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A write as a combatant: a study of Richard wright's black boy

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2013
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UNIVERSITY OF BURUNDI



FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

A WRITER AS A COMBATANT: A STUDY OF RICHARD WRIGHT'S *BLACK BOY*

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of the Degree "Licence en Langue et Littérature Anglaises"

Bujumbura, December 2013

DEDICATION

To the Almighty God,

To you who advocate for peace, equal rights and freedom,

To you who are attached to the welfare of people,

To you justice and new looking loving agents,

I dedicate this dissertation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this work has been possible thanks to the contribution of a number of persons to whom I wish to express my gratitude.

I am particularly indebted to my devoted supervisor Dr Eric Njeng, Lecturer at the University of Burundi who willingly accepted to supervise this work amid his heavy duties. I am grateful for his availability and detailed comments without which this work would not have been what it is.

I owe much debt to those who shaped my mind from primary school to University, especially the Department English Language and Literature, University of Burundi.

Moreover, It would be ungrateful not to think of the staff of Makere University for their devotion during our internship particularly Dr Benon Tugume for his helpful comments and suggestions on my topic.

My heartfelt expressions are due to my parents, brothers and sisters for their moral and financial support. This work is the fruit of their efforts. I will also recognize the support of my uncle Paul Nahayo during my time at University.

Last but not least, I thank my friends and classmates who in one way or the other have contributed to the completion of this work.

May the Almighty God bless them all!

ABSTRACT

This work examines the contribution of a writer in his combat for equal rights, good working conditions and welfare of people in a given community (here, African-Americans) as reflected in Richard Wright's *Black Boy*. It is an attempt at describing the relationship that existed between black folks and the white race and the circumstances in which *Black Boy* was produced. This work further examines how education may empower a writer or any person, how it gives him a position even in a degrading society and how it helps him to overcome the socio-political and economic problems. This work is built on the hypothesis that a writer's determination and commitment are the key elements that empower him in his search for self-definition. A writer is referred to as the eyes, the ears and spokesperson of a community. Written against New Historicism, this work, through the character of Richard Wright who is the protagonist, reveals the limitations of a writer, his choices and the risks he may run after he has made this or that choice. It finally reminds us that a writer may continue his work out of his country, if the conditions are not favourable in his country as being a writer may go with persecution.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Black Boy under study here is a multidimensional novel set in the South. It is multidimensional in the sense that it treats the social, political and economic issues at once. We can look at it as a reflection of American life especially the race-based atrocities endured by the Black race around this period of socio-political and economic hardships.

The first half of the twentieth century in America was characterised by World War I and II. The impact of these wars on the population of the whole humanity and on America in particular was of great evidence and Americans were taught by the experience and consequences of this two wars. The need to make themselves great and self-made men motivated them to work harder and harder. They had a vision— American Dream. Peter Carey cited by Watson says: "People believed their town was second rate. They have seen films of the "outside" which had filled their heads with dreams, dreams of the big city, of wealth, of modern house, of big motor cars"(*Reference Guide to Short Fiction*, 621).

However, we cannot generalise and say that Blacks and Whites had the same ambitions and shared the same view of the world. While Whites were trying to satisfy material desires, Blacks had their own problems— they were looking for identity.

By developing industries (in the North especially) and exploiting other sources as plantations in the south, they gained more, progressed mystically and quickly. The essential was to gain more whatever means may be used. The exploitation of black race in the south plantations is an illustration. The landowners were dreaming about progression while blacks were looking for their freedom and emancipation.

The influence of Darwin's theory in *On the Origin of species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859) carried by Lylle's concept over from geology to biology led to the beginning of scientific positivism— the belief that science alone gives the truth continually influence the contemporary thinking and that of 20th century. In *The Literary History of the United States (1962)*, we read that the world was characterised by capitalism dominance and people who wanted to gain more and more whatever the means should be.

Besides, the footprints of naturalists and Naturalism as a movement are still there even today. Herbert Spencer coined the phrase "the survival of the fittest" and argued that human perfection is inevitable, that a technological community is best and that the poor should not be aided but eliminated and that the character and behaviour are determined by two forces— heredity and environment. Thus, the Black race is considered by whites as an inferior race. Would this idea developed in white men's mind— to consider blacks poor and weak and that they must submit to their whites— be considered as natural selection? To this idea added the ones of Hegel and his fellows who upheld that black people were passive and could not think and that what they needed more was dependency. This created the gap between white and black folks and consequently, this fact has been at the origin of the complex of superiority and that of inferiority respectively.

Moreover, if we take a look at the influence of great men's ideas of the time in relation to racism, we can say that these men sometimes were exagerating. Aimé Césaire reports some speeches of theirs: "What they desire first of all and above all is not the improvement of their economic or material situation but the white men's recognition and respect for their dignity as men, their full human value"(*Discourse on Colonialism*, **39**). In the same book above, M. Caillois on his part says: "The West invented science. The west alone knows how to think; at the boarders of the Western World there begins the shadowy realm of primitive thinking, which dominated by the notion of participation, incapable of logic, is the very model of faculty thinking"(51). Is this reliable?

This is nothing but prejudice and stereotype that characterised the white world. It is also Wright's environmental experience. In *Black Boy,* Wright mentions that a conscious black had no place and had no right to express himself about any subject except if he was asked to. To say then that blacks could not think or see the hard life conditions in which they were living was to add to racists' ideas or ignore that blacks performed well if any occasion was there. Here, we can give an example of Shorty who could entertain Whites and Richard who was aiming at becoming a writer. He was hated by his environment and said that writing or the desire to express yourself in writing were more alien (133). Blacks had been blinded for so long to know the right thing not because they did not really know it but they were not told how to look at it or how to see it. He realised Negroes had never been allowed to profit from Western Civilization (45). Ironically, whites looked at blacks' negative confusion, their flight, their fears and frenzy pressure as their emotional strength.

By the facts mentioned above, we understand that Blacks reason though the white men do not allow them to emerge. Some abused blacks and persons like Rev. Muller sustains that humanity could not allow the incompetence, negligence and laziness of the uncivilized people who left idle indefinitely the wealth which God confined them, charging them to make it serve the good of all(*Discourse on Colonialism*, 17).

Furthermore, in *Black Boy,* we see that Whites own everything and want to appropriate the possessions of Blacks. Maybe, they rely on this idea of Rev. Muller to alienate the black race. Let us mention here that Europeans were the first to settle the New World and brought there many Africans and Asians to work in plantations. All aforementioned ideas of "civilised" people are undoubtedly at the origin of racial segregation and oppression that black people endured before, during and years after the first half of the 20th century. As Wright observes, Blacks never had the chance to learn the meaning of what makes a man a man that is the loyalty, sentiment and tradition. What they had to do was to endure the sufferings and this without regret or hope of overcoming them one day. Joy and despair were unknown to them.

Two blocks, after this alienation have been created– whites on one side and blacks on the other side. It had engendered many conflicts between the two blocks- the oppressor-white and the oppressed-black. Whites were powerful and "native sons" whereas blacks were homeless, landless and prevented from living in a place of their choice and education though they were also "native Sons". The South, with land-based economy was harsh towards blacks and the North, industrial was tolerant. That is the reason why Blacks envied living in the North because they thought it was a kind of paradise and devoid of any kind of violence and other cruelties.

In literature, *The Indignant Generation: A Narrative History of African American Writers and Critics, 1934-1960* is the first narrative history of the neglected but essential period of African American literature between the Harlem Renaissance and the Civil Rights Era. The years between these two indispensable epochs saw the communal rise of Richard Wright, Gwendolyn Brooks, Ralph Ellison, Lorraine Hansberry, James Baldwin, and many other influential black writers. While these individuals have been duly celebrated, little attention has been paid to the political and artistic milieu in which they produced their greatest works.

Looking at the decades surrounding World War II, Jackson restores the "indignant" quality to a generation of African American writers shaped by Jim Crow segregation, the Great Depression, the growth of American Communism, and an international wave of decolonization. The American depression of the 1930s left some tracks. Many lost their jobs, and for others it caused the decline of their industries or factories. The abundance of production instead of being an advantage became harmful to the population and almost the whole world felt it. In America especially in the black community, many men deserted their families because of the poverty that was prevailing. This is the case of Wright's father.

The following is Wright's short biography and his contribution in literature. He was born near Natchez, Mississippi in 1908; his father was a sharecropper. His boyhood was characterised by a broken home, poverty, and the moving from one place to another as his mother was doing her best to survive with his two sons after his father deserted the family. Wright's schooling was irregular and ended with the ninth grade; he was almost wholly self-educated. He was determined to improve his way of working though it was not easy. It is in the writings of H. L. Mencken, Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, and other social critics that he found voices that spoke to his experience. At Jim Hill school and then at the Smith-Robinson Public School, he was graduated as a valedictorian. His education was not lavish, and as such, was surely a stumbling block to a man of letters.

One cause of contentment for Wright in that wretched environment was reading, which along with writing, saved him from the brutalization and degradation that were frequent in the South among blacks and whites. He liked the party focus on equality for everyone and abolishing the very rich and the very poor.

While Wright is most famous for his novel *Native Son,* his autobiography is uncensored glimpse into the life of black man in early 20th century. His ambition to become a writer was developed to destroy the idea that a black person could not be a writer. With his first work, *The Voodoo of the Hell's Half Acre*, people were astonished by his work that some asked him many questions wanting to know why and how he managed to produce a work of literature. His classmates asked him: "Where did you get it from?" [...]"You copied from a book" (184). He realised that he was misunderstood and dispossessed. He had no other choice remaining but to flee to North.

In 1927, he parked in Chicago; a place he thought different from the South. It is in Chicago where he expected to express himself freely as a writer and where he thought was a better place he would enjoy life not as a Negro but as a Native

American. While there, he worked as a postal clerk and during his time off he read writers and their styles. At the post office, he was eliminated by Hoover's policies of the Great Depression and was forced to go on relief in 1931.

In 1932, he began attending meetings of the John Reed Club (but later withdrew due to the disenchantment with political communism though he was still attached to Marxism. As the club was dominated by the Communist Party members, Wright established a relationship with a number of party members. Especially interested in the literary contacts made at the meetings, Wright formally joined the Communist Party in late 1933 and, as a revolutionary poet, wrote numerous proletarian poems, The New Masses and other left-wing periodicals. A power struggle within the Chicago chapter of the John Reed Club led to the dissolution of the club's leadership; Wright was told he had the support of the club's party members if he was willing to join the party. By 1935, Wright had completed his first novel, *Cesspool*, published as *Lawd Today* (1963), and in January 1936 his story "*Big Boy Leaves Home*" was accepted for publication in *New Caravan*. In February, Wright began working with the National Negro Congress, and in April he chaired the South Side Writers' Group, whose membership included and Margaret Walker. Wright submitted some of his critical essays and poetry to the group for criticism and read aloud some of his short stories.

In 1936, he was also revising *Cesspool*. Through the club, Wright edited *Left Front*, a magazine that the Communist Party shut down in 1937, despite Wright's repeated protests. Throughout this period, Wright also contributed to the *New Masses* magazine. While Wright was at first pleased by positive relations with white Communists in Chicago, he was later humiliated in New York City by some who rescinded an offer to find housing for Wright because of his race. To make matters worse, some black Communists denounced the articulate, polished Wright as a bourgeois intellectual, assuming he was well educated and overly assimilated into

white society. However, he was largely autodidactic, having been forced to end his public education after the completion of grammar school.

