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"BLACK POWER"

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NARRATIVIZING AFRICA WITHIN THE DISCOURSE OF MODERNITY: RICHARD WRIGHT'S *BLACK POWER*

BY LÂLE DEMİRTÜRK

Richard Wright's *Black Power* (1954) explores Wright's perspective of his own cultural displacement as he writes from the subject position of a "specular border intellectual" (JanMohamed 97). The narrative of Africa (or the Africa textualized in *Black Power*) establishes a cultural domain in which Wright maps his position as the postcolonial intellectual in his problematic relationship to Africa *per se*. His positionality translates a privileged white man's reading of Western culture into investigating the border on which he promotes the constitution of meaning and subjectivity for the African peoples. The subject position of the *postcolonial* intellectual invigorates an enigmatic presence—a position similar in many ways to that of the Africans, "poised in the transitional spaces between worlds: . . . the living and the ancestors" (Richards 273-74). The proclivities of the historical moment determine how the Western self has signified the African as its Other. In exploring the discourse of the Other, Wright claims his identity as a specular border space in relation to Western culture that defines him as "simultaneously a 'space' and 'a subject'"

227

(JanMohamed 116). He maps the terrain of the border, signified by the presence of the West in Africa while also locating the Gold Coast (now Ghana) within the egalitarian discourse of Western modernity.

The Eurocentric epistemology has always defined the people of African descent as “the antithesis of Western modernity and modern subjectivity” (Hanchard 1). The issue of how African-descended peoples have been modern subjects can be understood in negating this antithetical relationship to modernity. Racial subordination is an integral part of modernization in that blacks have been the objects of the very modernization they have been implicated in (Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* 163). Wright’s border space in its textual dimensions, then, impinges upon a statement on ambivalences generated by modernity and by his location(s) in it. Hanchard offers a conception of Afro-Modernity as “a particular understanding of modernity and modern subjectivity among people of African descent [indicating] a form of relatively autonomous modernity [being] no mere mimicry of Western modernity but an innovation upon its precepts, forces, and features” (1-2). This conception of Afro-Modernity informs the paradigmatic structure of *Black Power*, displaying how Africans can become modern subjects after being historically “bound to the deepest structures of Euro-American modernity by slavery” (Gilroy, *Small Acts* 9). The need to deconstruct how *Black Power* interrogates the modernist discourse of progress, universalism, and objectivism cannot be divorced from the period in which the text emerged. The narrative act of interrogation is closely related to the emergence of identity politics as central to “challenging the cultural homogeneity of the 1950s and providing spaces for marginal groups to assert the legacy and importance of their diverse voices and experiences” (Giroux 31). Identity politics helped displaced people emerge from the margins of power to redefine/reclaim an act that takes us to Wright’s

political agency in composing a liberatory narrative for Nkrumah's Gold Coast.

Given the factual details, *Black Power* (1954) is an account of Wright's three-month-long stay in the Gold Coast starting June 16, 1953, when Kwame Nkrumah and the Convention People's Party were in the process of figuring out "the politics of self-government that four years later became the basis of the independent state of Ghana" (Reilly, "Richard Wright's Discovery" 48). With the influence of George Padmore, a prominent leader of the Pan-African movement from 1947 on, and with the encouragement of Dorothy Padmore in 1953, Wright went to visit the Gold Coast. He struggled with various titles for the book—*What Is Africa to Me?*, *O, My People*, and *Strange in a Strange Land*—which, "taken together," according to Nina K. Cobb, "show his ambivalence toward Africa" (230). The book came out at a time in the 1950s when the theory of modernization was becoming popular. The theorists of modernization studied those countries struggling for independence in Africa, as well as in other areas, to explore the process of modernization. It is at this point that *Black Power* enters into the discourse of modernization, building itself on the signs of modernity—liberty, equality, fraternity—all embodying the master narrative of Western progress. Wright's discourse of rationality is directed to reaching modernization at the cost of destroying the native traditions of African culture when they stood in the way of anticolonial struggle for self-government. He strongly suggests that "everything from the religion ('juju' and ancestor worship) to the nudity he witnessed in the villages either appalled him or left him wondering how to reconcile this ancient 'stagnancy' with the progressive demands of modern society to which he believed the new African nations must aspire" (Campbell 186). But modernizing Africa carries with it an assumption that Africans are traditional and the Westerners are modern—a polarity reinforced in the popular notions of "us/them" dichotomy. Creating a

modern African community entails an effort “to abandon neo-liberal, corporate and continentalist conceptions” (Martin 21) in order to be divested of the neo-colonialist rhetoric of vision. Wright fails, however, to acknowledge what surfaces in the studies by Edward W. Said and his followers in the last decades: that there is an inevitable “continuity between colonialism itself and the cultural hegemony created by the transformation of a non-Western culture into an object of unilateral Western ideological construction” (Austen 204).

