



Travel-Logical Readings of Cugoano, Equiano, Sancho, Wright and Brathwaite and the 21st Century Racial Realities in the West

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ABSTRACT

Timelines from 18th century slave narratives to modern fictional accounts in Literature of the Black Diaspora, document the maintenance of identity consciousness as a constant feature. Significantly representative of this feature are fragments of historical implications largely accountable for the behavioural patterning of characters portrayed in the narratives under study. The thrust of this paper is two-fold. The first is to map out the concise historiography of early Africans in the Diaspora, who were not transported through the Middle Passage to North American and British colonies as slaves. The second is an investigative attempt at identifying some predominating motifs embedded in characters portrayed in some major African-American and Caribbean narratives. Achieving this will bring the study into accounting for the independent status of some affected individuals and groups before their summary conversions into slaves; while equally taking into account some major activities that ushered in the conversion; early eighteenth century slave narratives of Quobna Ottoban Cugoano, Olauda Equiano and Ignatius Sancho's Letters are examined. Within the same line of scholarly scrutiny in the second segment of the paper, Richard Wright's Black Boy and Edward Rickardo Braithwaite's To Sir with Love are two of the principal texts assessed on the premise of 20th Century abolition realities in the United States that continue to haunt the same race even into the 21st Century.

INTRODUCTION

The antecedence birthing the realities from which *Literature of the Black Diaspora* has culminated, scholars have argued, is an interesting ensemble of challenging dynamics. At the epicentre of these realities is a race much maligned by its own history. Built around the key moments that make up the development of this literary tradition, is a web of chronological circumstances either paving way for the conception of new sub-genres in the diasporic literary traditions, or strengthening the body of already existing ones. This history it is, in its boundary between frankness and sometimes murkiness, that conveys the dreary accounts of what scholars have come to recognise as one of the world's most prominent literary traditions. Although some scholars like Okpewho Isidore (1999), out of deep sense of rare scholarly modesty admit the existence of bare-faced dishonesty in any deliberate attempt to specify a timeframe for the commencement of the journey of what becomes the birth of Literature of the Black Diaspora. However, like every other notable literary practice, since the tradition is one replete with key events borne out of deliberate malevolence against a particular race, history and creativity have both ensured adequate documentation. In order to have tenable mastery of the black Diaspora origin, Okpewho (1999) admits scholars

“have been just as cautious in subsuming a time-frame for the African presence in the region” (xii). His prescription of a rather guided approach to the discussion of diaspora, draws from the tendency to be met by stiff resistance from an age-long polemic related “to the Jewish experience of “dispersal” as enshrined in the book of Deuteronomy (28:25)” (xii). Added to this is the idea that “various scholars, Jewish and non-Jewish alike have explored it and may as a result spark “a real temptation to invoke as large a time frame as possible for the exercise” deemed easily unrealistic.

Whereas Okpewho prescribes “caution” as a necessary tool for consideration while trying to suggest an accurate period for Europe's conscription en-mass of Africans into slavery, polemics abound against his prescription. Kevin Meehan (2009) for instance, faults Okpewho's approach as one that deliberately “...avoids comparative approaches, treats comparative methods tentatively and with hesitation, or focus more on individual careers, leaving out more historical trends and theoretical analysis” (22).

Available evidence infer impossibility in the place of history being subverted in the build-up to Africa's diasporic character. In recognition of history's indispensability in the black Diasporas' journey, M.J.C Echeruo (1999) asserts that “history does not create our identities, it restructures that