Through reading he learnt from others' imagination and was also taught by the experience from his own environment. He was popular after winning the story magazine's prize to the best book-length manuscript submitted by anyone connected with the Federal Writers' Project. This was *Uncle Tom's Children* published in 1938. It is a collection of four novellas about the black sharecroppers of the South in their desperate relationship to the white power structure. This work brought him critical recognition and thus made him popular. *Native Son* followed in 1940. It is a harsh naturalistic novel in which Wright, the character of Bigger Thomas (made a real living black man) creates a powerful sense of the victimization of the black race in American Society. It is about a Black boy brought up in the Chicago slums who ends as a murderer and is executed. It is a violent and brutal work beyond anything American fiction has ever produced that reached a wide reading audience and brought Negro writing fully into the main stream of American literature. This novel gave its author an assured place in contemporary literature. He also expresses the theme found in *Native Son* in *Black Boy* first published in 1945; an autobiography that ended at his seventeenth year with his decision to leave the south forever and seek in the North a life that could be lived with dignity.

In 1946, he migrated to Paris after he had received the invitation of French government to live and to work in France. While there, he encountered Jean Paul Sartre.

He came close to the doctrines of Existentialism that lay at the heart of his novel *The Outsider* (1953). His radical attack on the injustices felt by the coloured people in America opened the way for many younger black Writers who attested to his influence upon them (*Longman Companion to 20th century Literature, 3rd Edition).*

Other works are *"The Man Who Was Almost a Man"* (1939), *Savage Holiday* (1954), *The Long Dream* (1958) *Eight Men* (1961), *Lawd Today* (1963), *Rite of Passage* (1994) ,*A Father's Law* (2008). He also wrote some Non-fictional works. We distinguish among them: *How "Bigger" Was Born; Notes of a Native Son* (1940), *Twelve Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro in the United States* (1941), *Black Power* (1954),*The Color Curtain* (1956), *Pagan Spain* (1957), *Letters to Joe C. Brown* (1968), *American Hunger* (1975).We also recognize him for his essays: *The Ethics of Living Jim Crow: an Autobiographical Sketch* (1937), *Introduction to Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (1945), *I Choose Exile* (1951), *White Man, Listen!* (1957), *Blueprint for Negro Literature* (1937), *The God that Failed* (1949). In poetry, he wrote his *Haiku: This Other World* (1998). Some poems also were written by Wright. We distinguish among them *"I Have Seen Black Hands"*, *"We of the Streets"*, *"Red Leaves of Red Books"*.

Black Boy under study begins with a four-year-old Wright setting fire to his house. This autobiography is Wright's primal scream of protest at the cruelties inflicted on him primarily by the white world. The world in question is forbidding and eager to keep him in his place. There is also the black world, from which he expected support, but from which he frequently got brutality and the same insistence on keeping in his place" (*Richard Wright,* 44).

Wright who is the main character in this novel is a curious child living in a household of strict, religious Adventist women (mother, aunts and grandmother). His father is violent in speech and actions. Not only is he a lawgiver in the house but also an irresponsible man.

Wright's view of the world is quite different from other blacks' or even whites'. He never conforms to the law pre-established by the society. He quickly chafes at the restrictions of his surroundings, reading instead of playing with other children, and rejecting the church in favour of "atheism" at a young age. He feels even more out of

place as he grows older and meets the rampant racism of the 1920s south. Not only does he find it generally unjust but also whites bother him and other blacks desire to squash his intellectual curiosity and potential. In this world dominated by whites, he encounters extreme racism and violence, which stay with him the rest of his life. What then was to be done?

Blacks have always viewed the North as a place of opportunity, and so as soon as they could gather enough money, Richard and his aunt went to Chicago, promising to send for his mother and brother. Once Wright entered the world of work, he found racism pervasive and intolerable and decided to fight with words thanks to the inspiration from Mencken.

The 20th century was characterised by a number of socio-political and economic problems especially in America. The inequality between races in sharing the societal resources was evident. Racism which was accompanied with violence and other atrocities was at top during that period. Target people were blacks and when we look at economic issues, poor whites and blacks were considered the same. Thus we can say that though some whites were discriminated and blacks as well, the struggle was not the same because whites were fighting for good life conditions whereas blacks were fighting for freedom and identity. What they needed first of all was to be looked at as human beings instead of playthings in the hands of whites oppressors. There was born the conflict between whites who wanted to maintain their position as masters and blacks who wanted to have a position in this degrading society.

In addition to this, when other works seek to reveal the atrocities in the black oppressed world, in our work we try to find out the factors that helped Wright to escape the violence and even execution that could be exercised by the two different blocks— whites the oppressor and Negroes the oppressed. Again, Wright is not any writer or any person. His influence and his contribution in changing the mentality of

both white and black folks are worthy to be studied. This work further analyses the service a writer can offer the community and how his language influences the thinking of the reader and consequently the change that it may bring.

In the course of this work again, a cause-and-effect analysis of *Black Boy* is made and afterwards deduce the context in which it has been written and how it has contributed in the shaping of black people and white men's minds as well. It also aims at awakening everybody to measure as a writer and thus helps to conscientize people and make them react in accordance with the actual situation. Apart from that, it comes to incite Burundian youth to write and promote Burundian literature. This would help our country that is in its process of integration in East African Community and Common market.

By the end of this work, the reader has enough information about the socio-political and economic circumstances that were prevailing during the 20th century-America. The hypothesis that we are assigned is also demonstrated.

This work is guided by the hypothesis that Richard Wright's determination and commitment are the key elements that empower him in the search for self-definition.

The combat of writers in general and especially Wright's attachment to his alienated people and his engagement in socio-political and economic change interested more than an individual. His uniqueness (the way he reacts to a stimulus, his non-conformism that is his spiritual independence), his patience (his perseverance though he had no support neither from blacks nor whites that put him in jeopardy situation) motivated us. His contribution as a writer is worthy to be studied so that it serves as an example to our emerging writers. Sometimes, we acknowledge that it is risky to be a writer, but one has to give his precious possession to save as many persons as possible.

Before we proceed, it is necessary to define some key terms that are used in this dissertation. Among these terms we have a writer, a combatant, arsenal and education. According to *Webster New Dictionary*, a **writer** is someone whose job is writing books. Looking at writing as a job means that it is productive in many senses. First its fruit is shared by all the readers, the digestion being the critics and comments. A **combatant** as we read it in *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary,* is a person or a group involved in a fighting or in a war. This definition will not be convenient as long as it insinuates that they fight using arms when a true writer fights with words. The definition we will be using is found in that someone that stops something unpleasant from happening or from getting worse. **Arsenal** in its broad sense as we find it in *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary,* is either a collection of weapons and explosives or a building where military weapons and explosives are made or stored. In this study, we make an analogy of what is the effect of using weapons and explosives on people and that of using words on them. The weapons we are referring to here are the words somebody uses to denunciate what seem to be unhappy situations. The place in which they are made or stored if we make an analogy with arsenal is the **education**. In the dictionary mentioned above, the term education is defined as a process of teaching, training and learning. Education is what makes someone aware of the prevailing situation and act accordingly. If need be, with words we gained during the curriculum of education, we may be involved in a fight and hope to win with our weapons which are words. The "**vision**" as defined in *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary,* is an idea or picture in your imagination or the ability to think about or plan the future with great imagination and intelligence. We can say that the two definitions seem to be relevant at almost the same degree. The message that Wright tries to convey is that, (he imagines, whether they like it or not) freedom of expression and unity among people are the only necessary conditions for America to live in harmony.

Written under New Historicism, this work focuses on the contribution of Wright in the improvement of Blacks' life conditions and the abolition of prejudices, discrimination and racism. New Historicism is helpful while analysing *Black Boy*. It views history as including all of the cultural, social, political and anthropological discourses at work through literature which documents the new discipline of the history of ideas. New Historicism began in the 1980s and became quite popular in the 1990s.It evaluates how the work is influenced by the time in which it was produced. It also examines the social sphere in which the author moved the books and theories that have influenced the author, and any other factors which influenced the work of art. In its historian and in its political interpretation, New Historicism is indebted to Marxism. But, whereas Marxism sees literature as a part of superstructure in which the economic base manifests itself, New Historicists tend to take a more nuanced view of power, seeing it not exclusively as class-related but extending throughout society. This view derives primarily from Foucault. By power, we understand the means through which the marginalised are controlled together with what they want to gain. Therefore, new historicists seek to find sites of struggle to justify that group or identity with most power. Foucault understands power as continually articulated on knowledge and knowledge on power.

In its tendency to see society as consisting of texts, with no fixed literary value above and beyond the way specific societies read them in specific situations , New Historicism owes to postmodernism. However, new historicists tend to show less scepticism than postmodernist and to show more willingness to perform the traditional task of literary criticism (explaining a text into its cultural practices that it depends on). Stephen Greenbelt was an early important figure and Michel Foucault's inter-textual methods focusing on issues such as power (that serves in making the world both knowable and controllable) also contributed in the definition of New Historicism.

New Historicism insists that to understand a literary piece, we need to understand the biography of the author and social background. In addition to this, we have to be aware of ideas circulating at the time and the cultural milieu. As *Black Boy* does it, literary works will tell us about prevailing ways of thinking at the time: ideas of social organization, prejudices, taboos, etc. New Historicism also seeks to find examples of power and how it is dispersed in the text. While measuring the effect of the power on the powerless or oppressed, the lateral surveillance technique is given priority. This technique contributes in the self-policing that occurs when those who are subject to prison are being watched.

Thus, this theory is also applicable to *Black Boy* as far as Richard Wright was first influenced by the prevailing situation– racism, disenfranchisement and alienation vis-à-vis Afro-Americans and poor whites. The culture of blacks was neglected and Blacks were considered as the inferior race and on their return had taken it as fact. Even in the absence of white, a black man thought he was around. The lateral surveillance that is told in the theory of Foucault analysing the idea of Jeremy Bentham about the form of prison house is discussed about. New Historicism is important in the fact that it helps us to understand the cultural milieu and the relationship between those who hold the power and those who are subjects.

A number of comments and critics have been made about Richard Wright and his works. Felgar in *Richard Wright* puts that Wright is seen as a combatant who always aligns on the side of his people. He continues saying that after Wright has read Mencken, he knew that it was no longer necessary to fight with a club or guns but with words. He also becomes conscious that the time has come to fight without delay (41). The question that we can ask is whether one can align to the side of people who hate him or ignore the importance of the enterprise that is planned for them. Harriet Beecher Stowe realised that Richard Wright was always willing to see himself as wronged and to see the black and white as evil. This priggish attitude, she continues,

was offensive but allowed him to score his points in a crudely powerful way. Though she says so, no one can hate everybody in his environment and at the same time want to cooperate with him. To look at others all as evil is to be evil yourself.

James Baldwin's as we see it in *James Baldwin* was against the attitude of Richard Wright and the content of most of his writings. He moves that Wright views the process of artistic creation is useful when one wants to realise the rage and fear that inevitably grew out of the black American experience. He accuses Wright for only depicting the fury or rage without examining the root of that violence. He says: "Violence in so much of Wright's work is so gratuitous and convulsive" (22).

For Dan McCall in *The Example of Richard Wright*, the way he talks about things is common but he is unique in his creativity and willingness to make people be aware of his new discoveries.

Caryl Phillips while introducing Wright's *Native Son* reveals that Wright was determined that he would make Whites conscious of the difficult facts of African-American life and encourage them to accept their complicity. He adds that *Native Son* is considered as a shelter for Richard Wright that will protect him from being transformed into a Bigger Thomas.

Paulin Hountondji in *"Race" Writing and Difference* states that Black writers accepted a false premise by assuming that racism would be destroyed once white racists became convinced that they were human too. He adds that writing stood as a complex certificate of humanity. In his pessimism, he is still wondering whether or not they will in no way be liberated by the black writings (12). We wonder if blacks are devoid of racism when they consider that only whites are racists.

