

CHAPTER 3

RELIGIOUS REALM

Wole Soyinkas's *Myth, Literature, and the African World* (1976)

substantiates the African existence in literature outside of a Western perspective, one that “habitually reflects the abandonment of a belief in culture . . .” (38).

Therefore, one must connect, transport and maintain African traditions by

considering an African world view. Again as noted in *African American*

Psychology: From Africa to America (2006), a worldview grounds the thought

processes and actions of people's lives: “Worldviews provide us with guidelines

for living. They affected our perceptions, thoughts, feelings, inferences, and

behaviors how we experience the external world” (Belgrave and Allison 127).

With an African world view, one can privilege the core beliefs, ideals and

practices that African- derived people tend to value, which comes mainly under

religion.

John Mbiti contends in *Introduction to African Religion*, that religion is

always at the forefront of all African peoples. This religion accompanies them

where ever they go. Mbiti notes,

we cannot understand the African heritage without understanding its

religious past. Religion is found in all African peoples Through

the ages, therefore, religion has been for Africans the normal way of

looking at the world and experiencing life itself. For that reason, it is found wherever peoples are. It is integrated so much into different areas of life. (14)

Therefore, recognizing this perspective (religious) for comprehending cultural transports clearly helps one for the better consideration for the preservation of culture, regardless of Africans' various displacements.

In the traditional African background, religion pervades and permeates all aspects of life and infuses the social, economic, political and psychological dimensions of Africans with meaning and significant. That is, African traditional religions, which have been rightly referred to as the womb of the people's culture helps the community to realize the community ideals of harmonious living.

The story of Afrikan religions is a tale of variety and creative fusion. In the beginning of 15th C, enslaved Africans transported to the New World with a wide range of local religious beliefs and practices. This diversity mirrored many African cultures and linguistic groups from which they had come. However, it is observed that the majority of Afrikans came from the West Coast of Africa. Islam was the dominant religion in Africa for several centuries before the start of the slave trade. The evidence of this religion's existence can be drawn from the fact that an estimated twenty percent of enslaved people are practicing Islam, and

some elements of their practices and beliefs have been retained into the nineteenth century Afrikan religious belief system.

Before discussing about the Afro centric perspective of religion, one must focus on the real essence of this aspect. There are lots of debates going on the argument that Christianity is Eurocentric and Islam is Afrocentric- since Christianity has emerged in Europe and America, and Islam has existed in Africa just before colonization. But, undoubtedly, one can say that this argument is unrealistic in the twenty first century. To elaborate it further, when one say that Christianity is Eurocentric, it implies to the whole of Christianity. But, theoretically speaking, to assert that the preaching of one religion is always dominating and enculturating the other, while the conversion of the other is submissive and weak. This, and not Christianity or preaching Christ is Eurocentrism. Or, in other words, one can say that it is not the religion- Christianity or Islam that claims Eurocentric or Afrocentric, but it is the beliefs, values, and rituals that defines Afrocentric or Eurocentric.

Compared to traditional African religions, Christianity and Islam are competing religions which may incorporate useful and similar aspects of each other. At the same time, even if the followers of indigenous African religions convert to Christianity or Islam, they often tend to continue their traditional ritual practices. But Christianity lacks the breadth to signify all their religious feelings,

values, and beliefs. As a matter of fact, Islam has, overall, been more compatible with and tolerant of these African religious and cultural practices and beliefs. That is, Africans are convenient in using their traditional ancestor veneration, polygamy, circumcision, magic, and beliefs in spirits and other divinities are common in both Islam and African religions along with Islamic beliefs and practices.

African traditional religions, in reality, are not acquired one, but are inherited as a birthright. That is, members of a particular group belonged to and practiced the religion of their lineage, clan, and family. With the advent of Islam and Christianity in Africa, and the widespread or forceful conversion to these monotheistic traditions, the numbers of adherents to African traditional religions dwindled. African traditional religions do not proselytize because traditional religious system and its expressions are accepted as unique to an ethnic group. At the same time, African cultures are often flexible enough to absorb values and traditions from other religious belief system.

As African religious cultures spread in the United States, new forms emerged to cater the spiritual needs of Afrikan people. It is observed that throughout the centuries of trans-Atlantic slave trading, Afrikans took their religious practices to America. Traditional devotees in the New World realized that, to preserve their religious heritage, they have to accept adaptations.

Consequently, they introduce enduring forms of African religious culture through music, dance, festivals and singing in Christianity. Based on these circumstances, two debates have occupied in much of the Afrikan literature on religious perspective over the last several decades. The first debate is based on the question that whether Christianity was, in retrospect, a helpful or harmful ideology for slaves and free blacks.

In the early 1970s, scholars have bolstered by Marxist philosophy and argued that Christianity has prevented Afrikans from intervening in American active politics of that time, by encouraging submission to authority and passivity in the face of violence. These types of notions and attitudes can be visibly seen early by the thoughts and attitudes of the characters in *Jubilee* and *Black Boy*. In *Jubilee*, Walker has clearly written how the Word of God has been misinterpreted by whites for justifying their deeds. It is clear in the speech of Judge Winston during the barbecue day celebration in Georgia,

I admonish you in the name of the Lord and the fear of god to *guard your property with your lives!* Remember, your slaves are your sacred property. They are committed to you as a sacred trust from God. Read in his Holy Word where he tells you that your bond servants are yours and you are responsible for them. You are morally obligated to teach them right from wrong. You must

constantly tell them the awful consequences of evil doing and the heavenly rewards for obedience and faithful service. God does everything well and for a purpose. Since the beginning of civilized man there have slaves and masters and there always will be Yours is the God- given right to admonish your slave in the fear of the Lord; to punish him when he does wrong and to teach him of the heavenly rewards after death that God has in store for him when he is your faithful humble and obedient servant. The Christianity of the black heathen is your sacred duty. He was brought to these great shores for a Christian purpose. It is your duty to see that that great and sacred purpose is fulfilled. (122)

After hearing the speech, Vyry gets confused with this Eurocentric version of Christianity with that of Brother Zeke's preaching at the Rising Glory Baptist Church. Winston's speech is also contained about the responsibilities of slaves as

...you must obey the laws of Moses when he says, Thou shalt not Kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not lie! Do you know what these commandments mean? Do you know what will happen when you kill, when you steal, and when you lie? I will tell you. God says He is a God who will never forget the disobedient. He will punish you and your children and your children's children, all your little black

pickaninnies down to the third and fourth generations, but He will have mercy on them that keep His commandments and obey Him.
(122-123)

Thus, white preachers consistently try to impose white rules of Christianity among Afrikans which hinder them to protest or participate any political uprisings.