The ambivalence about what characterizes “real” Africa has invited various negative responses to the book, shared across the color line: “Some African writers and intellectuals regarded him as an ‘outsider’ and his comments as naive. White critics resented Wright’s characterization of their African policies as condescending and exploitative” (Tucker 713-14). The negative responses depend heavily on Wright’s choice in positioning himself as the border intellectual in relationship to Africa. His factual account of African colonial history follows the similar trends of colonialist historiography, appropriating the colonialist inclinations in showing Africans as mere victims of European colonialism. He then turns to Nkrumah as an active agent in the making of the Gold Coast’s history but “teaches” Nkrumah what to do invoking the image of a “colonialist.” He enjoys his stance as a privileged “outsider living on the fringe of two cultures and therefore able to understand both points of view better than anyone else” (Fabre 259). But in doing so, he presents the difficulty of the task in depicting two things at the same time: He genuinely supports Nkrumah’s assertion of power for the people of the Gold Coast and wants to see African peoples as modern subjects, while he tries to discover “whether a technologically oriented, urban, Western, American black man might find a piece of himself in West Africa” (Moore 163).

Wright’s obscure attitude has to be located within the African American intellectual tradition in its historical

ambivalence to Africa. Up until the 1950s, some of the African American writers have had a positive image of Africa and looked up to it as their ancestral homeland, whereas some others had looked down on it as a place inhabited by primitive savages. It was mainly during the 1950s that a sense of pride emerged out of claiming close ties with Africa: some African American writers, artists, and intellectuals felt that they needed to reposition themselves within the domain of Africa as something beyond a geographical location. The technological and cultural innovations of precolonial Africa were acknowledged by people like Carter G. Woodson, among others, who set out revising the conventional narrative of Africa as uncivilized. During the rise of the middle class in Africa, conflicting values of tradition and modernity began to emerge. Some writers supported the modernization of Africa, while others, like Shirley Graham and George Padmore (a close friend of Wright, at whose suggestion he accepted Nkrumah's invitation to go to Africa), drew attention to the indigenous African traditions and considered, for instance, "chieftaincy as both a valuable symbol of tradition and a basis upon which an African form of democracy might grow" (Staniland 182-83).

Differences in ideological affinities enabled the African American *elite* to respond to Africa in diverse ways to evaluate their commonality with African people. The racial oppression that forced African Americans to leave America for Europe as self-exiled intellectuals shaped their vantage point, from which they examined the collective struggles of African people for modernization. Their criticism of the colonial practices in Africa helped them acknowledge close links with Africans while realizing that their oppression under white supremacy was not entirely different from the African plight. This sense of identification has played an important role in African-Americans' changing conceptions of Africa.

In this context, Ghana's independence in 1957 was considered to be especially significant because it represented the transformation of a Western colony to a modern state. African Americans' intellectual and emotional support of the rise of independent African states connoted a common identity. Nkrumah's success lay in seeing "the power of the Western industrial countries and their multinational companies as the main threat to the economic prosperity of the Third World countries then moving towards independence" (Rooney 2). Nkrumah voiced his plan for the future of Ghana and for Africa in his speech to the crowds in Accra, the capitol of Ghana: "We have to elevate ourselves from the lowliness into which colonialism has sunk us, and we must show integrity, honesty and truth" (qtd. in Rooney 137).

As C. L. R. James claims, the "Western world as a whole, blinded by the myth, does not yet know what all this means in Africa, and it must. The people of the Gold Coast fought for their own freedom within the context of themselves as a beacon for the rest of tropical Africa, and as part of a world-wide revolutionary movement for a new world" (353). As James' words suggest, Nkrumah did not just fight for his country, but his agency of Africa's decolonization and self-determination, notwithstanding his plans about the modernization of Ghana, constitute the "inside" narrative of Africa which Wright has to explore in order to "decipher" how the politics of his own location gets inscribed in his analyses of African culture.