Wright himself makes a kind of critique about his own work. While explaining how Bigger Thomas was born, he shares the same view with Baldwin when he defines a writer's role. He thinks the role of a writer is limited to transmitting what he has read, seen, and remembered. He imagines that there is no need to explain the matter. The moment he attempts to explain, Wright continues, a writer is confronted and defied by the inexplicable array of his own emotions (1-2). Wright acknowledges that thanks to writers who, in the past denounced the bleakness and flatness of American scene, America is what it is today.

Cyprian Ekwensi interviewed on voice of America (1981) upheld that a writer is someone who must take time and write in a manner that exposes the truth that helps himself to achieve the end he is aiming at. It is no use, said he, to mention everything simply because you must write about as this may defeat the very end you are setting out to achieve. In this way we realise that Richard Wright writes about specific topics especially socio-political, economic and peculiarly racial issues and injustice.

Orville Prescott in "*The New York Times*" when he looks at the revelations of *Black Boy* seems to encourage people to read it. After that, Prescott thinks these persons would understand human nature and consequently the relationship between whites and blacks.

Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic*, places Richard Wright on the centre Afro-modernism. In this view, Wright's legacy has been impoverished by those who rely on the narrowed description provided by racially cultural expressions that he struggled to overcome. This is the case of Baldwin who says Wright's works are devoid of any explanation about the origin of the hatred, rage and violence the main concerns in Wright's writings. Ralph Ellison on his account says that Richard Wright converted the American Negro impulse toward self-annihilation and going underground into a will to confront the world to evaluate his experience honestly and throw his findings unashamedly into the guilty conscience of America.

Karl Marx sustains that the main concerns of literature wounds which have been inflicted on the communities. They claim that the kindest thing would be to put an end to their agony.

Harriet Stowe looks at Wright as being strange in this sense that he viewed the world, white and black as evil. This priggish attitude says Harriet allowed Wright not to conform to any pre-established plan without questioning it.

Noelle Watson views Wright as the pioneer of black literature. According to Watson, Wright was the measure by which black writers were judged. He influenced his younger contemporaries as Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin and Le Roi Jones just to mention a few.

At last, Sylvestre Ndayirukiye in "The Negro Life in the American South through Richard Wright's *Black Boy*" analyses the life of the Negro in the south. He exposed the image of blacks in the south marked by segregations of all sorts— in education, in politics, in business, and culture. He finds out that Wright did a great job in fighting anything humiliating. His non-conformism and determination allowed him to achieve his freedom and have a place in a society.that seems alienating.

This study differs from existing works and other researches in that it focuses on the role played by Wright in the change of the lifestyle of Americans whereas others mainly treat the hostilities on the South Side. Instead of insisting on the portrait of Negroes in the South, our work treats the author's life as a writer, in his struggle for a new look in a society that has been alienated for so long. The attachment to the effectiveness of his message on Americans is a new perspective in this work.

Including the **General Introduction** and the **General Conclusion**, this work is divided into five chapters. The general introduction gives an insight or an overview

of what will be discussed throughout this work. It also provides the reader with the historical background, the motivation and the hypothesis that guide the evolution of this work. The approach that helps to analyse the work under study is also given and made explicit. The first chapter entitled "**Historical Situation and *Black Boy***" is concerned with the conditions under which Blacks were living— socio-political and economic segregations. It also reveals how they have reacted about the oppression that was inflicted on them. The second chapter "**Education as Arsenal**" in *Black Boy* demonstrates how Wright educated himself to be empowered. It is concerned with his achievements thanks to his education. Among this, we distinguish among them his decision to quit the communist party that was no longer following its ideology and his combat as a writer and his reaction as a native son. It is shown that education does not lack consequences that have been well demonstrated. Chapter three entitled "**Author's Flight**" centres on Wright's dream of a place that does not limit his skills, a land that is peaceful. The main concern is his message and how effective was his message on the population in general and on Americans in particular. It explains the difficulties that writers face on one hand and on the other hand, the problems Richard Wright encountered in his struggle for freedom and unity. Finally, a general conclusion is drawn. It summarises major arguments to see if hypothesis is proven. It gives recommendations and provides areas of research to future researchers.

CHAPTER ONE: HISTORICAL SITUATION AND *BLACK BOY*

This chapter is mainly concerned with both political, socio-cultural and economic situations and how Wright's *Black Boy* describes the period. Politically speaking, the production of *Black Boy* was nothing but an alarm to those who could not raise even the little finger to denounce the non-respect of the principles that were assigned to the Communist Party– togetherness and avoidance of the poorest. The Communist Party was seen as the regulator of blacks and poor Whites' actions. The oppression that was inflicted on these two categories of Americans pushed them to come together to fight against the advocators of discrimination and oppression. As it concerned both blacks and whites, the fight and the cause to fight were easily agreed upon.

Communism was seen as the only organisation that gave priority to equality and togetherness. From the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the term Communism is used to denote systems of social organisation based upon common property, or an equal distribution of income and wealth. In the past, there were small communities; most of them were living morally on religious inspirations of literal interpretations of passages in the scripture. In 1848, the word Communism acquired a new meaning when it was used as identical with socialism by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their famous *Communist Manifesto*. Marx found the basis for the movement no longer in religious ethical assumptions but in the new social science. How then do Black Americans view the communism?

Communism was looked at by Afro-Americans as a movement that would liberate them from the hostilities– discrimination, racism and all the like. This would allow Black Americans to share and work together as "Native Sons". Wilkerson's pamphlet "The Negro People and the Communist" states that the communist party had always understood that the achievements of Negro rights was fundamental to the

welfare of the people as a whole. True unity was the guarantee to victory, that is unity between black and white but Wright had a different view.

Richard Wright was against those who thought Communisms was the solely positive social uplift because in his view, it was also a kind of prejudice. To say any communist member should not read books other than those written by communists was deviance was to Wright limiting, what he hated with all his energy. As a black American, he realised that his being qualified as an intellectual, the fallacy that blacks could be confused in reading books was not dissimilar to the attitudes of whites who thought a black man was less intelligent or devoid of rationality. In the same way, the Communist Party members though they were different in paranoia, acted the same as when a black man sees a white or when a Communist Party member sees an intellectual.

The coming together in the same organisation to claim for the same cause was a clue to the ideal world that has been thought about by Wright. For him, people should look in the same direction, think of developing their nation, live in harmony-whites and blacks regardless their differences to resolve for all the discrimination-based problem.

In education, the only group that claimed to be educating the oppressed and informing them with a vision of life was in Wright's view devoid of vision. To hate an intellectual or any inspired person who wants to express himself was not in any promoting the aim of Communism. Wright was seen as a spy and most of the time was insulted by other communists. Bastard intellectual, incipient Trotskyite, traitor, were terms coined to call Wright. Communist party members thought he had seraphim tendencies and does not want to help them in their struggle for equal rights.

To read books not written by communists and for communist purposes was seen as a sin. Wright showed them that all those who wrote books even those who are not communists are not necessarily their enemies or partakers in the Bourgeoisie. Again, he did his best to show them the importance of reading books, that it opens minds to the external view of the world. In a word, it nourishes our conscience and lead to advanced faculties about creativity and thinking. Unfortunately, to be a writer was a tangible reason for a person to be to be condemned as a bourgeois.

If we analyse the relationship between Wright and his kinships and other communists, they shift faults to one another. For instance, when they blame Richard for having seraphim tendencies, he on his turn blames them for showing complacency. They have been told how to act, how to think and never plan their future. There was no hope that one day life would change. Wright says he totally understands them even though they are condemning him. He thinks that the way they react to stimuli has been inculcated to them a long time ago. He reveals that the blindness of their limited lives— lives truncated and impoverished by the oppression, they had suffered long before they have heard of Communism made them think he was with their enemies. All they know is to use force in their enterprises. To understand really what Negro communists aspire to, let us get an eye on this conversation between Wright and a Negro communist:

> -"He got that wound from the police in a demonstration. That's a proof of loyalty."
>
> -"Do you mean that I must be whacked over the head by the cops to prove that I'm sincere? That's a primitive way to measure sincerity"
>
> -"It's a practical way"
>
> -"Look, suppose that a cop whacks me over the head and I suffer a brain concussion. Suppose I'm nuts after that, can I write then?

> What will I have proven? " (*Black Boy, American Hunger, and The Outsider*, 317)

The fact that the communist nodes shows that he may have understood what was meant but does not want to betray those who had inculcated him with the Communist party policies.

As a combatant, like M. Luther King who adopted non- violence, Wright on his return focuses on non-conformism. He denounces everything that is inhuman, not adapted to the needs of the people. He tries to help his people to overcome their ignorance and blindness, to highlight things so that blacks be aware of the meaning of life. He wants them to be united and combat with all their energy to satisfy their hunger of justice, fullness, dignity and happiness. This perhaps constitutes the pillar or the cornerstone of a meaningful life. The problem with all this is that Blacks do not see that they are also racist in supporting their candidate. If words ''whites are bad'' are always on the tip of black's tongue, undoubtedly, they are also racist in generalizing and are perceptible to be racists.

Furthermore, the society itself was so violent, hostile, and racist to be lived in with dignity. Instead of evolving and developing humanism, racial roles were being developed and were looked at as instinct. Being so, the relation between Blacks and Whites was deteriorating and a big gap was created between them. In *Black Boy,* we see that from a young age, little children are aware of their roles as a race. In planning their role when they grow up, black children say: "You'd win with a new kind of poison gas!" "Maybe poison gas is something good to have". "Yeah, if they have race riot round here, I'm gonna kill all the white folks with my poison" (89).

By these sentences, we can deduce maybe, if blacks were to hold the power as the whites did, they would have killed the whites. If we consider how young children

interpreted the verses in the Bible, they seemed to be illuminated and conscious. The code of the streets held a special place in the minds of young boys. Words uttered by parents had no special impact on the behaviour and view of the world of the boys in question. To them, Bible stories must be interpreted according to the street life conditions and whatever did not fit their environment was to be rejected. As an illustration, in the conversation held by Richard and his mother, we realise Richard seems to know whites are enemies:

-"But I didn't want to sell Betsy to white people"

-"Why?"

- "Because they are whites" (81)

Though Richard does understand very well why he hates whites, it is like an instinct. He continues saying that the way he looks at whites is not premeditated but spring spontaneously out of the talk of black boys who meet and pretend the callousness of parents (88).

In family relation, *Black Boy* was produced during a period of culture deterioration. People had no fear to openly make love and prostitution was made a kind of business. In the words of the landlady addressing Richard, we can conclude that prostitution is useful in making money: "you scared my customers? [...] Why don't you come on over like the rest and spend a quarter?" Analysing these words, we understand that the essential is to gain money regardless the means of gaining it.

In addition, there was deterioration of relationship in the neighbourhoods between Whites and Blacks. The white neighbour decided to segregate the black one residentially; restrict his participation in the professions and jobs; all these to build up a vast, dense ideology of racial superiority that would justify any act of violence taken against him to defend white dominance. He further conditioned him to hope for little and to receive that little without rebelling.

In response to the hostilities of Ku Klux Klan and Jim Crow Laws and other setbacks, in the summer of 1905, W. E. B. Du Bois and 28 other prominent African-American men met secretly at Niagara Falls, Ontario. There they produced a manifesto that put an end to racial discrimination full civil liberties for African Americans and recognition of brotherhood. After Springfield, Illinois race riot that of 1908, a group of concerned whites joined with the leadership of Niagara Movement and formed the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) a year later.

Under the leadership of Du Bois, the NAACP mounted legal challenges to segregation and lobbies legislatures on behalf of Black Americans. During this period, African Americans continued to create independent community and institutional lives for themselves. They established schools, churches, social welfare institutions, banks and newspapers and small business to serve the needs of their communities and this is well illustrated in Wright's work under study. Boycotts against segregated public transformation systems sprang up in the South and the most notable is Montgomery Bus Boycott. The high point of the Civil Rights was the 1963 March on Washington for jobs and freedom. 250,000 marchers came to speak out of an end to southern racial violence and police brutality, equal opportunity in employment, equal access in education and public accommodations.