In *Black Boy*, Wright's attitude towards religion clearly signifies this protest. It is true that Wright clearly realizes the importance of the religion in the lives of people. He also realizes that the fundamental concepts within Christian doctrines are paradoxical and ambiguous, when it comes under Eurocentric version of Christianity. Consequently, in the application level of the principles of Christianity to the Afrikan's problems, Wright feels that it supports slavery rather than offers Afrikans a solution to eradicate their condition. He reveals,

I reasoned that if there did exist an all- wise- all- powerful God who knew the beginning and the end, who meted out justice to all, who controlled the destiny of man, this God would surely know that I doubted His existence and He would laugh at my foolish denial of Him: And if there was no god at all, then why all the commotion? I could not imagine God pausing in His guidance of unimaginably vast worlds to brother with me. (115)

This trend of going against the basic principles of Christianity leads to decrease Afrikans' faith in Christianity. Having traditional religious beliefs in mind, Afrikans feel that Christianity never satisfies their needs and eventually Afrikans' faith paved way to communism and gradually they do not pay any attention to religious activities. Such degraded mentality on religion is visibly set by Beatty in *Sell Out* as a background. Having lost faith in any religion, *Sell Out* seeks answer to the miserable condition of Africans through scientific investigations. Hence, little is mentioned on religious aspects in the novel.

The second and equally prominent debate has been the question about the extent of African survivals in Afro- Christian traditions. That is, to what extent did over 400 years of forced exile and enslavement eradicate African customs together? Scholars since the 1970s have taken up this question and described the background and the real essence of African traditional religion. Mbiti clearly offers a comprehensive exploration of what he calls "African religions" in his text, which highlights the fundamentals of African beliefs, customs, practices and spiritualities. A fare idea about these aspects provides one with a better understanding of traditional African religious perspectives. Although comprised of and practiced by various people (from various tribes) within this vast continent, African religion is complex and operates within five inclusive parts: beliefs; practices, ceremonies, and festivals; religious objects and places; values and

morals; and religious leaders. Each element works in concert with the rest to comprise African religion.

Traditional African religious beliefs are considered to be much complex by nature. For Africans, religion becomes a unifying part of universe. That is, traditional African religion serves as a fundamental delicate balance and equilibrium exist in the universe between the visible and invisible worlds. They believed that the Creator, Olodumare among the Yoruba, or Chukwu among the Igbo, created everything that exists and set everything in its place. According to them, universe is comprised of a three- tiered structure consisting of the heaven above, the physical world and the spirit world beneath. Each of these are inhabited by different categories of beings; the Creator and a host of spirits, including arch divinities inhabit the heaven above, ancestors and myriads of unnamed spirits dwell in the world beneath, while human beings occupy the physical earth. It is observed that human beings may be less powerful compare to the other two worlds, but their world is the center and the focus of attention. And, it is believed that one should maintain the delicate balance in the universe that what assures the happiness and prosperity of individuals and the community. Based on the three- tiered ancient African religious system, beliefs can be divided into four: the belief in impersonal (mystical) powers; the beliefs in spirit beings; the belief in divinities; and the belief in the Supreme Being.

The belief in impersonal power is dominant and pervasive in traditional African religious thoughts. The whole of creation, nature and all things and objects are consumed with this power. This power has been mentioned different names such as- mana, life force, vital force, life essence and dynamism in different books. The manifestation and use of impersonal powers can be related to the practices of medicine by men and women, and religious people who use dance and singing to cure mentally- sick people. Some people have the belief that mystical powers can be transmitted through certain objects and media or by pure spiritual means. Dance and singing have a significant role in transmitting mystical powers into human beings. For example, in *Beloved*, the dance and singing of community women lead to exorcise the ghost of Beloved from Sethe. In exorcism ritual, the power of the women's voices joined together has a creative capacity that symbolizes and ritualizes Sethe's cycle from spiritual death to rebirth. That is, the other women's voices, sound without words, have the power of cleaning waters, bringing Sethe back to the "clearing" and to Baby Suggs's rituals during Sethe's brief period- between slavery and the return of school teacher- of freedom. The exorcism of Beloved is, thus, a purgation ritual, a baptismal cleansing and rebirth, and a psychological clearing.

For Sethe it was as though the clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for

the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash. (308)

Coming back to the ‘shouting’ practices, the manner in which baptismal rituals has begun turn into shouts which are not at all European. They usually start with a song. After two or three repetitions however, the tempo quickens, the rhythm changes, and the tune is connected into a song typically African in its accompaniment of clapping hands and foot patting. The change from Baptist ritual to the African- like “shout” during a given service is gradual, for, as is often the case in Africa itself. Even leader does not know when the spirit will come and possession will occur. In this incident, drums and rattles, in Christian rite, are compensated for by hand clapping and choral singing.

If one considers these elements through a theological perspective, one must go beyond matching Biblical documents with specific traditional beliefs, since Afrikans’ religious beliefs and practices are structured within the frame work of their traditional religious worldview. That is, when Christian categories are introduced, such as- the power of the blood of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of God, and the power of prayers in the name of Jesus- how are these

powers understood theologically by man in traditional Africa? When a belief in the potency of mystical powers are condemned as demonic on a biblical base, traditional African men incorporate with this notion because they see and experience the same mystical power in their daily life. Hence, a mere reference to a Bible verse may not be enough to dissuade and convince him to do and believe otherwise, so he continues his African beliefs in a biblical base.