identity" (14). Therefore, whatever controversies pertain to the actual inception of Africa's mass invasion and consequent shipment abroad of her able-bodied, hitherto free citizens, point to the historical steepness of the literature produced from this contact. Dickson D. Bruce, Jr. (2001) admits that history has no probable evidence regarding the status of the first Africans to make their voyage into the British North American colonies. Moreover, even after their arrival, little or nothing at all was and is still known about their "colonial cultural order" (21). Instead, the English had before the Africans' arrival, gathered certain levels of pre-conceived notions through the writings of Winthrop Jordan and a band of other assuming creative writers. The travel literatures by Jordan and his ilk were already in use by the English, even before their colonial settlement in North America. In these works, writes Bruce, "Africans were described as a brutal and ugly people, filthy and licentious" (21). Such descriptions for an entire race with diverse values in a vast continent, portends falsehood. Not even when in Bruce's accounts of Jordan's reports, "The influential North African known as Leo Africanus whose portrayal of sub-Saharan people by 1600, wrote that by nature they are a vile and base people" who "observe no certain order of living nor of lawes" (21). Bruce proceeds to show the steepness in the preconceived data the English had amassed through Jordan and his contemporaries:

... John Hawkins, the first important African English trader, spoke in the 1560's particularly of the basic dishonesty of the Negro ("In which nation is seldom or never found truth"), and he and others told stories of African treachery giving substance to such a change... Such views were supplemented by a scientific thought that questioned African humanity in significant ways, not to mention a biblical thinking that, drawing on the story of Noah, described black Africans as the descendants of Noah's son Ham, cursed as a result of his own indiscretions to a state of permanent and internal servitude (21)

Such were the sociological theses that pre-determined black people as savages without institutionalised characteristics. Along with other religious imperatives, certain anthropological data supplied in the travel literature would go on to convince several generations of Europeans of their heightened superiority to the blacks, a race not totally in their (Western) views, far removed from beasts. With ideas like the ones reported by Bruce above, the wheel for racial differentiation was firmly set to spin. Thus, upon their arrival to British North American colonies, the blacks began to be tactfully sequestered from the predominantly white society in a number of ways in the mid-1920s. Although records of their status as previously free men are not provided, the fixing of slave status on Africans became the end-result of their tactful separation process. Legislations that converted blacks into slaves "...appeared obliquely as early as 1641

in Massachusetts and clearly during the 1660's in Virginia and Maryland" (22). The conversion itself at first, was not entirely successful as it was difficult to detach some black people with established contacts with Europeans prior to their settlement in North American colonies. Despite the murky nature of their social standings, in the behest slavery promulgation notwithstanding, the continued efforts by the colonial authorities to ensure a total conversion of African settlers into slaves held sway. In the turn of the 18th century, there were signs of

...hardening racial boundaries and hardening structures of enslavement. The legislative efforts that since the 1660's had been intended to fix an equation between "African" and "slave" in the older colonies were accompanied by slave codes defining what form African enslavement was supposed to take. Such codes were intended to ensure white control over Africans in most aspects of life. They regulated the movement of slaves, or at least inhibited, slave gatherings and provided for dealing with runaways. They gave whites in general patrolling and disciplinary powers to keep slaves in check. And, of course, whites were given leave to control slaves by means of the most brutal physical treatment (23)

Black enslavement reached its full stature when in the 18th century, free people who had earlier settled in their own independent terms had their freedom to certain rights repealed. There were laws depriving them testimonies in courts in the South particularly. In a number of other colonies, punitive taxation was levied on them. Their rights to vote were lost and they weren't accorded rights to property ownership. "This," according to Bruce citing Virginia's governor, William Gooch in 1723 "was necessary" to "make the free-Negros sensible that a distinction ought to be made between their offspring and the descendants of an English-man, with whom they are never to be accounted equal" (24).

Thus, the background for full-length slavery which was properly pronounced by conscripting black Africans into servitude without any benefit to their persons, was set. It was based upon this background perhaps, that the Europeans, having enjoyed the attractive economic and psychological benefits of subjecting fellow humans to beasts of burdens, decided to explore further. Peter P. Ekeh (1999; 100) observes that economic benefits especially, made up the chief lure for the Europeans' further exploration into Africa for slave trade.

By establishing seemingly, promising mercantile relationships with influential figures in African states, the Europeans succeeded in enslaving Africans on two fronts: physically (as represented by the human cargos they shipped to Europe) and psychologically (represented by their African suppliers of human cargos). Hence, continues Ekeh, "...the resulting colonial state in Africa was an imported bald model of the

Western state. It was supplemented in its operations by subjugated, indigenous African states" (*Origins*, p.100).