Many Blacks were being systematically eliminated and the non-violence advanced by M. L. King, Jr. was seen as non effective. More militant Blacks could not stay still. The fact that all are created by God and consequently equal was not totally agreed upon by blacks. What was then the place of religion in blacks' minds and what was the basis of their hope about the life hereafter?

Almost all the Blacks got religion and thought Jesus would redeem the void of living, felt that the bitter life was in the present the happier it would be in the

hereafter when they would be relaxing and enjoying with their redeemer Jesus after the Second Coming. This helped most of Black Americans to be stoic and resist the burden of Whites who were treating them as inferior, opposing their belief. When we read *Religion and the American Experience: A Social and Cultural History, 1765-1997* by Donald Charles Swift, William Billings makes these verses: Let Tyrants shake their iron rod, we fear them not, **we trust in God** (5).

We realise that even the motto of the United States derived from these verses of Billings. Nevertheless, some blacks doubted the existence of God. In *Black Boy,* Richard says he had given a kind of uneasy assent to the existence of God. Wright and other Blacks could not help thinking about the words of Thomas Jefferson- that men are created equal. Tired from waiting, some doubted the existence of God and still doubt His deeds.

Besides, we can say that Richard shares the same view with existentialists who uphold that it is ourselves who determine our future; that there is no need to wait from beyond. From Felgar's *Richard Wright,* we read that he was implacably opposed to the hint that American blacks' lives are shaped by the inchoate remnants of tribal ways or the thought that human progress might be guided by a divine hand. He found satisfaction in the notion that his race and he himself are the potential shapers of their own destinies. Wright's satire about religion is founded in the fact that there was no tranquillity even in religious houses like their own. In *Black Boy,* Richard observes this in Granny's house and wants us to evidence how a word uttered in a house of God is not put into practice. He notes:

> "There were more violent quarrels in our deeply religious home thanin a home of a gangster, a burglar, or a prostitute[...] Wherever I found religion in I found strife, the attempt of one individual to rule another in the name of God"(150).

Maybe, Wright could not tolerate the hypocrisy of religion members. The religious members called themselves the people saved but they did not act accordingly. In Wright's family, all are Adventists and he realises that the way they treat him is inhuman. He was always beaten either by his mother or by any family member. How come that one could admit that the preachers of Christianity in churches were the same to be vagabond, racists and slave-owners. Wright and any minded person could not understand it and consequently could bear it.

Moreover, religious members tended to submit to their superior authorities. Let us recall here that whites profited from it and relied on biblical verses to subjugate blacks. These misinterpreted biblical verses helped whites to maintain their supremacy. We mention here Colossians 3:22; 1Peter 2:18; Ephesians 6:5; 1Timothy 6:1; 1Titus 2: 9. He could not bear the fact that they give much time praying instead of working and prevent him from looking for job at Saturday. God being Blacks' first protector and consolatory, they invoked him in moment of helplessness. In *Uncle Tom's Children*, we read that Taylor, the representative of Blacks is exhorting them to call upon God in their moment of trouble. He says: "Sisters and brothers, let us call on the Great God who made us and put us in this world (137).

The biblical beloved book for Wright is that of Job. Wright always imagines how the wicked emerge and the righteous are most of the time in trouble. He also risks to line to the side of those who think God is powerless or unjust. He considers how innocent people are plunged in great problems whereas hardened criminals enjoy life and are leaders of institutions. Those who laboured in the hot sun and killed their restless aches and pains with alcohol were the alter egos of Richard Wright. They were hopeless and some thought drug addiction was solution to forget or to alleviate their daily pains though it was a kind of systematic self-destruction. Let us note that the church was the only black institution to be independent and was the centre of the



black culture. It was also the only place in the Deep South where blacks could release pressures caused by white race.

Wright sustains that the stability and safety for blacks depend on their struggle for their daily bread. However, they must combat to surmount the calamities and other evils caused either by misinterpretations of the Bible and ancient ideologies. The Bible and other ideologies were against the black race. They segregated blacks, killed them, in many ways. In this way, Blacks were considered as playthings in the hands of whites.

D. Piersen in *Black Legacy: America's Hidden Heritage* analysed it and revealed that "the religion finds justification for white supremacy in the doctrine that all blacks, even Christian ones, had been rejected to a position of subservience by the curse of Ham. There was the claim that it was the Whiteman's burden to rule over and uplift those races not yet ready for self-rule" (29). However, the question of freedom, apart from being a need for all, is also a right for everybody.

Discrimination happened in a society which was their own (blacks), where they were native sons. Spear in his work mentioned earlier observed that blacks were systematically excluded from white sections of the city, drastically limited in their choice of jobs, and barred from many places of public accommodation. In response to their deteriorating status, they developed separate institutions in the black belt (8). This included the black religion that put together thousands of men and women. It was the only place in which Blacks were not controlled in their movements.

In addition to racial evil, in the United States, there were more eventual crimes; more persons in prison, more homeless families and individuals, more children created virtually by accident and more fatal diseases were evident. In *Black Boy* Richard not only describes his hostile environment but also provides us with

instances. The fact that blood shed by a Black is normal angered Wright. This is his baptism to what we can call "black nothingness". This is seen when Wright is bitten by a White's dog whose proprietor is laughing instead of feeling passion. The conversation goes: -"It's swelling and it hurts, -"If it bothers you, let me know, but I never saw a dog yet that could really hurt a nigger" (180). To Whites, it is presupposed that a nigger never feels pain. If he said he was suffering, they thought he was pretending. They went far and considered Blacks as devoid of life. They could beat him and even kill him at their mercy when it pleased them. This is what Wright experiences when riding back to town. He is almost beaten to death and Whites enjoy his suffering as if it is interesting:

> "The words were barely out of my mouth before I felt something Hard and cold smash me between the eyes[...]. The car stopped And the white men piled out and stood over me [...] they laughed you're a lucky bastard, 'cause if you've said that to the other white men you might've been a dead nigger" (200).

Relying on this passage, we realise that the combat of Richard needs good supporters. He will win provided that he is still determined and patient about the probable change.

The police agents that were supposed to insure the security among citizens were partial. That is the reason why the intervention of the police was interpreted differently. When whites hear the cry "the police are coming", for them, it means the help was on way. On the contrary, a black could not presume the police would show up after losts and suffering. They were used to live in trauma at the point that when the overheard that the police were coming, the first thing to do was to run away as quickly as possible as long as the neutrality of the police was not guaranteed. They might also be charged of conniving with the white racists. Wright describes it when

he says: "A white policeman watched [a woman being tortured for not having paid the red rent] from the corner, twirling his night stick, but he made no move" (198). In *Black Boy*, we are told that the floor was bloody, strewn with whips of hair and clothing and the white man who whipped the woman did not care. He considered a black's blood shed normal and even venture that this was what he would do to any nigger who for this reason or another did no acquit the rent. He warns Richard: "Boy, that's what we do to niggers when they don't pay their bills" (199).

The hate that grows in the hearts of Blacks due to this ill-treatment would lead nowhere but to a revolution. As Richard views it, a person does not react according to his wish, but instead, according to the stimuli. He recalls:

> "The hostilities of the whites had become so deeply implanted in My mind and feeling that it had lost that direct connection With the daily environment in which I lived; and my reaction to this hostility fed up itself, grew and diminished according to the news that reached me about the whites, according to what I aspired to or hoped for"(98).

Unfortunately, blacks were too weak to make a tangible step to improve their life conditions. They feared to be killed or caught and be tortured. However, after they realised their lives were endangered if they stayed passive, some opted for what we may refer to as suicide. For instance, the woman who was revenging his beloved husband did it even though she knew quite well she probably had to perish on the ground; she did not care about the aftermath. This kind of woman is presented as a heroine. Richard sustains it using the following words:

> I had grown to feel there existed men against whom I was powerless, men who could violate my life at will. I resolved

> that I could emulate the black women if I ever faced with a white mob; I would conceal a weapon, pretend that I had been crushed by the wrong done to one of my beloved ones; just when they thought I had accepted their cruelty as the law of my life, I would let my gun and kill as many as possible before they killed me (83).

If we try to analyse this long sentence, we deduce that the hatred blacks were fed up with living under this plight on them by the white society. They opted to die fighting instead of starving and dying in silence. Resignation could not continue guiding them. The non allowance to cry theirs added to the wounds caused by the psychological torment.

Nicolas Rose in *Inventing Our Selves: Power and Personality* supports that all should be respected as human beings. She says they have an identity that is their familial heritage and their particular experience as individuals, which animate their thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and values. To her, we can say she was looking at America as being governed basing on the white myth that they are the motor of vehicle of life and that blacks are animal-like human beings devoid of any sense of organisation. The innate hate between races pushes them to systematically kill each other. This is the case of Bigger Thomas in Richard Wright's *Native Son*. In *Black Boy*, Whites invite their kinships to fight or kill if necessary. They are screaming: "The only dream of a nigger is to be a president and to sleep with white woman. Americans, do we need this on our fair land? Organize and save the womanhood" (144). Here, 'Americans' does not mean any American because everyone knows his place. If he said he hoped to become a lawyer or merchant, that he wanted to buy a car, to spend his vacation in Canada, then, that was white. But, if he prefaced his desire by the phrase "If I live and nothing happens" he was coloured. The author continues saying that it is this philosophy, born of heart-breaking experiences which kept his insanity and suicide rates below those of his fair skinned brothers (*The White Problems in America,* 160)

Engels in *Karl Marx and Frederic Engels Selected Works* upholds that "the world had hitherto allowed itself to be led solely by prejudices; everything in the past deserved pity and contempt. Now for the first time appears the right of day, the kingdom of reason; henceforth superstition, injustice, privilege, oppression was to be superseded by eternal truth, eternal right, equality based on nature, and the inalienable rights" (403).This vision is shared by Wright and his struggle should not end until equal rights are granted. In *Black Boy*, Wright wants to awake his people from their ignorance. This is true as long as they were taught what to think about but not how to think about them; how and when to act but not why to act so, what to bless and what to curse without telling them why they were invited to bless or to curse.

Economically, *Black Boy* evokes the consequences of the Great Depression and the deterioration of white-black relationships during this period of hardships. The Great Depression began in 1929 and rapidly spread worldwide. The market crush marked the beginning of a decade of high unemployment, poverty, low profits, deflation, plunging farm incomes, and loss of opportunities for economic growth and personal advancement. To profit from the little assets found in America during that period needed a competition. In *Black Boy,* Wright shows that blacks were discriminated and could not run a business. Their household was torn apart, belongings were sold, given away or simply left behind. The endless movement of blacks due to deteriorating relations with whites, violence and killings added to the hard living conditions.

Despite the fact that blacks were considered inferior and devoid of reason, they wanted to cope with whites and this created fear. In *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto (1890-1920)* we read that "Whites grew anxious as a growing Negro population sought more and better housing. They fear job competition in an era of industrial strife when employers frequently used Negroes as strike-breakers" (8). All

these fears the author continues, were accentuated by the racist ideology that reinforced the traditional anti-Negro-prejudices.

In relationships, whites thought blacks were to be avoided to limit their evolution about job competition and competence. Whites wanted to harm blacks psychologically by showing them they were not really human beings. Names like crazy bastard, son-of-a-bitch, Negro or nigger were at the tip of their tongue in presence of the coloured. Whites thus thought there were jobs deserved to them and others (dirty jobs) deserved to blacks. In *Black Boy*, Richard is working in an optical company. His boss gives him a chance to learn about the mechanics but his white co-workers threaten him, point at him saying: "Nigger, you think you are white, don't you? This is a white men's job around here" (207). They thought the moment Negroes will learn about all jobs, from that time on, they would no longer be able to control them or cope with them.