The second category of belief is the belief in spirits. Traditional African concepts of reality and destiny are deeply grounded in the spirit world. The activities of the spirit beings govern all social and spiritual aspects of an individual and community. The non-human spirit can be divided into two- good and evil. It is believed, “first in the hierarchy is the Creator, then the deities, object- embodied spirits, ancestors’ spirits and other miscellaneous spirits that are non- human, comprising both good or harmless spirits and evil spirits. Man stands between this array of spiritual hosts in the spirit world and the world of nature” (Ikenga- Metuh 130).

In picturing the religious world view of Africa, Mbiti stresses the fact that the African spirit world is densely populated with spirit beings either good (ancestor spirit) or evil. The ancestors or the living dead as John Mbiti refers to them are believed to be disembodied spirits of people who lived and died in the physical world, and received proper funeral rites. With the completion of

prescribed funeral rites, a dead person is believed to transform into an ancestor. The funeral rites in this case serve as some kind of 'rites du passage'. Africans hold the ancestors as the closest link between them with the spirit world. Mbiti says,

...the living dead are bilingual, they speak the language of men, with whom they lived until 'recently', and they speak the language of the spirits and of God They are the 'spirits' with which African peoples are most concerned. It is through the living- dead that the spirit world becomes personal to men. They are still part of their human families, and people have personal memories of them.

(82)

Africans believe that the ancestors are essentially benevolent spirits, who return to their human families from time to time and share meals with the humans.

African community also gives importance to ancestors for the harmonious living in society. "Ancestors were and are a vital ambience in the life of every living African whether he or she is aware of this reality or not. Centuries of traditions have been transmitted in their essence to each successive generation as part and parcel of their cultural identity" (Daima 122). As benevolent spiritual guardians of their respective families and communities, ancestors are believed to reincarnate in new- born babies in the community. A child is named after the

ancestor is believed to have reincarnated in that child's life. In *Roots* it is clear: "a child would develop seven of the characteristics of whomever or whatever he was named for" (2). Kunta is named after his great grandfather, Kariaba Kunta Kinte. "As everyone knew, it was the middle name of the child's late grandfather, Kairaba Kunta Kinte" (3).

The evil spirit has been reincarnated by Morrison in *Beloved*. Beloved as the spirit of slavery- the circle of iron around slave necks- did try to kill Sethe. West African religion believes that after physical death, the individual spirit lives, and consequently they may cause havoc to people if they are spirits of people who were killed in battle or unjustly" (Mbiti 28). Murdered indirectly by Sethe's slave master, Beloved is an unquiet spirit. Sethe kills her child unjustly so that no white man will ever 'dirty' her, so that no young man with "mossy teeth" will ever hold the child down and suck her breasts. But the unfulfilled desires of that child caused the second coming into this physical world as a ghost.

The murdered Beloved became ghost and made disasters to the entire family. The three residents of 124- Sethe, Paul D, and Denver- find out that although Beloved, once no longer a ghost, did address their deepest needs, she is also malevolent. Sethe realizes that Beloved will never accept her explanation for the murder and that Sethe can never make it up to her. Sethe consequently becomes Beloved's slave, goes without food so that Beloved can eat, and begins to die. Paul D

recognizes that making love with Beloved “was more like a brainless urge to stay alive”. Denver is finally deserted by Beloved when her mother recognizes her dead daughter. The character Beloved, thus, is not just the ghost of Sethe’s dead child.

Morrison uses the succubus figure to represent the effects of institutionalized rape under slavery. In separate assaults, Beloved drains Paul D of semen and Sethe of vitality; symptomatically, Beloved’s body swells as she also feeds off her victims’ horrible memories of and recurring nightmares about sexual violations that occurred in their enslaved past. But Beloved functions as more than the receptacle of remembered stories; she reenacts sexual violation and thus figures the persistent nightmares common to survivors of trauma. Her insistent manifestation constitutes a challenge for the characters who have survived rapes inflicted while they were enslaved. It is clear from this incident that ghosts, witches, and vampires are as well known in Africa as in Europe and represents the strengthening of belief when comparable phenomena in the two cultures come into contact.

Throughout the novel, *Beloved*, the invasion of the world of the living by Beloved’s physical presence is the evidence of the terrible destruction of the natural order caused by slavery. No one had ever thought anything about a ghost haunting the house, because ancestral spirits were known to linger in the world.

But her physical presence has the effect of Judgment day on all those whom she encounters: Sethe, Paul D, Denver, and the community. At the same time, this spirit feel punished with the view that Beloved has no name but the epitaph on her gravestone, a word Sethe remembers from the funeral. Her reply, “the circle of iron chocked it”, reflects the complexity of her character, as both the ghost of Sethe’s murdered baby who can’t get enough love from her mother and as also the representative of all the angry spirits-the manifestation of the murderous rage created by whites in enslaved Afrikans. Thus Beloved proclaims that apocalypse which lifted the veil on whatever lies beyond.

One can realize a very close relationship between the spirit beings and the mystical powers, as described in *Beloved*. That is, the realm of spirits are operated or controlled by the mystical power as seen in the exorcism. Thus, while it is quite incorrect to describe the religion of the Africans as essentially based on fear, the very nearness of the spirits mean that their requirements must be cared for as continuously and conscientiously as the other practical needs of life. ‘Shouting’ practices, therefore, have their humblest expression in individual worship. But in the final analysis the rapport between a person and the invisible powers of the world is his own immediate concern, to be given over into the hands of an outsider only in times of special needs. That is, for safety and protection in a world dominated by the spirit beings, one needs a spiritual compass for guidance and

control through religious rites, reverence to ancestors, rituals, etc. Hence, sacred localities do exist, and priest has their social and religious functions to perform.

The third category of belief is the belief in many divinities. African traditional religions in some parts of Africa, have claimed to be worshipped an elaborate pantheon of divinities. However, there are exceptions to this trend. It is observed that some ethnic groups in Africa do not seem to have divinities, or worship places specially designated to the divinities or to the Supreme Being. However, some of the common characteristics of African divinities can be outlined as: African divinities are many and each has its specific area of influence and control; some of these divinities are originally mythological figures in some African legends, histories and cosmologies, and some are tribal heroes or heroines; divinities cover different aspects of life, society and community such as rain, thunder, fertility, health, harvest, etc; They even took the forms of mountains, rivers, forests, earth and ancestors. Hence, the plurality of the divinities with their varying powers, influence hierarchy, even within one ethnic group or community, say a lot about the African religions, worship, beliefs and practices.