From the very beginning of *Black Power*, Wright explores the meaning of having African heritage—"But am I African?" (4)—within the framework of the signification of the African: "What does being *African* mean?" (5). Nkrumah's cultural mission as the first prime minister of the Gold Coast in the 1950s represents a breakthrough not only in the history of the Gold Coast but also in that of Africa, for whose decolonization Nkrumah was fighting. Wright's arrival at the Gold Coast enabled him to make

the trip from Liverpool to the Gold Coast, reversing the direction of the Middle Passage—the historical moment in the history of African people which “erased” their subjectivity, and hence their representations in the white mind. As a *postcolonial* intellectual, he displays a mindset totally engaged with how the imperial discourse operates in Africa. In his short speech at Nkrumah’s invitation, Wright posits himself as “one of the lost sons of Africa who has come back to look upon the land of his forefathers” (84). The distance in temporality and spatiality pivots round his dislocation, out of which he forms a commonality: “Centuries ago the living bodies of our forefathers were . . . sold into slavery [and] formed the living instruments which the white men of Europe used to build the foundations of the Western world. . . . [O]ur tribes were so . . . scattered that we could not even speak to one another in a common tongue” (84).

Later on in the book, he admits that he is a stranger to the land and its people as he distinguishes between African and Western forms of *knowing*: “Knowing” a person to an African “meant possessing a knowledge of his tribe . . . of being privy to the inmost secrets of his culture,” whereas “Western ‘knowing’ was limited to a more rational basis—to a knowledge of a man’s profession, of his ideas, and perhaps some of his interests” (112). The Western rationality is built into the foundation of Western progress as over against the illiteracy of the African, forming “a barrier . . . a psychological distance between the African and the Western world” (129) as the key factor in the Westerner’s failure in *knowing* the Africans in their own terms. The Western outlook on Africa as an embodiment of irrationality is what he represents in his authorial subject position as he recounts the “absurdities” embedded in the funeral ceremonies or human sacrifices as part of the tribal values and beliefs. Being of African descent, he soon discovers, does not provide him with an insight into the African identity, because he is a Western black intellec-

tual—a *cultural outsider* to Africa: “One does not react to Africa as Africa is. . . . One reacts to Africa as one is, as one lives; one’s reaction to Africa is one’s life, one’s ultimate sense of things. Africa is a vast, dingy mirror and what modern man sees in that mirror he hates and wants to destroy” (175).

Wright appropriates the colonial discourse in his agency as an informant on the cultural practices of the African tribal value-system, which he is unable to register fully due to his failure to be *on the inside*. Unlike an African, such as Mr. Shirer’s cook, for whom home and tribe are identical terms (“My home is with my tribe” [213]), he is involved in an ongoing search for a home in which to locate himself. As Kwame Anthony Appiah suggests, “[f]ace to face with Africa, Wright retreated from reason; and his book is the record of a mind closed to the world through which he travelled” (“A Long Way” 181). His agency is obscured because of his inability to remove the conceptual veil of Western rationality. The exiled African American intellectual in Europe transgresses the geographical boundaries between Europe and Africa to reach *the* racial homeland where his ancestors do not even “remember” him. In a land where one’s ancestors are always out there, where the past and the present converge, shaping one’s historical experiences, Wright relocates himself on the other side of the divide. His relationship with the Africans is specular in relating to Africa, where “[t]radition is the determinant of what is right and just, what is good and done” (237). This bears a direct contrast to the dynamics of modernity in its act of centering itself on the indeterminacy of right or wrong in terms of traditional values.

The indeterminacy of meaning paves the way for distorting one’s perception of reality. Appiah criticizes Wright’s description of his “late great-uncle Otumfuo Sir Osei Agyeman Prempeh II, then King of Ashanti . . . [who according to Wright] made the mistake of smiling once too often” (“A Long Way” 180). In the scene to which Appiah