The Journey Motif in 18th Century Slave Narratives of Ignatius Sancho, Olaudah Equiano and Quobna Ottobah Cugoano

In a largely, undocumented bi-lateral commercial understanding, the tone was set for some critical slave dealing activities termed the transatlantic slave trade through the middle passage. The transatlantic trade made the middle passage a popular concept in the history and literature of African slave movement. Some early Diasporic literary accounts reflect activities that occurred during the middle passage, in the course of the transatlantic slave trade. Notable slave narratives of Ignatius Sancho (1729-1780); Quobna Ottobah Cugoano (b.1759); and Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797), resonate slave trade activities of the middle passage. Ignatius Sancho, the first writer on this subject was himself born in the middle passage, while Cugoano and Equiano were bundled into slavery from Ghana and Nigeria respectively. In the course of his servitude to English painters— Richard and Maria Cosway— Cugoano, through his narrative, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Humbly Submitted to the Inhabitants of Great Britain by Ottobah Cugoano, a Native of Africa* (London, 1787), directed a scathing attack at the evils of slavery.

On his own part, Equiano, a ten-year-old kidnap victim, witnessed the evils of the middle passage; an account which predominates his narrative: *The interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African Written by Himself* (London) in 1789. Vincent Carretta (1998), in his essay, "Three West Indian Writers of the 1780s, Revised and Revisited", does a comparative study of Paul Edwards' (1987) paper on the same title, based on the narratives of Sancho, Cugoano and Equiano. While Equiano remains the most studied of the three 18th century slave narrators, Sancho is famed for his thought-provoking *Letters*. Edwards, Carretta reveals,

... pointed out that Sancho's *Letters* contains several comments on the evils of slavery and the slave trade, the earliest known attacks of a Writer of African descent. But, as Edwards was aware, to expect Sancho to have been more thoroughly engaged in a debate over the trade, let alone the institution of slavery itself, is to overlook the fact that those public debates did not begin until after Sancho's death (80).

This rather undeniable aspect of Sancho's anti-slavery protest antecedence does not overrule his influence in the movement. Despite Sancho's inability, considering his relatively comfortable status in England, almost as a freed slave, to initiate public debates against slavery, his *Letters* proved potent enough. Some of his contemporaries, Cugoano and Equiano cited his quotes in *Letters* in their individual narratives.

Cugoano, for some vague reasons, scholars have noted, stands the most obscure of the three writers. This, Carretta asserts is

... in part because least is known about his life. All we know with certainty about him occurred between 1789 and 1791. Cugoano is representative of the difficulty a researcher frequently faces in trying to recover the life of a specific relatively obscure person of African descent (or of any specific poor person) who lived in eighteenth-century Britain. Unless the person had an unusual name given at Baptism or later- Ignatius Sancho or Gustavus Vassa, for example- his or her slave or Christian name make the subject impossible to trace (81).

Carretta reveals that the little known of Cugoano's life is "largely limited..." to "...the ways he represents himself in *Thoughts and Sentiments* and elsewhere" For some reasons, perhaps, related to his deprivations, Cugoano's works were not as famous as Equiano's and Sancho's. His lack of popularity might have also been responsible for his works' reception of very mean critical patronage. Some scholars, including Edwards, Carretta writes, are even of the opinion that "Cugoano's writing was edited and improved by Equiano, with whom he had collaborated in writing letters published in the newspapers" (82). One other factor probably responsible for Cugoano's obscurity, could have been his writerly inadequacies. This much is revealed in one of his undated letters written May-June 1788.

Honoured sir,

Permit an african particularly concerned for the injurious Treatments of his countrymen to returned you His humble and grateful thanks for your noble, bold, and laudable exertions in the cause of justice, Liberty-and felicity, And a noble regulations you have proposed In our behaves. May the almighty god Whose Merciful Eyes is ever opened on all True acts of Virtue, generosity, and Humanity Enable you to meet with your desired Success infavour of the oppressed. No Doubt but it will (be) the means of saving thousands from the cruel sword of the cursed avarice, and if ever infidelity cease to be no doubt your noble Name shall be reviewed from shore to shores, and also permit me to recommend to your perusal these small tracts as a collection of an African against all manner of slavery, and oppression.