Roots depicts such a divinity through the presentation of Kairaba Kunta Kinte. “Kunta’s grandfather had followed a family tradition of holy men that dated back many hundreds of rains into Old Mali” (14). The story goes like this:

upon receiving his ordination as a holy man, Kairaba Kunta Kinte sets himself to be a wanderer among places in Old Mali for imploring the blessings from other old holy men and finally he stopped in the village of Pakali N' Ding. In a while, "the people of this village knew, by the quick results from his prayers, that this young holy man had upon him Allah's special favor" (15). The news has boomeranged with drums. Juffure suffered a severe drought at that time. "It was here that he heard of the village of Juffure, where people were sick and dying for lack of a big rain. And so, at last he came to Juffure, said Grandma Yaisa, where for five days, ceaselessly, he had prayed until Allah sent down the big rain that saved the village" (15). Since then, the whole community in Juffure believes that Kairaba Kunta Kinte is a holy man and savior of the community. "Many times, Kunta had heard about the grandfather holy man whose prayers had saved the village, and whom later Allah had taken back" (15). But, nowhere is it written that Kairaba is being adored and worshipped as a deity. The reason behind this may be lies to the factor that the Gambian communities are not giving ample relevance to the belief in the worship of divinities.

The fourth category of African religious belief is the belief in the Supreme Being. Earlier researches on the adoration of Supreme Being in African religions point out the fact that Africans have a concept of a universal God, the Creator, however, they do not actively worship this Supreme Being. That is, in most

traditional African societies, the Creator is not actively involved in the everyday religious practices of the people as the divinities or ancestors. Hence, the Supreme Being seems to be far remote or less functional in traditional African religions, and their religious activities mainly revolve around the first three entities.

The second element of traditional African religions is the practices, ceremonies and festivals. Traditional Africans quest to establish relationships with cosmic, spiritual and mystical powers, has developed a variety of interrelated religious and social practices, ceremonies and festivals. The main purpose of these practices, ceremonies and festivals are twofold: to exercise control over the world where these type of powers are dominated, and to restore cosmic and spiritual harmony in the community and individual people. With the power of words and incantations, symbolism, magic, charms, witchcraft, etc one can exercise control over these powers. Cosmic and spiritual harmony can be restored through sacrifices, offerings, and taboos.

In African communities, the presence of magicians can be seen as wanderers. They are supposed to be capable of driven out all the evil spirits that may cause havoc to communities. Such type of magician is vividly pictured in *Roots* as:

He appeared on the second morning- a very old man, walking with the help of a wooden staff and bearing a large bundle on his bald

head . . . the men rushing back to the village from their fields a moment before the magic man reached the gate and entered Juffure . . . The magic man's body writhed, his face contorted, his eyes rolled wildly, as his trembling hands struggled to force his resisting wand into contact with the heap of mysterious objects. When the wand's tip, with a supreme effort, finally touched, he fell over backward and lay as if struck by lightning The evil spirits had been driven out The magic man added these [gifts] to his bundle . . . In his mercy, Allah had seen fit to spare Juffure once again" (22-23).

That is, the people in Juffure exercises control over the spirit world through the witchcraft of magician and thus restore spiritual harmony in the community.

Sometimes, each person in the community also tries to drive out the evil spirits with the help of some objects that are assumed of having magical power. For instance, when Kunta's new hut is ready after his manhood training, he has kept some plants and barks to stay away the evil spirits.

In his hut, along with several saphies he had acquired in exchange for crops from his farm plot, he kept a number of other potent spiritual safeguards: the perfumed extracts of certain plants and barks which, like every other Mandinka man, Kunta rubbed on to his forehead, upper arms, and thighs each night before going to bed. It

was believed that this magical essence would protect man from possession by evil spirits while he slept. (115)

West and Central African religious practices as said, generally manifest themselves in communal ceremonies in which members of the community, overcome by force, are excited to the point of going into meditative trance in response to rhythmic drumming or singing. The drumming rhythms played by respected musicians often embody a deity or ancestor in energy by performing distinct ritual movements, or dances which further inspire their elevated consciousness. Novelists depict these elements both in African and Afrikan contexts. For example, in *Roots*, each day of the harvest festival starts with the rhythmic movements of the drums and dancers. At the dawn of the first day of festival,

Kunta leaped up when the tobalo sounded at dawn. Then he, Sitafa, and their mates were running among grown-ups to the silk-cotton tree, where the village drummers were already pounding on the drums, barking and shouting at them as if they were live things, their hands a blur against the taut goatskins. The gathering crowd of costumed villagers, one by one, soon began to respond with slow movements of their arms, legs and bodies, then faster and faster, until almost everyone had joined the dancing (34).

These drumming sounds and dances soon reached into another realm of enjoyment and their minds are filled with elevated consciousness. At this point, the mystical powers govern the minds. It is described in *Roots*,

The pounding heartbeat of the drums seemed to throb not only in Kunta's ears but also in his limbs. Almost without his knowing it, as if it were a dream, he felt his body begin to quiver and his arms to flail, and soon he was springing and shouting along with the others, whom he had ceased to notice. Finally he slumped and fell, exhausted. (35)

In the Afrikan religious practices, the influence of Bible and Christian beliefs are dominated in a considerable degree. For example, in the exorcism ritual in *Beloved*, the Community Women finally decide to drive out the ghost of Beloved, when they come to realize the havoc and disasters made by the ghost. Here, the ancient African belief in spirits and their exorcism is blended with the Biblical words, as charms to drive out the spirit. The woman chants Word and tries to drive out Beloved's spirit.

...the voice of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off

chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash. (308)

It is clear from the incident that whether these practices are sanctioned or prohibited in the traditional religions, they, however, fall short of Biblical standards.