refers, Wright describes the King in rather strange terms: "He was poised, at ease; yet, like other men of the Akan race, he smiled too quickly; at times I felt that his smile was artificial, that he smiled because it was required of him" (310). Wright's comments on the hospitable African King can be considered an insulting statement, which Appiah reads as "a parody of colonial discourse" ("A Long Way" 181). Wright's distorted image of the King is one of many examples of how he cannot bridge the psychological distance between himself and the African subjects. He depicts Nkrumah's attitude toward him as cold, or Mrs. Hannah Cudjoe's response to him as a refusal to "find an African home" (114)—just to cite a couple of instances among others which represent his cultural misreadings. Out of these distorted readings of the African self, *Black Power* emerges as a statement on how the African identity has changed because of the colonialist practices that inverted Africa's historical encounter with Europe, resulting in economic exploitation eroding tribal life. Traditional society can be rejuvenated by becoming a modern nation through "the syncretic politics of Nkrumah's Convention People's Party, which fuses the surviving patterns of a tribal way of life with the goals of African nationalism" (Reilly, "The Self-Creation" 224). Wright's attempt to understand what is going on in the Gold Coast makes him akin to the African elite educated abroad: Dr. Ampofo of Mampong says, "It was in foreign lands that they learned the meaning of what was happening to our people" (220). Wright inevitably represents the Western rationalist who cannot rid his mind of the conception that Africans indeed are "the anti-thesis of modernity."

With its lawyers, opportunistic black business men, and the Western educated elite as opposed to its chieftains, Africa still lives within the context of a polarity between tradition and modernity. The polarization of the Western and tribal values construes the divided African self whose desire for social cohesion or syncretic thought is embodied

in Nkrumah's ideology. Wright represents himself as the Western intellectual—"I'm Western" (322)—who addresses the issue of irreconcilability of the boundaries between the Western and African worlds drawn apart from each other: "I was black and they were black, but my blackness did not help me" (140). His use of such phrases as "the meaning of the industrial world was beyond that chief" (322) or how the African "minds were uninformed . . . about their situation" (323) specify a reductionist view that tends to homogenize Africans, characterized by "illiteracy." Wright's sense of distance from the traditional religious practices and values is transmitted through his agency to the Western readers in a failed effort "to render Africa intelligible" (Appiah, "A Long Way" 182). Reading Wright's representations of Africa points to the fact that Africa has to become modern in order to inscribe itself within the Western discourse of modernity. Even though he grounds the African lack of intelligence—"I observed orders being given an African; I saw him listen, nod his head to signify that he had understood. Five minutes later the African returned and asked for his instructions again!" (351)—within the African's dependency on the white colonist, he does not promote an effective anticolonial discourse to dissimulate the Western conceptualization of the African. His question "Does this curious attitude of dependence stem from tribal life?" (367) constitutes Africa as equally unintelligible to his heavily fragmented vision of African culture rendered through the rhetoric of distance.

African religious practices are part of a sense of spiritual wholeness that Wright feels compelled to resist: "To think about Africa is to think about man's naive attempt to understand and manipulate the universe of life in terms of magical religion" (375). This "magical religion" or spiritualism is what the African culture is associated with, forming a location where he feels, as he tells Nkrumah in his letter to him, "an odd kind of at-homeness" (385). This paradigm of Africa is an "unhomely site" (Bhabha 141) for

“an American Negro . . . filled with consternation at what Europe had done to this Africa” (385). He blames the colonial rule as an impediment to the formation of African subjectivity: “African culture has not developed the personalities of the people to a degree that their egos are stout, hard, sharply defined” (385). European exploitation of Africans has reinforced the sense of alterity on them due to the colonial ruptures. Wright defines himself as “a man of African descent brought up in the West” (387) to warn Nkrumah about the neo-colonialism of the West, showing to the latter at the same time that Africans are starting to redeem themselves from Western control. Even though he cares about the future of the Gold Coast, he stands as an outsider to the people of the region—a position that never changes, as is clearly shown in his constant rendition of Africans in constant conspiracy against him.

Jack B. Moore’s “Black Power Revisited: In Search of Richard Wright” (1988) is a valuable source which revises Wright’s misconceptions about African individuals, disclosing the particular facts that Wright mentions in the book. Moore directs his questions to individuals like James Moxon, the only non-African among the others; Mrs. Hannah Kudjoe, the propaganda secretary in the Convention People’s Party; and Kofi Baako, Nkrumah’s right-hand man. Moxon feels that Wright appeared to be an American tourist but became furious when people reacted to him as one. He remembers Wright’s reading a whole chapter from *White Man, Listen!* at his invitation to make a speech when the two were eating together: “Poor fellow, he had no sense of occasion, no sense of occasion at all” (Moore 168)—a metaphor for his dislocated self in the African cultural domain. Moxon also mentions how Ghanaians were totally oblivious to this African American intellectual, a fact that explains why *Black Power* received no response from the people in Ghana.