And Honoured Sir,

With a Humble Submission

Your Most Obedient Humble Servant

Ottobah Cugoanao. John Stuart

At Richd Cosway Esqr. Pall mall

That said, Cugoano may have failed in his syntactic articulations, but the same cannot be said of the substance his semantics conveys. Scholars who have read him agree

his ungrammatical constructions do not to a large extent, distort his position on the subject of slavery against which he writes. According to Carretta, Cugoano speaks emphatically to his audience, employing the persona of the Old Testament prophetic voice that constantly reminds the guilty of imminent retributions as the wages of all evils.

As if to signal his assumed rhetorical identity, his last biblical quotation in the text is from Jeremiah 16:18: "And first, saith the Lord, I will recompense their iniquity, and their sin double; because they have defiled my land, they have filled mine inheritance with the carcasses of their detestable and abominable things." Though he embraces Christianity, his Christianity has a strongly Old Testament edge, stressing justice far more often than mercy a point he underscores by combining passages from Numbers and Mathew to form his epigraph. Like the Old Testament prophets, he cites, quotes and imitates in his quasi-biblical diction, Cugoano rhetorically positions himself at the edge of the society in which he finds himself (83).

His adoption of a marginal status, "Pitting himself in the observant position of a stranger of African descent in England with an innocent task of having a first-hand perspective of how slavery fares, is as brilliant as it is interesting. From this point, he is able to record the ills of native English men in their rabid craving for tortuous commercial exploitation of their captives. His voice carries with it a consistently angry, yet gentle note that scholars agree is not present in Sancho and Equiano's works. Cugoano's infallible stance even prompts scholars to affirm that both Equiano and Sancho had earlier been involved with the Europeans against whose conducts they would later write, as slave drivers. Carretta affirms that Equiano and Sancho had earlier been involved with the Europeans against whose conducts they would later write, as slave drivers. Equiano as a free African "... had been a slave driver on a plantation in Central America in 1776" (83). On the other hand,

...as a grocer, much of Sancho's income depended on the sale of Sugar and tobacco, the primary products of West Indian Slavery. Cugoano repeatedly points out that the economic and political effects of slavery are so pervasive that all members of society, including the monarch, bear responsibility by their passive or active behavior for the confirmation of the evil. In Cugoano's persona in *Thoughts and Sentiments*, we find little of the double consciousness of being black in Britain that Sancho and Equiano frequently express (83).

In a bid to demonstrate his commitment to his course of agitating against slavery, Cugoano Smartly apologies for his evident grammatical inadequacies, noting that it exist "...from want of a better education..." (P. 84). What comes next after this apology reflects the livid content from an emotionally laden heart. He also recognizes a very salient issue in slavery which has to do with Christianity, by acknowledging the expedience of the religion even in saving the Europeans

themselves who he sees as more licentious and savage than the black man. Christianity for Cugoano, "... does not require that we should be deprived of our own personal name unto us ..." (84). This belief, coupled with his identity helplessness, is responsible for his adoption of what Carretta terms a "binomial identity" (P.84) that sees him addressing himself as John Stuart. "When he writes on public issues to correspondents who knew him in his private capacity as COSWAY's servant," Coretta observes, he uses both names as enabling tools with which he operates his both identities.

Like Cugoano, Equiano's double identity consciousness also sees him ed Gustavus Vassa. But unlike Cugoano, Equiano almost relegates his original name in place of Gustavus Vassa and adding his racial information only at some points of life became only an unwelcome formality. Scholars are even of the view that had Equiano not been prompted into writing down *The Interesting Narrative*, his name would have been lost like those of other Africans who went through agonizing circumstances through the middle passage to Europe in their countless millions.