African traditional societies give ample significance to the ceremonies and festivals. These are many, depending upon their functions. The festivals are regarded to be communal, with fixed annual seasons, hence ceremonial in nature. It is a fact that these ceremonies and festivals play dominant religious and social functions in African society. And they include dancing, eating, music, drinking, praying, wearing masks and costumes, and general merry making. Such a festival is depicted in the beginning of *Roots*- the harvest festival. The harvest festival celebrations last for seven days annually in Juffure. The social activities include making new clothes and huts, repairing broken huts and village fence, cleaning the house and village, preparing food, etc. The communal activities are described in the novel, *Roots* as:

The festival's second day began with a parade for the people of honor just after the noon sun. At the head of the parade were the arafang, the alimamo, the senior elders, the hunters, the wrestlers and those others whom the Council of Elders had names for their

important deeds in Juffure since the last harvest festival. Everyone else came trailing behind, singing and applauding, as the musicians led them out in a snaking line beyond the village. And when they made a turn around the traveler's tree, Kunta and his kafo dashed ahead, formed their own parade. (35-36)

That is, festivals are celebrated in families and communities as a whole, in accordance with the seasons.

But Afrikan festivals are celebrated in accord of Biblical events or particular political days. For in America, Christmas is celebrated after harvest as a festival or ceremony. Like, in African tribes, houses are repaired, food is cooked in the African slave communities. And in the night, banjo party is conducted in slave quarters. "On Marse John's plantation, Christmas was always an occasion and all during the holidays there were dancing parties and dinners with lots of wonderful food and plenty of the finest liquor" (141). But it is again noteworthy that Christmas is not celebrated in slave quarters with the real sense of Christian prayers, instead, they mix up the concept of Christmas with African notions and celebrated in a pure African way of rituals and rules.

The third element of African traditional religion is religious objects and places. Every African and Afrikan communities have their own religious places in different forms such as artificially built or found in nature. Artificial places are

built for specific religious purposes like to protect either religious objects or the faithful from adverse weather condition. Natural religious places are vast in number. These may be parts of forests, rivers, trees, mountains, waterfalls, and rocks. They are believed to be the meeting places between heaven and earth and between visible and invisible worlds. Hence, these places are considered as the sites to communicate with spirits of the dead, with God, and with the heavenly world.

The community in Juffure is treated particular trees as a site of religious and social gathering. Trees remain powerfully animated in West Africa, and griots continue to mention them even in the most Islamized areas. The tree is a symbol which connotes different meanings in both Christianity and Islam. In Islam, it serves as a locus for pre-Islamic practices in “The Kano Chronicle”, a West African Arabic text that begins with the introduction of the local god of Kano, “a tree called Shanuz”, and follows with a prophecy from its priest concerning “how their domain should be wrested from them, and their tree be cast down and burnt, and how this mosque should be built” (Palmer 97-98). The growth of Islam is, further, revealed to be incremental in this text. First, ...a mosque was built beneath the sacred tree facing east and finally the arrival of Islamic scholarship appears to deracinate older ways: “Abdu Rahman lived in Kano and established Islam. He brought with him many books. He ordered Rinfra

to build a mosque for Friday, and to cut down the sacred tree and build a minaret on the site. (111)

Contrary to Islamic notion, in Christianity, ‘tree’ connotes another meaning of evilness.

Of this tree you must not eat,
 Dese bones gwine rise ergain,
 If you do you’ll have to skeet,
 Dese bones gwine rise ergain.

Serpent wound around’ the stump,
 Dese bones gwine rise ergain,
 At Miss Eve his eye he wunk,
 Dese bones gwine rise ergain, (White 84)

Differing from the Anglo- Christian tree’s tendency to mark a guilt- laden divide between Natural Eden and fallen culture, the Afro- Christian tree is move fully erotic-linking freedom of body and soul. The Afro- Christian tree is a trope that fills dualistic gaps and serves as a point of connection between nature and culture, earthiness and spirituality: “My Negritude is neither tower nor cathedral / It plunges into the red flesh of the soil/ It plunges into the ardent flesh of the sky” (Aime C’ esaire).

But, at the center of many West African villages, a tree of words shows a shaded location for public discourse. As Johnson states, “In Senegal’s arid flatlands baobabs or ‘other’ old trees are often the most prominent landmarks and the oldest living things, serving a function similar to one Mande bards assign to a tree called ‘origin of origin’s” (207). Throughout the Senegambia region, trees are often considered as being spirit-inhabited locations. The Mande-speaking Bamana has described how Pemba, a deity incarnated on a tree, descended to earth and enabled creation. When the French adventurer, Louis Chambonneau visited the Wolof Kingdom of Waalo in 1675, he wrote that “each family was represented by a totemic animal that numerous sacred trees received offerings” (Barry 60-70).

Roots portrays the importance of tree in Gambian community. The tree is the center of all social activities. It is evident. “And when they made a turn around the traveler’s tree, Kunta and his Kafo dashed ahead, formed their own parade” (36). Here, it is believed that all the important people in the visible world connect and contact with those in the invisible world through these trees. And sometimes, a huge tree is regarded as traveler’s tree and every village should have such a tree. “Near every travelers’ tree, the trail would fork, one leading on into the village and the other past it, so that a person with no business there could pass on by without being considered rude” (66). And at each traveler’s tree, “Omoro took the bypass fork at every traveler’s tree, but each village’s first-Kafo children always

raced out to meet them and to tell the strangers whatever happened to be the most exciting of the local news (72). It is also written that “at every traveler’s tree now, since the drums had spoken, were not only the usual naked children but also some elders and musicians” (73). And before starting journey, “at the traveler’s tree, Kunta prayed for their journey to be a safe one” (127). In short, tree is regarded to be a meeting place for humans in physical world and also a connection between visible and invisible worlds.

The importance of the association of water with African ritual indicates its fundamental character. In the African ritual, one invariable element is a visit to the river or ocean for the purpose of obtaining the liquid indispensable for the rites. In certain occasions, the spirit of the river or lake or sea manifests itself by entering the head of a devotee and causing him to fling himself, possessed, into the water. But in the United States, where such type of rituals is absent, the only water ritual is Baptism. The importance of the Biblical concept of ‘crossing the river Jordan’ in the religious images of the Afrikans, and as a symbol of what comes after death, is a further part of this complex. For, like Baptism, the river Jordan embodies a concept in Christianity that any African would find readily understandable. In the transmutation of belief and behavior under acculturation, this has furnished one of the least difficult transitions to a new form of belief. In the end of the novel, the women’s voices have the power of cleansing waters upon Sethe. It baptizes Sethe

into a new, into a radical spiritual transformation. She has taken a crucial step towards self-ownership in directing her protective violence against the oppressor and the novel ends with a positive note of better future for the Afrikans.