Moore's conversation with Mrs. Hannah Kudjoe, on the other hand, serves as a tool for correcting what Wright told about the African people, including her. Moore's image of her is much different from Wright's account, making him "feel that talking to her would be pleasant and easy" (Moore 170). She corrects her title as National Propaganda Secretary, besides correcting Wright's information that she or any African never turned down anybody's request to live in an African home. She also belies Wright's impression that she did not trust him: "There was, she thought, no mysterious conspiracy among the Africans to keep Wright unenlightened about their ways, only a natural disinclination to share with him what was politically too intimate for him to be told. And she . . . did not fear that he would scorn what he found in an African home. She had arranged many such visits" (Moore 176). Her account is a crude representation of Wright as a misinformant on the African character. Baako had explained to Wright the factual details of Ghanaian independence, while he ironically finds Wright "very well informed for an outsider" (Moore 179), tentatively adding that Nkrumah or others never commented on Wright because he did not leave a strong impression on anyone. Baako does not agree that Nkrumah would have a cold attitude in the political rally or that he did not give permission for the publication of Wright's speech. In the face of Baako's response as "Perhaps Wright misinterpreted," Moore says, "Kofi Baako's Nkrumah was not nearly so complicated and far more open, a politician, a crowd-pleaser, and an idealist. Baako could not comprehend Nkrumah reacting as Wright described him" (Moore 182). Baako also repeats Mrs. Kudjoe's view that Wright "makes it seem like a conspiracy against him" (Moore 183).

Although Moore points out that it is quite conceivable that maybe Moxon, Kudjoe, and Baako may still be defending themselves or Nkrumah from Wright's charges, "the truth of what occurred to Richard Wright resides in a

mixture of perceptions and misperceptions" (Moore 185). Moore's centering the silenced voices of Moxon, Kudjoe, and Baako in his own text revises Wright's preconceptions about the African cultural reality—a problem he shares with other African American intellectuals in their equally problematic relationship to Africa.

In its historical context, the experiences of the Middle Passage and slavery have resulted in the erosion of bonds between Africans and African Americans, reinforcing the strengthening of Western civilization, which, in Cedric Robinson's words, "sealed the African past" (qtd. in Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans* 40). The European intervention in the course of African development shaped the constructions of Europe as a signifier for "superior" values and of Africa (or non-Europe in its broadest sense) as a signifier for "inferior" or "primitive" values. Europe's embodiment of liberal ideals of Enlightenment necessitated the definition of Africa by "absences" (of the superior values of Europe) (Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans* 14). What distinguishes Africans is the absence of the attributes of civilization—that is, the lack of positive cultural values. The ramifications of the historical encounter between Europe and Africa embody "the reality of contradiction and distance that informed black American perception and treatment of Africa" (Adeleke, "Black Americans and Africa" 522). The constructs of Europe as Inside and of Africa as Outside resulted in the colonial historiography as the site of the Inside shaping the ambiguities in African American identification with Africa. African Americans' "socialization and maturation occurred within a Western cultural milieu. It is . . . the utilization of [Eurocentric] values as the basis of redefining their relationship with Africa, that is problematic" (Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans* 152). In this sense, Wright utilizes conceptual tools derived from European epistemology to perceive only *the* Africa historically invented by Europeans. Appropriating the colonialist historiography in perceiving the Outside

(Africa) from the vantage point of the Inside (Europe), Wright's text is also marked by absences—of African paradigms. He never inculcates pride in African values; he does not situate himself against a Eurocentric construction of Africa; he does not promote a feeling of oneness with Africa. All in all, his subversion of African sovereign culture revivifies racial ramifications of imperialism. His privileging of the components of modernity pulls him back into more elitist subject formations in depicting the African social reality as a “simulacrum” (Baudrillard 11). The rational forms of understanding he embodies cannot cope with the irrationality he depicts, and hence he represents the African mind as a passive register of discrete objects.

