you accept becoming an appendage of Moscow; and why should you change one set of white masters for another ... ?

There is but one honorable course that assumes and answers the ideological, traditional, organizational, emotional, political, and productive needs of Africa at this time:

AFRICAN LIFE MUST BE MILITARIZED!

... not for war, but for peace; not for destruction, but for service; not for aggression, but for production; not for despotism, but to free minds from mumbo-jumbo.

I'm not speaking of a military dictatorship. You know that. I need not even have to say that to you, but I say it for the sake of others who will try to be naive enough to misconstrue my words. I'm speaking simply of a militarization of the daily, social lives of the people; I'm speaking of giving form, organization, direction, meaning, and a sense of justification to those lives. . . . I'm speaking of a temporary discipline that will unite the nation, sweep out the tribal cobwebs, and place the feet of the masses upon a basis of reality. I'm not speaking of guns or secret police; I'm speaking of a method of taking people from one order of life and making them face what men, all men everywhere, must face. What the Europeans failed to do, didn't want to do because they feared disrupting their own profits and global real estate, you must do.

Above all, Africans must be regimentalized for the "long pull," for what will happen in Africa will spread itself out over decades of time and a continent of space. . . . You know as well as I that what has happened in the Gold Coast is just the beginning; and there will be much marching to and fro; there will be many Sunderings and amalgamations of people; there will be many shiftings and changes of aims, perspectives, and ideologies-there will be much confusion before the final redemption of Africa is accomplished.

Do I sound gratuitously hard, cruel? How I wished I did not have to think of such measures! Yet, what could make such measures unnecessary? Only a West that could come forth and admit that it didn't do the job, that the job has to be done, and that it was willing to help you to do it. . . . Yet, I cannot conceive of the West acting in that manner, even though all the common sense of history, moral and material, is in favor of it. In its fight against Communism, Europe could bind Africa to her by such an act of help and understanding. . . . Of course, when this is pointed out to Westerners, they shrug their shoulders and say that they have timed African development according to their conceptions of what Africans can do; but, in saying this, they forget that they are not free to indulge in such fantasies. Western time today is being timed by another time: Communist time! It would seem that the issue of self-preservation alone would jolt Europeans out of their infantile dreams about Africa. . . .

And in exchange for aiding honest Africans to shake their people loose from their tribal moorings, the West could have all the raw materials it wanted, a larger market for its products. . . . And an Africa deliberately shaken loose from its traditional past would, for a time, be a more dependent Africa than the angry, aimless Africa of the present day. Such an Africa could menace nobody.

Why do I bring up the question of "menace"? Because the mere thought of a free Africa frightens many Europeans. Europeans do not and cannot look upon Africa objectively. Back of their fear of African freedom lies an ocean of guilt! In their hearts they know that they have long tried to murder Africa. . . . And this powerful Europe, with atom bombs in its hands, is haunted by visions of an eventual black revenge that has no basis in reality. It is this subjective factor, among others, that makes the West brutally determined to keep Africa on a short chain. . . .

Will the West come forward and head up these nationalist revolutions in Africa? No; it's a dream. If it comes true; I'd be the first to hail it. But since we cannot wait for dreams, let us turn to reality. . . . That is, the militarization of African life.

The basis, concrete and traditional, for the militarization of African life is there already in the truncated tribal structure. The ideological justification for such measures is simple survival; the military is but another name for fraternalization, for cohesiveness. And a military structure of African society can be used eventually for defense. Most important of all, a military form of African society will atomize the fetish-ridden past, abolish the mystical and nonsensical family relations that freeze the African in his static degradation; it will render impossible the continued existence of those parasitic chiefs who have too long bled and misled a naïve people; it is the one and only stroke that can project the African immediately into the twentieth century!