There is another aspect of African belief that is associated with river- that is, the river spirits. It is pointed out that the river spirits are among the most powerful of those inhabiting the supernatural world, and that priests of this cult are among the most powerful member of tribal priestly groups. In all those parts of the new world where African religious belief have persisted, the river cult or the cult of water spirits holds an important place. All this testifies to the vitality of this element in African religion.

The entering of the ghost child re-strengthens this view: “A fully dressed woman walked out of the water Sopping wet and breathing shallow she spent those hours trying to negotiate the weight of her cyclids Nobody saw her emerge or came accidentally by” (60). But the next pages reveal the fact that she was very thirsty. “The woman gulped water from a speckled tin cup and held it out for more. Four times Denver filled it, and four times the woman drank as though she had crossed a desert” (62). And this ghost child later makes large destructions to the whole family, both physically and emotionally. Beloved, thus, categorizes as a river spirit.

According to African religious system, some parts of the forest often uses as a religious place. It is apparent that the meeting places in *Beloved* is differing from what is found in more conventional Christian churches, at once strike the eye of the Africanist. “. . . a wide -open place cut deep in the woods only to deer and whoever cleared the land in the first place. In the heat of every Saturday afternoon, she sat in the clearing while the people waited among the trees” (102). It will remember an Africanist, the meeting places of tribal Afrikans in the African forest. In the same manner, the preaching sections in *Jubilee* are also conducted in the wilderness of forest. “Always the meetings were held deep in the swampy woods, seldom on bright moonlight nights when the moon was full” (146).

Rocks also have been considered as a religious place in Africa and also in America. For instance, it is vividly described in *Jubilee*,

Looking up she could faintly see the blue sky in thin scraps of light through the interlacing of tender young leaves and green pine needles. She found herself a rock, and instead of sitting down she dropped to her knees. Instinctively she began to pray, the words forming on her lips at first in a halting, faltering, and half- hesitant fashion. (454)

In a fabricated and artificial manner, ‘house’ is treated as a religious place. Africans believe “the house constitutes the smallest portion of the cosmos

but also the most noble, as it is entirely subject to the uninterrupted organization and control of man”(Zahan 69). In traditional African religion, practices of faith are present within every act of daily life. “Evidences show that African peoples worship God at any time and in any place, and there are no rules obliging people to worship at a given place of time” (Mbiti 71). Moreover, ‘home’ is a symbol of the woman’s body. And, those who live within the house are likened to the fetus in the womb. The inhabitants are ‘protected’ and ‘invigorated’ by the mother, who is dominant in the house. Such a scene can be seen during the naming ritual of Kunta Kinte.

When the eighth day arrived the villagers gathered in the early morning before the hut of Omoro and Binta. . . Then they quieted as the jaliba began to beat his drums. The alimamo said a prayer over the calabashes of sour milk and munko cakes Then the alimamo turned to pray over the infant, entreating Allah to grant him long life, success in bringing credit and pride and many children to his family, to his village, to his tribe- and; finally, the strength and the spirit to deserve and to bring honor to the name he was about to receive. (2-3)

After pronouncing the name first to the baby’s ear, then to Binta, and the rest of the people, the ritual has ended.

In the New World, it is the dream of most Afrikans who are forced to rent that one day they will also be able to buy or build their own homes that signifies the day they too will be propertied people and own a small portion of the world. Such a thirst for making home is seen in Vyry's thirst for building a home in *Jubilee*. After building a temporary house with the materials available in the surroundings, Vyry feels happy. "And in their joy to be building a home of their own, everything seemed possible" (320).

In the New World, from a non-institutionalized form of woods, the religious places changed into the institutionalized form of church after the independence. The idea of church, according to western understanding, is often meaningless to or different within traditional African religions. In western religion, church is a group of people who come together, often within a building of some kind, who have a common belief in God and how He is to be worshipped. It is true that outside of a few weekly church functions, the members of each church do not have any communal contact with one another.

Considering the organizations that compromise the institutionalized forms of Afrikan religion from the earliest times of slavery, it is the less inhibited, and more humble denominations that attracted Afrikans in the United States. As Doyle states:

The worship of the Negro is of the simplest sort. He has no appreciation of elaborate rituals, of services consisting of forms and ceremonies. Hence the great mass of colored races have united with either the Methodist or Baptist churches. These churches have the simplest, least complicated forms of church services, and the Negro naturally gravitated toward them. (185)

It is impossible to say from census materials about the percentage of Afrikans who are members of religious bodies in Afrikan community. It is assumed that about half of the adult Afrikans are church members and of these, four-fifths are Baptists. Apparently the Baptists and Methodists are most energetic in their early measures to capture Afrikan allegiance by means of their itinerant preachers. Furthermore, the African background of Afrikans seems to have a marked selectivity for the tensivity and emotionalism of the Baptist and Methodist preaching. As Jackson states:

. . . there was a strong attraction of the slaves for the Baptist church because they were given greater participation in religious exercises . . . There was also greater liberality among the Baptists in giving Negroes permission to preach while also in addition the Baptist method of discriminate against them. Finally the mode of Baptism

among the Baptists satisfied the desire of the Negro for the
spectacular. (199)

In other words, these churches give Afrikans some emotional release which would help them to release their psychological conflicts.

The most revealing segment of Afrikan religious life is that of the Baptist “shouters” who, on casual inspection, would be regarded merely as more individualistic adherents of that Christian sect. The ‘shouters’ themselves distinguish two types of Baptist, however, the ‘carnal’ group, wherein ‘shouting’ is not countenanced and a greater degree of decorum exists than in Afrikan Baptist churches in the United States, and their own group, the ‘spiritual’ Baptists. They were outlawed by an ordinance in 1917, ostensibly because of the disturbances these groups created in their fervor, but probably in more realistic terms because of the understandable need felt by the more conventional denominations to counteract the inroads these ‘shouters’ were making into their following. They strikingly resemble the early Christians in their communal cooperativeness, in the measures they take to exact discipline and morality within their own groups, and in the gentle nonresistance and what they regard as constant persecution resulting from enforcement of the law which makes them subject to frequent raids, fines, or imprisonments.