In this context, Countee Cullen's question “What is Africa to me?” has to be addressed within the terrain that Africa itself inhabits, wavering between the industrialized West and its own cultural practices of tribal values. The cultural (dis)location is reinscribed within the cultural alterity of the African whose “specifically African identity began as the product of a European gaze” (Appiah, *In My Father's House* 71). Being forced into becoming an object of the imperialist gaze, Africa has been constructed as a “simulacrum” that brings us to Chinua Achebe's question—“When you see an African what does it mean to a white man?” (Appiah, *In My Father's House* 71)—which can be reworded as “When you see yourself an African, what does it mean to you?” In other words, if you are no longer the product of a European gaze, then you are negating an agency central to the formation of the alterity of the African, an act which elucidates a distinct African identity in the making. Wright, on the other hand, forms an agency through which he deciphers Achebe's question at a different level: “When you see an African, what does it mean to you as an African American intellectual?” Through his African American agency, the white Western addressee does not see Africa and Africans in the text but in his own *self* (signifier of the colonial presence) implicated in that

agency in terms of the ontological values of a rationality dominant in the Western nation-states.

The text's historicizing the colonial past not only implicates the African otherness as a production of the white European gaze but also the narrativization of colonial discourse (the presence of the West in Africa) constructing multiple identities of Africans, caught up in postcolonial displacement. Mr. Justice Thomas, for instance, represents a confused self, who identifies with the colonizer and fails to recognize the real African. His case is in direct contrast to the American Negro whose "passionate identification with America" results from the Western fiction of Africa as "shameful, barbaric" (73). The dissociation from what Africa signifies to the white man foregrounds the young Africans' fictions of the West: a young African who saw detectives in the movies and in the magazines and desires to be trained to become one of those characters in the movie in order to punish the English who violate the laws; an African lad who refuses to buy a camera believing the British would deceive him but wants instead Wright to supply him with one to take pictures so that Wright could sell them in Paris in a "pathetic distrust . . . lodged deep in the African heart" (109); a young African who wants to go to America and receive a scholarship; the African men who kept their women "out of reach of the Europeans" (108); and a young boy who sees Wright as a European and feels threatened by him—all share commonalities with each other in their confused conceptions of Europeans and of themselves. This is the self-image Wright cannot evade either. As George E. Kent asserts, "[w]hen he confronted African culture in *Black Power* or met representatives of non-Western cultures, he was both the alienated black man and the exaggerated Westerner, and was at once sympathetic and guiltily snifty" (83). The confused identity serves as a signifier for Wright's cultural positioning(s) in relation to Africa—as the real, as the colonialist simulacra

of the real, and as the very text Wright constructed out of his specular position to it.

Reading Africa as a textual space requires an awareness of how cultural interpretations inform African narratives in reference to colonial representations. The historical context gains a place within the temporality of the discourse, reminding us of Lacan's notion of history: "History is not the past. History is the past in so far as it is historicised in the present—historicised in the present because it was lived in the past" (12). The African colonial past is historicised in the present moment of the text (reconstructing absence as presence), designating how the collective agency available to African subjectivity has been disrupted. Then living "within the narrative of modernity is achieved through a learning to *read* the other through the language of history" (Kanneh 277). In this sense, the text interrogates the narrative of African progress impeded by colonialism in the course of mapping the role of Africa in a modernity which negates and challenges African cultural values and beliefs. The vision of *postcolonial* Africa is articulated through an inverted form of colonial discourse built upon the Western notion of rationality as the normative paradigm, while also negating the hegemony of normativity in the desire to see African peoples become "modern subjects" under the political leadership of Nkrumah.

The struggle for decolonization led by Nkrumah is an important step not only for Africa but also for the African American intellectuals who have to decolonize their "border spaces" from the Eurocentric mindset in order to liberate the Africa within. If this is what the journey back to Africa takes, then Wright's response to Countee Cullen's "What is Africa to me?" is embedded in his textual position towards the formation of his own subjectivity, signified by his role of agency in reflecting on the region and culture producing the struggle for Africa's self-determination: He interrogates his agency with the demands that Africa makes on him as a *postcolonial* intellectual, because of the

very fact that mapping the terrain of Africa informs the very act of mapping the terrain of his own subjectivity. Registering the difficulty of finding a home on the border between America (home) and Europe (exilic status), between Europe (provisional home) and Africa (as a place to travel), between the colonial and the *postcolonial*, Wright's positionality can be defined as specular to the African terrain of subjectivity. Wright appropriates his "interstitial cultural space as a vantage point from which to define . . . other, utopian possibilities of group formation" (JanMohamed 97). As he deconstructs the Western fiction(s) of Africa, Wright maps how he borders on the specular site in identifying the kinds of subject positions that constitute him as a border subject in order to be freed from the domination of those discourses that formed him. The border subject then constitutes the narrative of Africa itself in which the problematics of tradition and modernity are constantly pitted against each other just like in the border subject's body, redefining the African alterity at its historical moment of entry into the discourse of modernity.