Over and above being a means of production, a militarized social structure can replace, for a time, the political; and it contains its own form of idealistic and emotional sustenance. A military form of life, of social relations, used as a deliberate bridge to span the tribal and the industrial ways of life, will free you, to a large extent, from begging for money from the West, and the degrading conditions attached to such money. A military form of life will enable you to use people instead of money for many things and on many occasions! And if your

people knew that this military regime was for their freedom, for their safety, for the sake of their children escaping the domination of foreigners, they will make all the sacrifices called for.

Again I say: Would that Western understanding and generosity make these recommendations futile. . . . But if the choice is between traditional Western domination and this hard path, take the hard path!

Beware of a Volta Project built by foreign money. Build your own Volta, and build it out of the sheer lives and bodies of your people! With but limited outside aid, your people can rebuild your society with their bare hands. . . . Africa needs this hardness, but only from Africans.

You know as well as I know that politics alone is not enough for Africa. Keep the fires of passion burning in your movement; don't let Westerners turn you away from the only force that can, at this time, knit your people together. It's a secular religion that you must slowly create; it's that, or your edifice falls apart.

There will be those who will try to frighten you by telling you that the organization you are forging looks like Communism, Fascism, Nazism; but, Kwame, the form of organization that you need will be dictated by the needs, emotional and material, of your people. The content determines the form. Never again must the outside world decide what is good for you.

Regarding corruption: use fire and acid and cauterize the ranks of your party of all opportunists! Now! Corruption is the one single fact that strikes dismay in the hearts of the friends of African freedom. . . .

In your hands lies the first bid for African freedom and independence. Thus far you have followed an African path. I say: So be it! Whatever the West or East offers, take it, but don't let them take you. You have taken Marxism, that intellectual instrument that makes meaningful the class and commodity relations in the modern state; but the moment that that instrument ceases to shed meaning, drop it. Be on top of theory; don't let theory be on top of you. In short, be free, be a living embodiment of what you want to give your people. . . .

You and your people need no faraway "fatherland" in either England or Russia to guide and spur you on; let your own destiny claim your deepest loyalty. You have escaped one form of slavery; be chary of other slaveries no matter in what guise they present themselves, whether as glittering ideas, promises of security, or rich mortgages upon your future.

There will be no way to avoid a degree of suffering, of trial, of tribulation; suffering comes to all people, but you have within your power the means to make the suffering of your people meaningful, to redeem whatever stresses and strains may come. None but Africans can perform this for Africa. And, as you launch your bold programs, as you call on your people for sacrifices, you can be confident that there are free men beyond the continent of Africa who see deeply enough into life to know and understand what you must do, what you must impose. . . .

You have demonstrated that tribes can be organized; you must now show that tribes can march socially! And remember that what you build will become a haven for other black leaders of the continent who, from time to time, long for rest from their tormentors. Gather quickly about you the leaders of Africa; you need them and they need you. Europe knows clearly that what you have achieved so far is not confined to the boundaries of the Gold Coast alone; already it has radiated

outward and as long as the influence of your bid for freedom continues to inspire your brothers over the teeming forests of West Africa, you can know that the ball of freedom that you threw still rolls. . . .

With words as our weapons, there are some few of us who will stand on the ramparts to fend off the evildoers, the slanderers, the greedy, the self-righteous! You are not alone. . . .

Your fight has been fought before. I am an American and my country too was once a colony of England. . . . It was old Walt Whitman who felt what you and your brother fighters are now feeling when he said:

Suddenly, out of its stale and drowsy lair, the lair of slaves,
Like lightning it le'pt forth, half startled at itself,
Its feet upon the ashes and rags – its hands tight to the throats
of kings.

O hope and faith!

O aching close of exiled patriots' lives!

O many a sicken'd heart!

Turn back unto this day, and make yourself afresh.

And you, paid to defile the People! you liars, mark! Not for
numberless agonies, murders, lusts,

For court thieving in its manifold mean forms, worming
from his simplicity the poor man's wages,

For many a promise sworn by royal lips, and broken and
laugh'd at in the breaking.

Then in their power, not for all these, did the blows strike
revenge, or the heads of nobles fall;

The People scorn'd the ferocity of kings.