Opportunities to job application were not offered the same way. Whites controlled all the institutions, plantations, all industries and big shops and blacks were moving from one place to another in the search for the daily bread. This is what made them still starving in misery. Wright questions: "Why could I not eat when I was hungry? Why did I always have to wait until others get through? I could not understand why some people had enough food and others could not". (26)

In a country where one class controls the means of economic production, that class also controls the means of intellectual production; ideas, feelings; intuitions in short- the very meaning of life (*Communication for Social Change- Anthology: Historical and Contemporary Readings*, 49). The problem with all this is that the egocentrism guided actions of Whites. The fact that they limited the possessions, education— source of freedom, opportunities of jobs led to the bleakness of blacks on one hand and on the other hand to the superiority of the white race. Whites should at least

understand and acknowledge that the development could not be possible if Blacks were not to contribute morally and physically.

James Baldwin moved that White people needed the presence of Black people as a reminder of what providence has spared them from becoming. During the production of *Black Boy*, there was no humanity and philanthropy. When Wright looks at the white houses, wide clean streets and how orderly things are, he feels out of the place. He has no desire to live there. He remembers that these houses were the homes in which lived those people who made Negroes leave their homes and flee into the night (79). It was evident that blacks were no longer able to pay rent and that whites had drawn a line that blacks could not dare to step and had accepted it because their bread was at stake (251). This fact made blacks still be dependent on whites and trusted what they were told by them even more if the same thing was told by their comrades black (262).

Juda Matras in *Inequality, Stratification and Mobility* mentions whites in the industrial North and those of the South made coalition in persecuting and excluding blacks. He says: "Emerging industrial work groups made common cause with planter and property owning groups to exclude blacks from job competition by means of rigid segregation and Jim Crowism (75). If this was the case, the persecution of the "Nouveaux riches" that we mentioned in the section of general introduction is proved. The "Anciens riches" did not want any emerging group or class as it can cause tension and defeat. This situation was unbearable and there were two choices remaining- to flee or to die.

Talking about the economy during that time needs to focus on the income of the population. As it is well illustrated in *Black Boy*, blacks were landless, houseless; and most of the time they were forced to move suddenly. Illuminated blacks could not stay indifferent to this unfair treatment of blacks. They were irritated by the long

oppression and deprivation and led to find a way out. Ngugi expresses his view about this segregation and avoiding of emerging new rich in his *Petals of Blood.* He shows it through the character of Abdulla who question the national economy. His doubt and nervousness is shared by conscious blacks in America. We read:

> He had asked himself several times how was it that a boss who never once dirtied his hands in the smelly water and air in the tannery or in any other part of the complex, could live in a big house and own a car and employ a driver and more than four people only to cut the grass in the compound (136).

If we try to analyse this expression full of anger, we can conclude that the laborious class or group remained poor instead of emerging. The working class benefited less from the fruits of their labour. If they began to claim for better housing and working good conditions, it would undoubtedly lead to a repression.

To conclude, throughout this chapter, we have seen that the socio- cultural circumstances such as racism, Ku Klux Klan and Jim Crow had been at the origin of many cruelties. Ku Klux Klan and Jim Crow Laws advocates were the main civil forces that reinforced racism and white myth. They may be charged of violence, thefts and killings that took place in America especially in the South Side. The community tended towards generalization and without knowing it, the two races were indirectly racist one towards another. In politics, Blacks could not express freely or vote. They were not free in their feelings and deeds as well. It is true blacks were the poorest of the poor, but this could not in no way make them silent and this forever. *Black Boy* is nothing less but the voice of these who were voiceless. Economically, the Great Depression, egocentrism of "anciens riches", the poverty in the black community may have pushed Wright to produce this novel under study here.

CHAPTER TWO: EDUCATION AS ARSENAL IN *BLACK BOY*

This chapter examines how Wright has managed to triumph in his fight against the stereotypes vis-à-vis the Blacks. We are in the search of sources of his weapons that helped him in the overcoming of the prejudice, poverty and racism in this hostile world he was living in. In a world characterized by discrimination and hate, many people had been "uncle toms" and had surrendered to what seemed inhuman and unbearable. This was the case of black Americans who, after harsh living conditions, were weakened and thought there was nothing more to do but to resign. No one could raise the little finger to denounce the cruelties inflicted on them.

Thanks to his education and through reading, Richard Wright learnt what was kept secret to black folks. Education was at the origin of awareness of black race in general and of Richard Wright in particular and thus they organised in clubs to denounce and fight against the advocators of discrimination and racism. When other blacks seemed too "satisfied" with the bad conditions under which they were living, Wright said that he could not show complacency. Two fortuitous events then conspire to alter Wright's prospects and view of the world: his mother, who is a schoolteacher, teaches him how to read and how to decipher the meaning of words; then, a kind man who delivers coal to their house teaches him how to count to 100.

From the very beginning, Richard showed an interest in the function of what surrounds him. His curiosity pushed him to burn the curtains and afterwards the whole house was put on fire. From his young age, Wright began to be aware of himself as a distinct personality striving against others. Wright wanted to be different from other children and even adults in his environment. These experiences opened up new perspectives and possibilities for Richard and gave him skills other than those he uses to defend himself. He wonders if one ought to surrender to authority even if one believed that that authority was wrong. He says he would always be

wrong because he was not planning to give up the search for freedom of his people. Wright using the Socratic questions convinces his readers by asking them: "How could one live in a world in which one's mind and perceptions meant nothing and authority and tradition meant everything?" (182). Richard realises that the authority and adults constitute an obstacle to him in their thinking; that their way of looking at the world was dogmatic. He who always wants to question any situation is looked at as a rebel or a stubborn child.

He wanted to fill the hunger and emptiness that he daily felt that is the hunger of justice, education, and freedom. His want to avoid ignorance by educating himself kept him from the atrocities of his racial environment. He gained a place and position in this society that denied him though he was a native son. Pride and self-confidence characterized the personality of the young Richard. The premature self-evidence frequently rendered him wilful, stubborn, and disrespectful of authority especially for those who mistakenly thought he had a degraded position in the society. Let us note that he was constantly punished for his non conformity with varying degrees of physical violence and emotional isolation. Granny for example is an ardent Adventist. She tries to persuade Richard to adhere to the Christianity, to adore her God. He is considered a rebel for not accepting the religion and be baptized. He knows his place: "I was a minor, an uninvited dependent, a blood relative who professed no salvation and whose soul stood in mortal peril". (114)

He most of the time denies to conform to the family laws and behave in independent adult. He does not understand how girls and boys easily adhere to concepts they do not understand and he could not act like them. He said:

> "There boys and girls were will-less, their speech flat, their gestures vague, their personalities devoid of anger, hope, laughter, enthusiasm, passion or despair. I was able to see them

> with an objectivity that was inconceivable to them. They claimed wholly by their environment and could imagine no other, whereas I had come from another plane of living, from the swinging doors of saloons, [...]. I had shocked more than half of them and had embarrassed Aunt Auddie to helplessness". (115-116)

His stubbornness causes him lose many opportunities and jobs and consequently was isolated and impoverished. He was adamant to change though he must learn to live with whites. His friend addresses him and warns him in these words: "Dick, look, you are black, black, black, see? Can't you understand that?" (202-203). The repetition here is not done randomly but rather expressively to put an accent on his words. Griggs uses repetition maybe for Wright to understand and be conscious there was a distance separating them— blacks and whites. He does not want his comrade to be ignorant because he could die from it. The tone used by Griggs and the way he accentuates his intervention help to make Wright to get an idea about what to be black is all about and the comportment to adopt. Wright then signals that the lesson is understood but to put it into practice is shocking and similar to slavery. He screams: "Oh, Christ, I can't be a slave" (203).

We can say that Richard shares his view of not being a slave with a number of persons. When we are trying to conform to what is pre-established and not touch or talk about what is told to be taboos or tradition, we are doing it not because we like it but because we do not want to be marginalised. M. Tarde cited by Donald and Cannor supports Richard saying that most of the things we do, we do them for no better reason than that our fathers have done them or that our neighbours do them, and the same is true of a larger part than we suspect of what we think (in *Readings of the Twentieth Century American History,* 51).

Besides, Richard Wright's difficulties and isolation are his good educators. This experience fuels his intensively powerful imagination, his love of reading and writing. His adaptation to the harsh systems– Ku Klux Klan and Jim Crow Laws without putting apart the economical event– the Great Depression of 1930s and the violence that accompanied them were transformed into literature in this work we are treating and *Native Son*. Instead of looking at him as inherently imperfect, he is courageous to the extent that he is unable to believe the publically or common accepted notions.

After Wright had had the little education we see him determined to overcome the consequences of the systems mentioned above. Again, in him, we see the spokesperson who eternally will seek the welfare of his people. His poor upbringing and degraded position in a hostile society do not prevent from emerging. His auto-didactic manoeuvres helped him to know the meaning of life and to give himself a place in this society that not only deprives him from his rights but also rejects him as an outsider. Though the culture of black household was thus transmitted to another black household, and folk tradition handed from group to group did not prevent Richard to evolve mystically. In few words, his loneliness, his rebelling, his independence are at the same time the sources of his strength and unhappiness if we consider his relation with blacks and whites. To liberate himself from any dependence or shameful things, he departs from other blacks who claim for the little things and who are devoid of vision. About whites, he puts it in his writing and every reader could see who he is and why he writes. This would put an end to the suspicion that he is a dangerous black-white intellectual.

After he had embraced his career as a writer, as Gallantz observed and put it in *Richard Wright' Native Son and Black Boy*, Richard loves to retreat into the imaginary world of the novels that he reads. His decision to become a writer represents a declaration of independence from those in the black community who

ridiculed his ambitions and a declaration of war on the white racists who have oppressed him (86). Before, Wright could not believe that there could be whites who would fight on the side of Negroes. But writers such Mencken and Dreiser impressed him. He read them and knew what the hidden agenda of the white race was. It is true when a writer is writing does not write for specific persons but for everybody who will fall on the book. While looking at Wright's determination, he seems to be saying that every reader will be concerned and touched emotionally. He specifies it using these words:

> "I stove to master words, to make them disappear, to make them important by making them new, to make them melt into a rising spiral of emotional stimuli, each greater than the other, each feeding reinforcing the other, and all ending in an emotional climax that would drench the reader with a sense of a new world. That was the single aim of my living" *(Black Boy, American Hunger, and The Outsider*, 267-268).

Since life is the source of all inspirations, serious writers cannot ignore the problems which confront people from day to day. Therefore, they set out to expose and condemn all manifestation of evils wherever they appear. The conscientization of his people about justice and the upliftment of the society are his dreams. But he is hated when he tries to bring greater enlightenment about the new world. He achieves it in creating poetry, essays, and stories that could aspire them to become better human beings though he is condemned and criticized for this. In *Black Boy*, the chief mission of a writer is to struggle for peace and upliftment of society in which he lives. This role is determined not only by his place in literature but also by the degree of his involvement in the society's public life. The writer's vocation is to explain to people the essential meaning of today's world, of the seeds of tomorrow and future hope.

In *Black Boy,* Richard Wright becomes an outsider, in conflict with his family, the community and professional affiliations. The major source of conflict was his spiritual independence. In this environment that hates intellectuals puts writers in jeopardy. If they are hated by those for whom they are fighting, what will their enemies not do to them? Who are they saving? Are they trying to save a people that ignore what is happening around them? The answer is 'yes' but Wright pitied them because in his opinion it is the way they have been taught to look at that "unreal world".