Black Power embodies a convoluted set of discourses in positioning Wright in the contradictions between Africans and African Americans endorsed by the imperial discourse. He criticizes the colonial disruption of Africa by the dominance of modernity and rationality while also stressing the value/desirability of them. This case charts the way for reinterpreting Wright's African American border space as a site, producing a text that narrates a displacement. The displacement is closely related to what the text does not say: What the text does not "say" rests largely on Nkrumah's positioning in the margins of the text, for his voice is never centered in the discourse of the text, reducing him to the level of occasional references to parts of his speech or to Wright's subjective descriptions of him.

In contrast, one remembers W. E. B. Du Bois's powerful image of Nkrumah, for instance, as he explains

Nkrumah's political ideology in his own words: "From now on it must be Pan-African nationalism, and the ideology of African political consciousness and African political emancipation must spread throughout the whole continent. . . . I have never regarded the struggle for the Independence of the Gold Coast as an isolated objective but always as a part of the general world historical pattern" (qtd. in Du Bois, "Kwame Nkrumah" 293-94). Nkrumah's Pan-African nationalism is what Du Bois feels as necessary for the future location of Africa in a global context: "The social development of Africa for the welfare of the Africans . . . would ultimately change the entire relationship of Africa to the modern world" ("The Realities" 659). The significance of Nkrumah for Africa is addressed by Wright in his comments and in his letter to Nkrumah on the need for Africans to become part of Western modernization to rearrange their power relations with the West. But the letter solely recreates what Nkrumah had been verbalizing in the Pan-African Congresses where he worked with distinguished Pan-Africanists, among whom Du Bois stands out as one of his strongest proponents.

The location of where Wright stands in relation to Africa as a text he produces is designated by the positioning of the text. Where the text stands in relation to the world, its "*worldliness*" (Said, *The World* 34), if you will, is determined by the displacement of Nkrumah's political vision of where Africa should stand in relation to the modern world. If the text could center Nkrumah's discourse, then it would also center Africa within the nexus of its indigenous value-system, without seeing it as an impediment to modernization. The problematics of African American positionality in relation to an African identity construct is reinforced in the text where Wright implicates himself in the margin of Africa, trying to sense what makes it marginal. In appropriating Gayatri C. Spivak's terms, one can definitely say that Wright should learn "implicating [himself] in that center [the cultural domain of Africa as Western

construct] and sensing what politics make it marginal" (107). Sensing what politics make Africa marginal does not pertain to seeing through how colonialist historiography repositions Africa as its Outside. Wright's text, invested in colonial values emanating from colonial discourses, situates him as the "specular border intellectual" in relation to Africa where his agency fails to disrupt the discourse of racial and tribal differences between "we" (Inside) and "they" (Outside). His inscription of difference in Africa elucidates his political agency of reconstructing Africa as remote from the Western elitist formation. Inscribing his subject position in an "uncomfortable position [which is] inside but not organically of the West" (Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* 151), he produces *Black Power* as a text of his own subjectivity repositioned on the margins of the Western discourse (intruding into the Africans' relationship to their land) in designating "the uncomfortable location of blacks within modernity" (Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* 213). Torn between the issues of tradition and modernity, Wright implicates himself in the center of modernist discourse, negating the premodern stage of African society, which is also an act of negating the colonialist intervention that placed the domain of Africa on the fringes of modernity. In negating the African traditions/customs, and all the values that posit Africa on the very fringes he hates to see, he constitutes his positionality as the border space in which Africa and Europe, tradition and modernity, periphery and center converge, forming an ambivalence whose very positioning maps Africa as the only domain where Western modernity can confront its conflicting narratives of Africa. Wright's effort in probing the conceptions of race, subjectivity, and agency on the border space seems to be an act of confronting how much he remains implicated in the past as recorded by Western historical discourses.

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