Blackness and the Endless Journey of Being Black

Fictional narratives of the Black African Diaspora are often written with a conscious blend of time, and spatial negotiations coming into the fore. More often than not, narrators in fictional texts use the occasion of the world reflected in their texts to espouse both historical events that affect them as individuals and their transcendence through the time reflected. While cases of historic import predominantly determine the plot structure, characterization is sharpened by the events portrayed in the text. It has been generally conceded, that the black diasporic literature, irrespective of the genre under examination, is always engaged in identity crises, negotiation of space and the conscious attempt to assert a voice against an opposing "other". According to Ashcroft *et al* (1986:9),

A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by *dislocation*, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or voluntary removal for indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by *cultural denigration*, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model. The dialectic of place and displacement is always a feature of post-colonial societies whether these have been created by a process of settlement, intervention or a mixture of the two. Beyond their historical and cultural differences, place, displacement, and a pervasive concern with myths of identity and authenticity are a feature common to all post - colonial literatures of English (9).

A definition of identity crisis doesn't get better than Ashcroft's thoughts echoed on the excerpt above. The termination of vision and the consequent suspension of the self-image, leads to a double consciousness, a system where two souls are trapped in one body. These souls, upon getting trapped,

engage each other in self-interrogations, leading the physical being housing them to act upon their promptings. Acting on their promptings then manifests in diverse ways. One of these ways, as have been promptly identified by scholars could result in further creative interrogations using literature as a perfect vehicle. However, not everyone could be prone to falling back to creativity as a tool for carrying out a search for his identity. Some or even most victims of identity crisis fall back on crime in a bid to get back at this big “other” that stands in the way of the self. Research indicates that in the United States of America, for instance, a great percentage of the black population has past criminal records. And, of course the reason for this is not farfetched. As Ashcroft again puts it

...imperial expansion had had a radically destabilizing effect on its own preoccupations and power. In pushing the colonial world to the margins of experience, the ‘center’ pushed consciousness beyond the point at which monocentrism in all spheres of thought could be accepted without question “(*The empire writes*, P. 12)

The result of this excessive push is the tendency on the negatively affected black population, those of them to whom literature and art generally do not make any sense, to fight back animatedly. If not for anything else, at least for survival through the only means available to them– crime. Charles, E. Silberman (1978), an American Lawyer interprets this criminal spate using the following table:

Offense	% Black	% Mexican – American	Disparity relative to population
Homicide	55.3	18.4	4.9 to 1
Sex offenses	39	32	2 to 1
Robbery	49.9	12.3	6.6 to 1
Assault	35.4	30.1	1.9 to 1
Burglary	35.9	14.4	4.1 to 1
Auto theft	21.4	20.4	1.7 to 1
Narcotics	11.6	23.7	0.8 to 1

The statistics portrayed above reflects arrests made in California alone which evidently testifies to the average American black’s propensity to crime. Silberman, however shows an understanding of the source of such huge appetite for violence exhibited by the black man in the United States of America. He does not depend on the current statistics provided alone as a valid premise upon which his arguments can be made as many a lawyer would do. Rather, his explanation of his knowledge on the basis from which such statistics is possible, comes in handy enough: He reveals that

A propensity to violence was not part of the cultural baggage black Americans carried with them from Africa, the homicide rate in black Africa is about the same as in Western Europe, and well below the rate in either white or black American. Indeed the black American homicide

rate is three to five times the black African rate. Violence is something black Americans learned in this country.

They had many teachers; violence has been an intrinsic part of the black American experience from the start. Every other immigrant group came here voluntarily, often illegally; Africans came in chains, having been uprooted from their homes and transported across the sea, at a ghastly cost of human life. (Two Africans in three died en route). Moreover, slavery was maintained by violence; so was the racial caste system that was erected after emancipation and that still endures, in diminished form, in parts of the rural south.

For most of their history in this country, in fact, blacks were victims, not initiators, of violence. In old South violence against black was omnipresent sanctioned both by custom and by law. Whites were free to use any methods, up to and including murder to control” their Negroes” (122 – 124).