Wright suffered this misunderstanding after he had wrote his first story he entitled *The Voodoo of Hell's Half Acre.* From that moment, people especially the Communist Party members looked at him with a scornful eye, at distance and with suspicion. In writing, he thought he was doing it for the sake of his kinship and he unfortunately realised it was cutting him from them more completely than ever (160). In the house, Granny thinks to write fiction is a sin. She says that *The Voodoo of Hell's Half Acre* is a Devil's work and that writing a fictional novel is being weak-minded. To use the word 'Hell' itself was a sin, said Aunty Addie. In a strict religious family as Granny's, to write or say things that were not related to religion and law was seen as a sin. His engagement was misinterpreted by both white and black communists. Wright regretted about his enterprise in writing. He expressed it in the following words: "If I had thought anything in writing the story, I had thought that perhaps it would make me more acceptable to them" (184). From this regret, we understand how difficult it was for a writer to predict what the impacts would look like. Sometimes, it is better for a writer to die morally for others to make critics without asking him his opinion. It is no use for him to complain because it is the reader who gives to a work of literature the value that it is worthy of. As he was hated by his environment he planned to go North, a different place. It is true a writer needs to be in a silent place but better is to mention that the sources of good themes and inspirations find their roots in experiences.

Education is like light and whoever walks in light never falls in darkness. It brings awareness and whether one likes it or not, the impact of reading is always evident. In addition to this fact, Wright's view is that what was hitherto considered as taboo— become a writer for example could in no way continue to be considered as granted. The ideal state– the nirvana would only be achieved after the wall that prevented them from getting into the Eden was to be pulled down. In my opinion, I think that Wright, in saying that we have to make an effort to set ourselves free, he himself is recounting his own experience. Thanks to his works, he earns an amount of money and at the same time develops his way of looking at the world around him. Before, what he considered his enemies are not the same after he embraced his career as a writer. Uneducated Blacks considered all whites as evils. In *Black Boy*, Wright wants his fellow blacks to learn from him– how he was astonished when he read Mencken (a White) for the first time. From that moment he realised that the skin colour does not matter for someone who wishes to save his people or save himself from the ill-treatment of a category of people.

Moreover, his education makes him so powerful to the extent that if he talks, it is as if he is using a sword. His reading and writing consolidate his adaptation about the harsh environment of this wrecking world. What Richard thought was before impossible, from the time he is promoted to 6th grade into only 2 weeks, he realised everything was possible, simple and easy (138). He observes life is menaced and will be won by his new plans and policies. He says that his life is revolving into a world that he would fight if an opportunity was to be given him.

Furthermore the ignorance that characterized blacks and the white myth that made blacks subjected were to be fought with all energy. This is expressed through the character on Ned in Gaines' *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* when he says: "I'll blame ignorance. Because it was ignorance that put us here in the first place. Ignorance on the part of the black man and the white man" (108).

It is evident that a writer is not always a perfect person; this is the reason why the Communists should not judge Wright on what he is but on what he writes. Even though he is fighting for the sake of his fellows, he is rejected by some of them. His effort to change the animosity that characterized some unconscious Communists in general and the white world in particular marked his combat. The rejection of him does not surprise or make him take much time thinking about what they have done to him. He knows that there will be a time they will understand him. He is still patient waiting that time when they will be aware of the reality that is unknown to them. We can by this fact compare Richard to a parent who tolerates his little kids' ignorance or innocence. All the errors and faults committed in this period of unconsciousness or ignorance are not considered. That kid needs protection and his parent must know what are his needs and wants. In his struggle, Wright knows what his people want and what they need. Among their needs, justice and equal rights, freedom and unity are put forward. They wanted their daily bread and that was all.

In his combat again, he recalls the importance of having freedom of expression and actions. The stifling of the freedom of expression prevents Wright to continue his career as an artist. What he writes is not criticised but judged as coming to defeat or oppose the party's policies. Communism has declared war upon human loneliness and whoever deviates should be executed. They wanted to avoid the weakness of divided people as they find strength in togetherness. Let us signal here that writing needs concentration and this in a calm place where one has to concentrate in an isolated place.

The bitter life in the South as it is described in chapter one had had impact on blacks in general. Whites tried to deprive blacks from access to education. Richard Wright analysed the thinking of whites and concluded:

> The southern whites would rather have had Negroes who stole, work

> for them rather than Negroes who knew, however dimly, the worth of their own humanity. Hence, whites placed a premium upon black deceit; they encouraged irresponsibility and their rewards were bestowed upon us blacks in the degree that that we could make them feel safe and superior. (219)

Analysing this passage, we realise that the way blacks behave is dictated by whites. Wright who has always been different causes fear in not respecting what he is asked to do. He states it in the following words: "But, I who stole nothing, who wanted to look them in the face, who wanted to talk and act like a man, inspired fear in them" (219).

J. Gaines in his work made the same observation as Wright. He exhorts Americans without class distinctions: "I'm telling you all this because I want my children to be men [...]. I want my children to fight. Fight for all– not just for a corner. The Blackman or Whiteman who will tell you to stay in a corner wants to keep your mind in a corner, too. I'm building that school so you'll have a chance to get out from that corner" (110). This exhortation should be put into practice immediately but Wright observed that Negroes took much time to react to a stimulus. Wright knew that education was a kind of hidden richness that any American might discover. This would illuminate their way to success and consequently to their fullness. He declares an open fight against the hunger to be, to know and to understand the pervasive bias in judgement of what people are worth of. He puts a new way of living. He said that in him was shaping a yearning for a kind of consciousness, a mode of being that the way about him could not be, must not be, and upon which the penalty of death had been placed (187).

To solve a problem, we need to know its source and afterwards try to get it remedied. He discovered that all the secrets were hidden in books. People should then learn how to read and write. He thought writing was a new and effective means to express

feelings and experiences. Wright sends this message to awaken his people and make them love reading for them to look at the world differently. His experience makes him travel; his plane is nothing but books. Through books, he discovered a new world, new life and new people. Here is his testimony: "In buoying me up, reading also cast me down, make me what was possible, what I had missed" (274).

This new way of travelling does not lack obstacles. Sometimes while walking he finds himself heading to a cul-de-sac. This is illustrated by the Negro newspapers that are not producing an echo Wright is expecting. On the contrary, whites' writings, could extract elements of life that reveals the meaning of life. His attachment to books helps him to fill his hunger for justice, unity, education etc; and the new avenues of feeling and seeing were opened. These new avenues led him to new land, a land of harmony. Books here can be compared to compass and new binoculars and comprise new equipment for success in life and are the keys to consciousness (274). He mentions that he could not live being naïve and pretend to be satisfied about such a life. He says he could fight whites by organizing with other Negroes but he finds this way of fighting does not fit. He seeks for another means and opts for using words as a new weapon. He could not fight physically for he could perish on the ground before his objective is obtained. Though he was against conformism, he admires the fight of Mencken and inspired him. He confirms: "Yes, this man was fighting, fighting with words. He was using words as weapon, using them as one would use a club. Could words be weapons? Well, yes, for here they were. Then, maybe, I could use them as a weapon. No. It frightened me" (272).He wants to fight but he was afraid. This fear has source in the dilemma that he has to serve blacks and whites at the same time. The way words he wanted to use sounded in the ears of the addressee was the same as a sword stabbed in one's stomach.

In addition, the contribution of Richard Wright does not limit to his writing. We can agree with Carl Jung who mentions that the poet's work must meet the spiritual

needs of his society; the term "spiritual needs" suggesting that the psychic health of the nation depends on the author's commitment to truth and justice. Reading *Protest and Conflict in African Literature*, we see that a writer is a healer of our minds and souls. If he wants to heal our ills, he should not give us sour pills; we shall merely taste them and then spit them out. To be a successful healer, the writer should bring us a pill concealed in a lump of sugar. It is then that we will taste, such and swallow the pill and be healed (28).

In the same view, Gallantz realised Wright chooses his incidents and structures of his autobiography in such away as to emphasize the gradual progress of Richard's journey towards awareness and knowledge of the world around him (in *Wright's Native Son and Black Boy*, 90-1). Though the two men say this, I may say that the better is to face the world as it is and write about it without exagerating because it may mislead a reader.

To sum up, we have seen so far that the education of Richard Wright gave him power that he could not find anywhere else. Thanks to his education he has been able to know the realities of the world that surrounded him. His education again may be compared to a place in which weapons are found. This analogy allows us agreeing with those who opted to fight with words and ideas instead of fighting physically with guns or other weapons. His non-conformism, his hard working and self-esteem lifted him up in this society that offers him a degraded position. His success made him famous and his celebrity is evident until today. Critics about this extra-ordinary autodidactic writer are numerous and many still want to know how he did not succumb in the violence in the South Side.

The main source of his power is books and he understood the way proposed by R. McCoy and G. O. Connor when they said that the way to gain a liberal view of your subject is not to read something else but to get to the bottom of the subject itself.

They add that the means of doing that are in the first place, to follow the existing body of dogma into its highest generalizations by the help of jurisprudence, next to discover from history how it has come to be what it is, and finally, so far as you can, to consider the end which several rules seeks to accomplish, the reason why those ends are desired, what is given up to gain them, and whether they are worth the price (54).

To all those who thought blacks could not be writers, that reading some books could confuse them, that blacks were naturally inferior race and whites their masters were dismantled. The world that hitherto seemed unreal was revealed real then after Richard learnt the secrets hidden in books. To have neglected the utilitarian education of the South is due to his assiduous enterprise to get his people set free. Thus we can say that the hypothesis is demonstrated.

CHAPTER THREE: AUTHOR'S FLIGHT

It is concerned with the message Richard conveys through his novel and its effect on the American folks and this could concern other areas of the world that were enduring the same experience of race- based discrimination.

His experience proves his dream of a united people which was among his preoccupations. For Richard, what was important was not to do what pleased people for personal interest but instead doing what was good by nature was essential and needed to be encouraged.

To redeem his people was not something simple. He thought that he could even sacrifice himself if it was the only condition for his people to be saved. This proved his love to his community. He openly declared: "If laying down my life could stop suffering in the world, I would do it. But I don't believe anything can stop it" (128). Analysing these sentences above, we note that Wright was tired of the cries, violence, killings, hunger, injustice and all the like. He was no longer able to bear it and wished to die thinking it could save the world. He manifested his devotion to save his society plunged in evils of every kind that did not hope it could have an end. Whatever could liberate them could be done by Richard. Who could share this view with Richard? If Richard was moving from one place to another, what was the reason behind?

In my opinion, Richard Wright's flight can be justified. Again, whoever experienced and knows how it feels like to grow up in a rural, violent place, starving there and having people who try to stop him for having aspirations and vision will easily understand why the Wrights are in endless movement. Wright's abuse and his being abused and misunderstood by adults even in his years of innocence add to the major cause of flight. Wright's non-conformism may have been the main cause of his flight

from one area of the town to another and from the Deep South to the North. Blacks there were like outsiders in the only land they knew. They were "devoid" of identity and were dispossessed. Wright's mother who has been a school teacher turned into a cook. Blacks in general were paid a pittance (a wage hard to live on) and Wright experienced this situation. In *Black Boy*, the author let us know that the hunger was at the gate and the little they were paid could help in no way to survive and be stable. He says: "The most abiding feeling I had each day was hunger and fear" (36-37).