That is, within the Afrikan community, the church plays an important role in the lives of Afrikans. Traditionally, as in African communities, church has been the center of Afrikan culture. From the time of slavery to the present, the church has served as the Afrikans sole outlet for his anger, rage, terrors, and frustrations. It has also served as a political force in some Afrikan quarters. Wright fully recognizes the significant of the role of church in the lives of Afrikan people.

In analyzing Afrikan religious institutions, some autonomous Afrikan groups are not affiliated with denominations whose primary membership is drawn from whites. These are the 'shouting' sects, which play a large part in Afrikan Christianity. These shouting sects have four general characteristics: preaching the Word, salvation by faith, worship as fellowship, and vernacular singing. Usually, the preaching of Word by the charismatic leadership will be led the devotees to a hypnotic degree of control over their miseries. The regular features of the worship services are listed as shouting, running, jumping, screaming, and jerking. The other methods are the frequent repetition of hymns transformed into jazzy swing time and accompanied with hand clapping, tapping of feet and swaying of bodies. And these ceremonies conclude with the testimonies given in rapid succession and certifying to the reception of 'miracles', healings, messages, visions, etc.

Beloved portrays such a shouting sect under the leadership of Baby Suggs. Her preaching is based on the Word. Accepting no title of honor before her name, she

becomes an unchurched preacher. She has begun those ceremonies by asking the children to laugh, the men to dance, but the women to cry, “ for the living and the dead” (103). Then she will direct them all to love themselves deeply.

It started that way: laughing children, dancing men, crying women and then it got mixed up. Women stopped crying and danced; men sat down and cried; children danced, women laughed, children cried until, exhausted and riven, all and each lay about the Clearing damp and gasping for breath. In the silence that followed, Baby Suggs, holy offered up to them her great big heart. (103)

Baby Suggs has never told them to clean up their lives, or to go and sin no more. She has never told them that they are the blessed of the earth, its inheriting meek or its glory-bound pure. Instead “She told them that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine. That if they could not see it, they would not have it” (103). Thus, she is emphasizing her preaching on the faith.

For religious practices during ceremonies, some religious objects are necessary. These objects may be listed as: food, water, organs of certain animals, etc. In the traditional African religions, magicians carry such things along with them for driven out the spirits. *Roots* says about such type of magical objects in a magician, who has once visited juffure.

As the villagers gathered around him he walked over to the baobab and set down his bundle carefully on the ground. Abruptly squatting, he then shook from a wrinkled goatskin bag a heap of dried objects—a small snake, a hyena’s jawbone, a monkey teeth, a pelican’s wingbone, various fowls’ feet, and strange roots. (22-23)

Mr. Grimes has identified the presence of witchcraft in *Jubilee* by seeing some objects like,

At first it appeared to be a doll. Grimes took the thing and saw it was a fetish made with some of the clothes from the child who had died. The clothes were streaked with blood and despite the fact that the dog clawed and tore the thing, he could see that the face, which had been buried in the soft clay, had been painted chalk white and marked to resemble his little girl as much as if her picture had been painted. (66)

In some occasions, food becomes a religious object when some prayers are enchanted by the priest and is given to the community who gather for the ceremony. In *Roots*, such kind of practice existed in the traditional African naming ritual. For the naming ceremony, “the women of both families brought calabash containers of ceremonial soul milk and sweet munko cakes of pounded rice and honey” (2). When the prayer started, “the alimamo said a prayer over the

calabashes of sour milk and munko cakes . . . as a gesture of respect for the food”

(3). But in Afrikan Christian ceremonies, Cross and water, which is blessed and supposed to be holy is treated mainly as religious objects. In a way, one can say that in traditional African religions practices of faith are present within every act of daily life. “Evidence shows that African people worship God at any time and in any place, and there are no rules obliging people to worship at a given place or time” (Mbiti 71). That is, although the practice of sacred places and objects are identified as part of worship, these are not representative of the whole of African faith.

The fourth element of traditional African religions is morals and values. Morality is another significant area through which traditional Africans try to form people and inculcating in them the major ideas and values of harmonious community living. The African morality has an appeal to cosmic dimensions that emerged from their world- view implicit. Perhaps because of their strong attachment to the community, Africans have a very strong sense of justice. Without justice, life in the community would not be possible, and there would be no harmony. It is the obligation of a victim of injustice to make a direct appeal to God. Africans strongly believe that God, who is just and who sees and knows everything, hates injustice. Hence, belief in God and in the other spiritual beings

implies a certain type of conduct, conduct that respect the order established by God and watched over by the divinities and the ancestors.

The center of traditional African morality is believed to be human life. Africans have a sacred reverence for life, as it is believed to be the greatest of God's gifts to humans. To protect and nurture their lives, all human beings should insert themselves within a given community, and it is within this community that one works out one's destiny and every aspect of individual life. The promotion of life is therefore the determinant principal of African traditional morality and this promotion is guaranteed only through the community. Living harmoniously within a community is therefore a moral obligation ordained by God for the promotion of life.

Religion provides the basic infrastructure of a life- centered and community- oriented morality. John Mbiti's famous phrase, "I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am", captures this ethical principle well. The implication is that one has an obligation to maintain harmonious relationships with all the members of the community and to do what is necessary to repair every breach of harmony and to strengthen the community bonds, especially through justice and sharing. And this is not simply a social need but a religious obligation since God, the divinities and ancestors, the guarantors of this order of things, are quick to punish defaulters.

In the traditional African background, God serves as a policeman. And, any person who infringes a moral norm has to fear for reprisals not only from community but also God and the spiritual beings. “In order to aid man in ethical living, God has put in him ‘the oracle of the heart’...’the inner oracle’... This ‘oracle of the heart’ is a person’s conscience, the law of God written in him. A person is at peace when he obeys his conscience” (6). On the contrary, when he disobeys this ‘inner oracle’, he lives in constant fear, especially in fear of all natural manifestations of divine power.