The letter addressed to the Prime Minister, Francis Kwame Nkrumah if one day it indeed has reached to his hand I have no doubt that it have choked him.

What can be said concerning the Ghanaians, without committing the fault of free generalization, is that they are a polite people. Consolidated is the sense of never offend somebody; do not hurt with words, actions or even corporal gestures the person they interact to. The young people, at the secondary school, learn how to treat his teachers, senior staff members and even senior students. They call work colleagues as Mister and their wives as Missis. At the everyday one can see all the time a certain care in choosing the words to avoid misunderstanding, searching for a gentlemen ambience. Crossing the dialogue of others require always *I beg your pardon*, what is made as well when presenting some divergence about the matter in discussion. This is the Ghana I knew.

When I've arrived Ghana by the first time, January 1976, I was a young lawyer, member of a commercial mission from Brazil. According to Latin use, being a lawyer, I used the title doctor before my name. Because of this, for some

years even the good friends I've collected in Ghana or called me Dr. Dacosta – Dacosta is a popular name at the West Coast of Africa – or after some time *Doc*, or ahead just Kofi, but when we were real good friends, the local name of the ones born in a Friday.

A gap between the common citizen and an authority is extremely wide. The judge dressing, with his black robe and a white wig seem to be more than a colonizer inheritance, but an incontrovertible sign of authority. Probably, only at home with his wife the magistrate will be called Kofi, or Kwame, Kwakw, etc.

Ghana is a formal Country and the letter of Wright, and the contents in his book are, maybe, as said at the preface of his *Black Boy* Amritjit Singh: "If in the mid-1950s, Black Power was for many a hard book to take, it remains a politically incorrect book even today".

I have made intensive research trying to know if Wright's letter to the Prime Minister it has reached to his hand. Trying to know if he indeed have received, and so, did he made any comments to the member of his circle of power? I asked to my friend Afriye – he said that at Nkrumah's time he was just a school boy, not concerned about politics. But, as I have summarized Wright's letter by telephone to Afriye, he guessed that hardly the Prime Minister, with the struggle for Independence, received the letter. Maybe, as some writers do, the letter was just a part of the book, being not a posted document. If this is true, has the book reached to Mr. Kwame Nkrumah?

Peter Abrahams once met Kwame Nkrumah in Accra, and recorded what can explain so how any reaction of Nkrumah face Richard Wright:

Richard Wright was surprised that even educated Africans, racially conscious literate people, had not heard of him and were skeptical of a grown man earning his living by writing. They could not understand what kind of writing brought a man enough money to support a family. Wright really wanted to understand the African, but – "I found the African an oblique, a hard-to-know man."

This same Peter Abrahams, along the decades of 1940/50 worked in London struggling for the Independence of some Countries in Africa. He tells a story which is something more to comprehend Nkrumah, and the difficulties of Richard Wright and a top leader of Africa's freedom, as Jomo Kenyatta, as well:

The president of our federation was an East African named Johnstone Kenyatta, the most relaxed, sophisticated and "westernized" of the lot of us. Kenyatta enjoyed the personal friendship of some of the most distinguished people in English political and intellectual society. He was subtle, subtle enough to attack one's principles bitterly and retain one's friendship. He fought the British as imperialists but was affectionate toward them as friends.

It was to this balanced and extremely cultured man that Francis Nkrumah proposed that we form a secret society called The Circle, and that each of us spill a few drops of our blood in a bowl and so take a blood oath of secrecy and dedication to the emancipation of Africa.

Johnstone Kenyatta laughed at the idea; he scoffed at it as childish juju. He conceived our struggle in modern, twentieth century terms with no ritualistic blood nonsense. In the end Francis Nkrumah drifted away from us and started his own little West African group in London. We were too tame and slow for him. He was

an angry young man in a hurry.



I'm closing this essay, a work that I've decided to do after the reading of Richard Wright's *Black Power – A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos*.

I sincerely believe in esthetic and historic value of his work, as well his contribution for the universal culture, as part of the Afro diaspora.