Richard Wright who always seeks to be free is like a prisoner in the South. Who could not flee from this place where hunger was still their friend, where fear was the law of life and toughness the king? As a combatant at his age, he could not help thinking about tomorrow's unwanted and unreal. He could not easily stand the act of "charity" that could bring shame on him. He wanted to handle things and solve problems but unfortunately the environment was restricting (96). He runs away from the orphanage and caught by the police and brought back to the " cage". We would not thus be mistaken if we entitled this novel "Black Boy Running away or The fate of a Race" in this sense that it is full of instances where the protagonist is endlessly running away and whatever happens to him is like his destiny. Now, things change from bad to worse. Richard who did not know,the difference between whites and blacks is being baptised as "Coloured". This rite is accomplished when his beloved uncle Hoskins is killed by white mob. He says:

> Before dawn we were rolling away, fleeing for our lives— I learnt afterwards that uncle Hoskins had been killed by whites who had long coveted his flourishing liquor business. He had been threatened with death and warned many times to leave, but he had wanted to hold on a white longer to amass more money (63).

This tension, poverty and killings characterised the life of blacks and were thought to be controlled by a supernatural human being.

There was a curtain that separated blacks and whites. There was also no contact between these two blocks except in circumstances of killing or other kind of violence. However, let us mention here that this was relevant in the south side. In the north, there were some whites who were kind towards blacks and some went beyond to claim for rights of blacks folks. This is the case of H. L. Mencken who was hated for his wanting to have blacks set free. In *Black Boy*, the author insinuates how complex it was to live in a society where the two nations "whites and blacks" only touch in moment of violence. For instance, the grandfather of Richard Wright fought in the civil war but after that has no contact with his masters. They willingly falsified his name for him not to get his fees as war veteran. The contact in Wright's family is now having place when whites come to kill his uncle Hoskins, the only hope for life to Wright. It is said that they were not even allowed to see Hoskins's body.

As long as the enemy is defined as someone who wants to kill you and take your country, or someone who wants to kill you, your kinfolks and take your country away, none would escape unless one is out the sight of his enemy. This was true because the whites wanted to control everything even life. Blacks were then to choose between being killed by enemy or kill him before they were killed. The choice was clear— the enemy deserves to be killed on sight (91).If it is so, if blacks were to be given power, maybe they would do the same and try to control the white folks and their possessions. Wright noticed that crimes were numerous and that to fight physically was not possible because whites were many and more violent. What could blacks do in such situations?

The plague of religion, misunderstanding in his family, his black comrades, whites, suspicion, poverty, lynching, traumatism, and other crimes oblige the author of *Black Boy* to suddenly move whether with his family or alone from job to job and from one city to another corner of the town. Wright was tired of the atrocities caused by whites in the south side. Unfortunately few blacks were showing any sign of fraternity and sameness to fight together for the same cause of identity and freedom. Wright claimed to see and understand issues that other blacks still ignored. Apart from this, he was adamant to change especially when he thought to be doing right things. This made him different and he was hated by other blacks who wanted him to submit in front of whites and do things the way the world wants them to be done.

We can figure out how Wright conceived whites as he expresses it through the character of Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*:

> White people were not really people, they were as sort of great natural force, like a stormy sky looming suddenly at one's feet in the dark. As long as he and his lack folks did not go beyond his certain limits, there was no need to fear that white force. But, whether they feared it or ,not, each and every day of their lives they lived with it, even when words did not sound its name, they acknowledge its reality (144).

It was these racist whites, who could violate one's life at will that Wright wanted to avoid. He did his best to put his people together but he failed. He was hated by whites for his cause and blacks did not understand him, instead suspected him thinking he was mixed up with ku kluxers and was a spy of whites. Blacks feared him and he too feared them.

Wright who got a way out could not continue living there because he could be killed. The south as described in *Black Boy* was forbidding, full of conflicts and curses, blows and anger, tension and terror (281). Not only were blacks coward and ignorant but also they did not want someone to discuss about they have been inculcated as taboo issues like racism, and relation between whites and blacks. They showed complacency and resignation. In *Native Son*, Wright indicates what should be the enterprise of blacks to overcome this bondage and be set free. "One day to end fear and shame was to make all those black people act together, rule them, tell them what to do, and make them to do it". (144)

The problem with this is that there is no difference between what whites want and what Richard Wright wants. If he wants to rule them, tell them what to do and make them to do it, we do not see the difference. Whites want blacks to do what they want them to do, want to rule them and act according to the restrictions invented by them. Blacks did not understand him and he waved his hands and surrendered.

The combat of Richard Wright could not end there because he was determined to get his freedom and liberation of blacks in one way or another. We can say he was the disciple of Mackay Claude who swears to fight, for freedom until he gets free. He expresses his courage to the white audience:

> But I possess the courage and the grace
> to bear my anger proudly and unbent [...]
> I must search for freedom every hour
> Deep in my wrathful bosom and raw,
> And find in the superhuman power,
> To hold me to the letter of law!
> (*Conference of African Writers of English Expression*, 4)

Wright does not understand blacks and wonders how could they still stick on useless things and hold on archaic destructive ideologies widespread by whites. It is true they have been taught to hate themselves and what related to them, but what Wright does not understand was their satisfaction. They were taught to say "yes, sir", "yes, sir" to the white man and were docile to the extent that they could say "yes, sir" even in situations about which they did not have an idea. They depended on the giver of the bread though it brought ephemeral happiness. He criticises their ignorance and passivity and tries to awake them to fight for their rights. If they were not ready to fight, at least let them know the value of what they were given by whites: "A man will seek to express his relation to the stars; but when a man's consciousness has been riveted upon obtaining a loaf of bread, that loaf of bread is as important as the stars". (254)

The time of Wright was characterized by chaos. As it has been demonstrated in the first chapter, the emerging class provoked jealousy and fear to the masters. The latter did their best to master the situation and repress this class by whatever means. If asked to kill, they would kill without regret and hesitation. They also ventured that they could kill any black at their wish. For example, after Hoskins has been killed by a mob, it was said they could kill all his kin. Who could resist these persons filled with rage? Who could remain passive before this situation? Wright proposed possible solutions— be not attached to the daily bread, fight for freedom and identity- but he at the end of the day realised that it all turned into a dream. Many thought he was wishing to flee to North they thought to be ideal but the attachment to this bread was obstacle .Their cowardice prevented them from claiming for better conditions. For instance, in *Black Boy* when Wright is through with the money to go north, his friend Shorty says Richard will never have any problems as hard in South. This justifies the fact that they knew the south was not worthy an area to live in. We hear Shorty screaming: "I'll leave this godamn south. I'm always saying I'm but I won't... I'm lazy. I sleep to godamn much. I'll die here. Or maybe they'll kill me"

(281). To go north was at first taken as dream to most of blacks. This was the culture from which they were brought up. They had never "stated" the happiness of being free. Wright who had been in search for it for a long time knew that happiness is in freedom.

Many factors then contributed to Wright's decision to leave the South. Firstly, an abiding reservation about the face of him as black in America, his deteriorating relations between him and his environment, relation with both whites and blacks could not be stood easily. The following was his determination to be a writer. He had to be in calm and in place where one may express freely. Let us note here that Shorty and many other blacks knew they could be killed if they were to stay there but were not courageous enough to leave this place because their life depended on whites. Wright afforded it because he got the sense of life at his early age and was determined to live differently and independent. He says that when he was only 12 years of age, he had a sense of the world that was his own, his own alone.

The question of segregation was questionable. About this view, J. Robinson and J. Tidnell (1995) exhort us to believe so devoutly in a vision of what black people actually were. There, they continue, could be no ambivalence on this point; underdevelopment and immobilization are unacceptable conditions. They not only lead nowhere and reduce according to these authors the stature of blacks in their own eyes of the world (*The State of Black America*, 24). We deduce from this opinion that whoever is discriminated in his native land, the remaining choice would be revolt, rebellion, followed by victory or death.

Moreover, the importance of being free is the central view shared by many persons of good faith. John F. Kennedy observes: "Freedom is indivisible, and when one man is enslaved, all are not free. When all are free, then we can look forward to that day when this city will be joined as one and this country and this great Continent of

Europe in a peaceful and hopeful globe"(*Speeches that Changed the World*, 147). M.L. King on his part says: "There will be neither rest nor tranquillity in American until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges" (*Speeches that Changed the World*, 151). Wright's *Black Boy* is a response to the unbearable hunger of justice, freedom unity and education.

Furthermore, on realising he was not admitted by blacks he opted to quit the South to the North. He justifies his reason thus:

> I was leaving the South to fling myself into the unknown, to meet other situations that would perhaps elicit from other responses. And if I could meet enough of different life, then perhaps the graduàlly and slowly I might learn who I was, what I might be. I was not leaving the south to forget the South, but so that someday I might understand it, might know its rigors had done to me, to its children. I fled so that the numbness of my defensive living might thaw out and let me feel the pain— years later and far away — of what living in the South had meant (284).

It is true that Richard is heading North, what he ignores is what it looks like. He says he is running from something more than running towards something. That he finally decides to flee does not mean he is coward. On the contrary, he is courageous and great because many blacks are coward and too fearful to afford it. His determination is the key to his success.

Black people (most of them) were ignorant about books, the only sources of secrets of the white world. As Richard sees it, the idea of murder was planted in each of them (blacks) by white men (261) and for this reason, they are not to be condemned. They made propaganda through newspapers and journals and ignorant they were,

they could help in selling them. It is what happened to the young Richard. Another black warns him: "If you sell'em, you are just helping white people to kill you" (145). In the article that he reads aloud to Richard, it is stipulated that lynching was passionately advocated as a solution for the problem of the Negro (145). We realise that the ignorance itself kills or helps to kill. If they were to sell these papers in great number, blacks were to be preparing their death unwillingly.

From darkness to light, Wright wanted to live a different life, to attain the nirvana he has been dreaming about. He decided to go in a calm place and continue his work as a writer, to continue to denounce racial segregation and enjoy the citizenship as an American not as a black or a nigger. However, this was but an illusion because even in the north, blacks were not totally free. Gallantz commented on feelings about the South and says Wright concluded the white South has allowed him only one honest path, that of rebellion. He argued that whites there, his family and other blacks have not let him develop more than a portion of his personality. But he still admits he is a production of the South *(Richard Wright's Native Son and Black Boy*, 121-2) He Wright himself considers his departure to a sower who transplants a grain from an alien soil to put it into a fertile one. If it brings fruits, the realization will be the same as what would happen to oppressed blacks from the South that would completely change and be aware of what they really are-human beings, not animals, Americans not blacks and men and women of ration not dependent and ignorant persons.

Ngugi looks at the world as a place where millionaires are not created on the backs of millions poor persons, where the state is so subject to the social control of majority as to wither as a coercive power outside and above society. The goal of humanity is the reign of art on earth (Writer *as an Activist*, 144). Wright seems to support this view of Ngugi and dreams about society governed by intellectual who understand the problems of people and who can adjust the binoculars of life to lead his people to a development that do not segregate. The elimination of the very rich

and the very poor would in my opinion the pillar of his policies. To change the blacks' conditions would be the first preoccupation.

As advice, Wright should know that the law of life is that there will always be master and servant and that one has to act according to his being exploiter or exploited. Whether they like it or not, as Mangalwadi states it, man must necessarily be controlled either by a power within them, or a power without them, either by the word f God, or by the strong arm of man; either by the Bible or the bayonet. The struggle and disagreement between the two races (whites and blacks) provoked fear and sometimes lead to flight. Engels thinks that each new emancipation of one class means a new oppression of another. If things are like this, we understand now that whites were right when they killed or traumatised blacks to prevent them from emerging. The combat for freedom must be perpetual and in space. Though we support Mangalwadi who thinks freedom, democracy and rule of law are implied in or precluded by a culture's belief— system and that a man must be governed in one way or another, as long as we are not free or satisfied with that culture- system, we will be fighting for our freedom and this without fear of dying. Doing so, we will be supporting Claude McKay in his in his verses:

> If we must die— let it be like hogs
> Hunted and penned in an unglorious spit
> While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
> Making their mock at your cursed lot (.....)
> Like men, we will face the murderous, cowardly pack,
> Pressed to the wall, dying but fighting (in *Black Identity: A Thematic Reader*, 133)

Besides, though blacks were brainwashed, the time has come for them to rise and say "**no**" to everyone who wants them stay dependent. This could not contribute in

improving their life condition or their living as Americans not as blacks. They could sustain the idea of Hacker who states that whites still think blacks stand in need of the tutelage, as if they lack the insight to understand their own interest. He adds it makes sense for members of a minority to stand together especially since so many whites delight in magnifying differences among blacks. He wants blacks to know they had history of being divided and conquered and that better was to no conjugate their efforts as individuals not as mass.