For a white lawyer in the 20th century, Silberman’s exhaustive knowledge of the black history is commendable. His testimony above does not justify the violence perpetrated in America by the black American. It does not also mean that the black’s conscious attempt at asserting their battered presence in a society they had bled to promote its civilization as slaves and indentured labourers exhibited through physical violence alone. The blacks who had little opportunities of going to school have had to distinguish themselves in their chosen careers in sciences, technology, commerce and the arts. Despite the success recorded by these few, the continued search for identity still surfaces through inadvertently betrayed double consciousness.

Plot and Characterization Reading of Richard Wright’s *Black Boy* and Edward Ricko Braithwaite’s *To Sir With Love*

Born in 1908, Richard Wright is famous for his controversial novel, *Native Son* (1940). According to William L. Andrews (2001), Wright’s refusal to compromise his thematic standards by way of giving his white audience what that demanded of him as an African American writer, set the tone for the future generation of African writers who came after him. His insistence on the expression of an African American voice “...allowed later writers to do the same, allowed Toni Morrison for example to write as she would without concern for explaining her sometimes obscure meanings to a mainstream reading public.” (472). His prominence, scholars agree, began with his publication of *Native Son* in 1940. The novel’s striking uniqueness and its success is embedded in its portrayal of a defiant character in its all-round structure. The success recorded by novel was behind its adoption by-the-book-of-the-month-club, signaling the first time since the 19th century fugitive slave narratives the willingness of a mainstream reading public to give ear to an African American writer, even one who appeared unapologetic in his bald and forth-night representation of a large segment



of African American culture "(472). Since literature does not exist in a vacuum, without recourse to being a product of the society it seeks to portray, Wright shows in earnest that events occurring in real time can be subject to successful Microcosmic re-presentation. For instance, in his *Uncle Tom's Children* of 1938, Wright through the short stories, portray his comprehension of what it meant to grow up as a young boy in the south. This knowledge, in its advanced stage culminated in the development of the main character his *Native son*, bigger Thomas. To show the relationship between his experiences as a boy and that of Bigger, Wright ensures that like himself, Bigger was born and reared in (southern) Mississippi. Where living the Jain crow law reinvents him into a defiant character always at daggers – drawn against his identities.

Born on the 24th November, 1908, at a time in the United States of America when racial conflicts tore the country's society apart, Wright grew up partly in Natchez, Mississippi with a school teacher named Ella for a mother and a tenant farmer named Nathan for a father, Wrights childhood is a perfect example of the turbulence ingrained in growing up in a black low income earning family. His father desertion at a time when his was barely six ensured that his entire life up till when he finally establishes himself as a writer becomes a constant journey.

A quarter of a century was to elapse between the time when I saw my father sitting with the strange woman and the time when I was to see him again, standing alone upon red clay of a Mississippi plantation, sharecropper, clad in ragged overalls, holding a muddy hoe in his gnarled hands a quarter of a century during which my mind and consciousness had become so greatly and violently altered that when I tried to talk to him I realized that, though ties of blood made us kin, though I could see a shadow of my face in his face, though there was an echo of my voice in his voice, we were forever strangers, speaking a different language, living a vastly distant planes of reality (29).

Wright's confession of his life's stark reality, a painful one though, evokes what family life patterning in the south predominantly obtained. For a quarter of a century– a period of twenty five years, Wright and his father embark on journeys within which time, they become strangers to each other with similar identities, yet at cross purpose. Wright in his own reconfigured into a fugitive in a white world, constantly seeking points of exit away from the south. He is drawn into a cold reality of the fact that though a man is born into a family where he is raised to a certain stage of his life, he must embrace loneliness, a substance that comes along with abandonment.

Also poignantly explored in Wright's *Black Boy* is the harsh reality of being born black. Even in his struggle to survive in the violent south, the only viable commercial option for his survival instinct in the form of commodities constituted to

fight against his own existence. His endeavor as a newspaper vendour brings him to his harsh reality when he encounters a black man who opens his reasoning to a cartoon which pronounced it.

The only dream of a nigger is to be persistent and to sleep with white women! Americans, do we want this in our fair land? Organise and save white womanhood!

I stared, trying to grasp the point of the picture and the captions, wondering why it all seemed so strange and yet familiar.