To conclude, Wright is the model in claiming for what was worthy of being Native American; he wanted his folks in a special way to support him in the struggle for independence of mind. He was alone in his search for liberty and self- rule. The complacency showed by blacks discouraged him and he could not continue this enterprise alone. He could not also stand being ill- treated by whites who asked him and any black to submit and we cannot put apart blacks who expect him to behave like other Negroes making dependent. Wright shares the same view with Malcolm X when he said that he does not believe in any form of segregation or any like that. He continues saying that there is no need to force brotherhood upon people who do not want it, that one should not be running around trying to love somebody who does not love you (*Speeches that Changed the World*,159). Wright opted to flee to North to try to live a different life. He tried his best to placate whites and blacks but in vain. Thus, he found in dilemma- who could he serve if his comrade blacks suspected him and looked at him as a rebel and whites who wanted him to submit.

In family, at school, in white environment, Wright wanted to become a writer but this was considered as deviance and crime. As he could not fight whites (for example) especially, face criminals like kluxers, he opted to flee to North hoping to put all the atrocities and black experiences into books. Before, he was unable to keep his job for long because like other blacks he had to hide his feelings and react or act differently in front of whites. Any new job held a new experience: as a street

sweeper , he realised how orderly were things and how clean were the streets and wanted whites and blacks to know that these were the houses of those who made blacks flee into the night letting behind their possessions, as a seller of newspapers and journals, he was told they contained the propaganda of kluxers; working in an optical company, Pease and Reynold reinforced the Jim Craw Laws that there must be a distance in relation between blacks and whites; as a ticket seller at a movie theatre, he learnt that better was to behave as an irresponsible black than to show any consciousness just to mention a few.

By all these experiences, Wright cautioned blacks and whites that the questions of freedom and identity were not only the need for everyone but also the right for everyone to live as a human being. Flight was nothing but the last alternative after he has tried to live in this harsh environment that did not allow him to develop his personality. What we still want to know is his life while in North and we are still eager to know what his achievements there are.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This work entitled "A Writer as a Combatant": A Study of Richard Wright's *Black Boy*" examined a writer's contribution in his combat for equal rights, justice and good living conditions in African-American society. It has been divided into three chapters apart from General Introduction and General Conclusion.

Chapter one entitled "Historical Situation and *Black Boy*" discussed the political, socio-cultural and economic situations that were prevailing during the period *Black Boy* was produced. Politically, it has been found out that Communism was considered by African Americans as an important movement in that sense that they were expecting it to liberate them from racism and discrimination. Communism brainwashed some blacks. By so doing, some blacks thought reading books that were not written by communists was deviance. Richard Wright who was always against any limiting action reacted to this fallacy. His being liberal writer was a strong reason to be condemned as long as writing books opposing Communist purposes was a sin.

Socially, the period in which *Black Boy* was produced was characterised by a great want of money no matter the way it was to be gained. It was a period of culture deterioration. The role played by churches in the shaping of Wright and of blacks has been tackled. Richard found out that religion was another source of submission, what he hates most. He exhorted his kinships to contribute to the development of America in general and of black community in particular. Blacks were asked to solve their problems to have all the problems of America solved.

Economically, there was fear of job competition. We realised that Blacks were landless, houseless and were made to move suddenly. Whites were doing their best to prevent Blacks from emerging economically.

Chapter two: "Education as Arsenal" treated the role played by education in the shaping of Wright's mind. Though Wright was almost autodidactic, he was saved by his being "intellectual". Both blacks and whites feared him because they saw him different. With his little education, unlike blacks or whites, he realized all the races have the same needs— being free and human beings. For him, prejudices and stereotypes should not be the measure of worthiness or unworthiness. He concluded that those with whom we do not share the skin colour are not all enemies in the same way that all those with whom we share the skin colour are not our friends. A true enemy, according to Wright is that one who always wants to maintain you in the same place, ignorant and showing complacency. Here again is a true enemy: That one who shows jealousy when people are united or educated.

Chapter three entitled "Author's Flight" had as main concern the message to Americans in general and Afro-Americans in particular. His flight may be justified. He fled to launch his new "plane" to his comrades in the South. His words were like missiles that were launched from a remote area but that any black and white would be the testimony of the effects of their fall. The reality was that the launcher was not present on the terrain but was waiting for an echo. Wright seems to be using binoculars to control what was happening in the society that segregated him until his departure (fleeing) to North. The combat of Richard starts from his childhood due to his non-conformism to the pre-established laws. We have seen so far that Richard is against everything that deprives him with freedom and happiness, the pillars of meaningful life. He encourages struggle against racism, discrimination under any denomination and puts forwards unity, consciousness and education to achieve a new look.

Throughout this work, it has been demonstrated that education contributes much and that it is the source of any triumph in our life. The more the population is educated,

the more working on fallacies, fancies and the like are avoided. Our capacity to read and write will prevent us from having our countries destroyed by things we have brought ourselves. This is what happened to Richard while ignorantly he was selling a magazine in which lynching was advocated as a solution for the problems of the Negroes (145). Passionately, Wright has triumphed in his struggle for unity and freedom thanks to his commitment about his self-definition.

This work was guided by the hypothesis that, in his combat, a writer's determination and commitment are the key elements that empower him in the search of self-definition. It is he who is well informed about the problems of people and the problems that people face are the sources of his writings. This dissertation has analysed the contribution of some black American writers of the first half of the 20th century. It has been proven that Wright is the pioneer of black writing and the first models of Black writers. Again, this dissertation helped to understand the contribution of Wright in the denunciation of injustice inflicted on black folks in general and on writers without putting apart those who were fighting on the side of Blacks in particular. It has been discovered that most of the time, a writer is not understood because his view about the world is not shared by his folks.

Moreover, in the course of this dissertation, we realized that a writer (Wright) is not ignorant about any detail of lifestyle. When others were considering racism as a fatal destiny, he says that thinking so is being an "uncle tom"– a coward. He is conscious of the power of words and unlike other blacks, every word uttered needed analysis. When "nigger" was uttered, it meant a black man who took the consequences of the Jim Crow Laws as granted and there was nothing one could do about it. Wright opted to fight for complete freedom for all. We agree with Brignano cited by Ndayirukiye who states that Wright continually tried to fulfil himself as a moral agent. Although he often shocked his readers by terror, violence, irrationality and human alienation found in most of his writings, his desire, Brignano continues, was

that this shock treatment would help in breaking down prejudice and ignorance and in creating a rational world in which a Negro would be treated as a man, not a Negro. We also share the same view with Ngugi when he says that "People united can never be defeated" and that the role of a writer is preponderant in so far that he must be part of parcel of that revolutionary unity for democracy, socialism and the liberation of the human spirit to become even more human". (In *A Writer as an Activis*t, 75).

With Robert Felgar, we can say that Richard Wright is an extraordinary writer, given his background. His suffering was racial, familial, educational, economic, and philosophical; no other writer has ever had to break through many restrictions like Wright did. Thus, it is hardly believable and imaginable that he produced *Native Son* and *Black Boy*, two novels that many critics think he will never produce again considering how emotionally they were effective on readers stereotypes. They revealed the real world in which Americans in general and blacks in particular were living in. His will and determination, his imaginative powers and his ability to use literature to denounce insupportable reality made Wright successful and was given a place in his degrading society.

We can also support all who move that we should not generalize. Richard Wright, Gaines and Baldwin are among those who think that if you are hated, there is no evidence that you too you do not hate who you think is your enemy. When Baldwin says that many whites realised that their freedom was inextricably bound to blacks (*James Baldwin*, 21), Wright, after he has read Mencken, realised that even among blacks there were those who were more enemies than some whites. He observed that a few whites were fighting on the side of blacks. M. Luther King sustains Baldwin and Wright when he says: "Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I Say To you today, my friends. And so even we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. (In *Speeches that Changed the World*, 151- 2). The patience and hope that characterised Richard Wright allowed him to achieve his goal. As he knew the

true enemies, he allied with all those who were against the stereotypes vis- à- vis Blacks or Whites and he fought with all his energy against any degrading act.

Wright was and is looked at as a combatant against injustice and prejudice. His instability, the lost of contact with black experience especially in the south reduced his inspirations. It is clear what we find in *Concise Anthology of American literature* when it is said that " Wright's dramatic and gripping picture of the black man in the United States and the impact his writing had on Americans both whites and blacks have assured Wright's place among the notable writers of twentieth-century America (1824).

We may deduce that Wright has been the ears, eyes and spokesperson of blacks. We say so because apart from being almost a self-made intellectual and writer, he has been able to fuse all the problems of blacks and whites and the relationship between these two different races. His struggle for justice and unity has had fruits. His Vision– united population, satisfaction of black's hunger for education and freedom have been achieved if we get a look on America today. The two blocks in a bus are no longer there, education is accessible to all and is granted. This has been possible because Wright was able to transmute the deprivations of his early life and the miseries of black people into powerful and moving literature (*Reader's Digest: Family Encyclopedia of American History*, 1280).

This work comes to complete researches related to racism, alienation, prejudice, domination, in a word, any kind of injustice. Burundians should be aware of the contribution of writers and consequently know that they are worthy of being read and that their wage and contributions should be taken into consideration or commented about instead of being rejected.

To resolve this problem of ignorance about books (writings), all governments should avail libraries and make them accessible to all citizens. The policy to teach people how to read and write must be supported and put among the first elements of the agenda of any government. Burundi government in particular should encourage writers in order to produce professional writers in future. This will help to break the ancient idea that to hide something to an African, you put it into a book.

Furthermore, our focus was on the contribution of Richard Wright in the conscientization of the black community to fight for their identity. Wright's influence on his younger contemporaries was enormous, as Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, X Malcon to name just a few.

We have seen so far that the environment is the source of inspiration. A comparative study should be undertaken to measure how differently effective are Wright's works while in the Deep South, in North (Chicago) and outside America. Wright did a great job and his combat ended with victory. Shame would be on him if he was to cross his arms instead of promoting values, culture and anything related to the personality and morality. Who cannot support Adagia Erasmus cited by William James who upholds that if you accomplish anything noble with toil, the toil passes, but the shame endures (In *Discrimination and Comparison from the Principles of Psychology*, 1950: 483). As advice, writers Richard Wright as an example, should serve as examples for anyone who thinks our skin colour or any natural difference would be an obstacle to our unity and empowerment.

In order to resolve the everlasting-like problem of ignorance, prejudice and other sordid facts, uncreative and working on non up-to- date data, governments in general and our governments in particular should put in their policies that of creating and supporting flourishing young generation of writers. Thus, they will be, not only reducing ignorance among his people but also some cases of unemployment will be

reduced at once. We suggest that a faculty that would train professional writers be created and that a house that would be in charge of edition be available and accessible to any talented and others who like to develop their skills in writing literally works. There, as Richard Wright, they will learn how to fight and win with words instead of being interested in an endless war of guns and like.

Finally, we looked at Richard Wright as a writer combatant in his struggle for freedom and our hypothesis that is determination and commitment were the key elements that empowered him in his search for self-definition is demonstrated. A research should be conducted on the results (in North) of Wright's combat as our focus was on his combat and contribution while in the south.

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