"Do you what this mean? "The man asked me.

"Gee, I don't know, "I confessed

"Did you ever hear of the klu Klux klan?" he asked me softly.

"Sure. Why?"

"Do you know what the klukluxers do to coloured people?"

"They will kill us. They keep us from voting and getting good jobs". I said

"Well the paper you are selling preaches klu Klux Klan doctrines" he said.

"Oh, no!" I exclaimed

"Listen, son" he said. "Listen you are a black boy and you are trying to make a few pennies. All right, I don't want to stop you from selling these papers if you want to sell 'em but I've read these papers for two months and I know what they are trying to do. If you sell 'em, you just helping white people to kill you" (14)

From this moment onwards, Wright's entire character gets steeped in the struggle for both space and identity realization, while also fighting animatedly to escape the racially uncomfortable world in which he is trapped. Wright would not achieve this struggle even after his literary works become sources of emancipation to him.

Like Wright, Caribbean writer, Edward Ricardo Braithwaite experiences a similar struggle. Although, Braithwaite, born in British Guiana in the same century Wright was born in, he is also faced with identity crisis. Unlike Wright though, Braithwaite gets a proper family life in which his education is ensured to the highest level his academic acquisition positions him in a situation in which he serves in the British Air force as a pilot. However, the harsh realization for him sets in when after his decommissioning he finds it difficult to get a meaningful owing largely to his skin pigmentation being black. Thus began Braithwaite's journey in a world where he must assert his being. In his autobiography, *To Sir with Love* (1959), Braithwaite's so journeyed a society that barely regards his existence commences on a bus ride down to a Greenslade, a sub-urban High school. On the bus, a white lady on board wouldn't sit in a vacant seat beside him.

As I looked up she smiled her thanks to him and was preparing to sit when her eyes met mine. Surprise flickered briefly on her face as she straightened up and moved forward to stand in the narrow aisle beside the boy who looked up at her with a puzzled expression (7).

There is no doubt about whether the lady's attitude triggers a feeling of racial consciousness as subsequent narrations in the work confirm his disenchantment. His inability to get some reasonably paid employments which obviously are not scarce, heightens his questioning sense. As the narrative builds up, Braithwaite transverses between physical and psychological migrations to bring his experiences to his readers' knowledge. His notion of London for instance, veered off everything positively beyond what he is led to experience.

I suppose I had entertained some naively romantic ideas about London's East End with its cosmopolitan population and fascinating history. I had read references to it in both classical and contemporary writings and was eager to know the London Chaucer and Erasmus and the Sorores Minores.... But this was different. There was nothing romantic about the noisy littered street bordered by an untidy irregular picket fence of slipshod shop fronts and gaping bombsites (9).

As a visitor to London, Braithwaite would also come to realize that the rot against which he preaches does not stop with the facilities in the street alone. Instead, the art also spreads to the humans in the city. From his refusal of jobs even when his academic qualifications and experiences meet the requirements, to the decay in character as shown in the students in Greens lade Secondary school. Braithwaite is faced with the options of either adapting or staying jobless. His choice to stay with the teaching job at Greens lade, despite the consequences proves to be a success. Unlike Wright who keeps having to run away from his challenges, Braithwaite changes the society in his favour in record time.

In the entire, wide, inexhaustible web of literary materials that make the literature of the Black Diaspora there are some notable constants without which a particular text may not qualify as a representative text. These constants have been discussed in the work, but a summary emphasis on them would suffice. That most African writers in the Diaspora echo sentiments of slavery and colonization is not a

deliberate conspiracy against the European hegemony. More pertinent in the works from Diaspora Africa is the conscious attempt after abolition for to negotiate space for themselves. Spatial negotiation as evidently portrayed in these works always comes with the imperatives of the quest or journey motif. Predominantly, one cannot embark on a successful discourse on this literature on this literature without noting the modernist effect of identity consciousness which play a very important role in the lives of virtually every character portrayed. This consciousness is evident in Richard Wright's narrative of himself in his autobiography, *Black Boy*; and E.R Braithwaite's *To Sir with Love*.

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