In most traditional African religions, there are two types of morals- those that govern individual conduct and those that govern social and community relations. These two types act as the two sides of a coin, in which one cannot exist without the other. That is, fundamental human rights are often seen as important not only for the sake of individuals, but also for the collective survival of the tribe or community. At the same time, community morals govern the family units, and family members must adhere to specific roles, privileges, and rights.

Morals governing the community are complex which include various norms of rites of passage. Every religion, true to say, has important rites of passage. One can see this in Islam, in Christianity, in Judaism, etc, as this is common in many parts of the world. Hence, this is also true in Afrikan traditional religions. This starts with the birth of a human being, and accompanies till death.

That is, when a person is born, there are certain kinds of religious activities and rituals to protect the child from the spiritual danger. Birth rituals in Africa and America are conducted differently. In Africa, with the naming ritual, the child becomes a member of the tribe. “On that day, like his father and his father’s father, this new son would become a member of the tribe” (2). And the ritual is conducted by the priest on the eighth day in the presence of people in those tribes. And the name was first spoken to the child’s ears as

Omoró people felt that each human being should be the first to know who he was. The tan-tang drum resounded again, and now Omoró whispered the name into the ear of Binta and Binta smiled with pride and pleasure. Then Omoró whispered the name to the arafang, who stood before the villagers” (3).

But in America, this christening is conducted after one year of child’s birth and by conducting such ritual, the child becomes a member of church/Christianity. “Dearly beloved, we’s gathered here to welcome another lamb into de fold! What de chile’s name, sister?”/ “Kizzy, reveren”(372). And the name is given for just a formality. ““Bless dis chile Kizzy and take her wide you safe into dat Promise Lan!’ With that the preacher dipped his right hand into the water, flicked a few drops into Kizzy’s face, and shouted ‘Amen!’” (372). In *Jubilee*, christening is conducted when the child acquires adulthood. It is said, “Aunt Sally had promised

her mysteriously that when she was older and had her “woman hood” she could be baptized by Brother Ezekiel” (47).

The second rites of passage is the transition from childhood to adulthood. This tends to be very important in traditional African religion since it provides capability for a child to take hold of the roles and responsibilities of grown-up men in the community. *Roots* portrays such a training period in the beginning chapters of *Jubilee*. The reason behind this training is told in Kintango’s words: “If men are to return, your fears must be erased, for a fearful person is a weak person, and a weak person is danger to his family to his village and to his tribe” (92). Through that training, they are practiced how to use the stars to guide them deep in the forest, art of hunting, acquiring skills for the survival in the forest, how to be a good warrior etc. But in the New World, such type of training is absent, as in their childhood itself, they are assigned to do the works told by the white master and this ends till their death. Afrikans are disintegrated before they reach adulthood, and they don’t get practice for strengthening the community in any means.

The third rites of passage is marriage. Marriage is very important in all cultures but in Africa, it has some special meaning, as marriage in Africa occurs not only with bride and bridegroom, but with their families also. That is, by marriage individuals unite as a family, at the same time, their families also unites

to strengthen the communal bonds. Hence, it is a very important legal and social event which involves certain kinds of rituals. Kunta recollects: “since the Mandinka people considered marriage to be the most important thing after birth itself” (324). He continues his thoughts, “He could see the dancers, and hear the praise singers and the prayers, and the talking drums relaying the glad tidings to other villages” (325). But in the New World, marriage ritual consists of jumping over a broomstick. “A marriage would meet the very worst kind of bad luck if the feet of either person should touch the broomstick and whoever did it would be the first to die. As they landed safely together on the other side of the broom, all the observers applauded and cheered”(326). In the absence of extended family members and relatives as in Africa, the marriage rituals in America are conducted in the presence of all other slaves in the quarter.

In Africa, marriage needs not only the approval of state or any religious body, but the families’ concern also. “But any couple intending to marry, first had to obtain the Council’s permission. Couples judged by the Council to be too close of kinship were refused out of hand” (137). And “at the Council sessions, however, Kunta learned that sometimes parents hadn’t been told things that people did tell the senior elders” (138). And the bridegroom assumes certain obligations towards his father and mother- in- laws, which in many instances continue after marriage. But in plantations, usually in the absence of families, man and woman

can take the decision to live together and should ask permission of their owner. In *Roots*, it is portrayed,

one night Bell came running out to Kunta's cabin and reported breathlessly, 'I done tol' I' m we still wants to marry. An' he say, well, den, he reckon it's awright'. And after finishing the religious rituals of Kunta and Bell's marriage, all were awaiting Master Walles' consent, and Marsa stepped forward and spoke softly, 'He's got a good woman in Bell. And she's got a good boy. And my family here, along with myself, wish them the rest of their lives of good luck. The loud cheering that followed from all of the slave-row people'. (326)

But in some plantation, where church is not established, marriage ritual is nothing but just living a man and a woman together. It is quite evident in Sethe's marriage.

That lady I worked for in Kentucky gave them to me when I got married. there wasn't going to be no ceremony, no preacher. Nothing . . . or just me bringing my night bucket into his cabin. I thought there should be some ceremony. Dancing may be. A little sweet William in my hair. Sethe smiled . . . They said it was all right for us to be husband and wife and that was it. All of it. (70)

The last rites of passage is death itself. When a person dies, certain rituals should be performed in order to send the dead person from the visible world to the invisible world of spirits. And these rituals are conducted in elaborate way in the African societies. That is, in the African cosmological vision, death does not cease human life, rather a transition to the next stage of life- ancestor hood. Proper burial rites and ceremonies, hence, assure a peaceful passage of attaining ancestor hood. But in the New World, there is a great variation in the traditions and rituals surrounding death. Attendants use natural objects to wash, clothe, and bury the body, which is often covered in animal skins, to cotton, bark cloth, or leaves. It is evident in the funeral of Hetta in *Jubilee*, “soon it would be time to bathe the dead body and prepare it for an early burial, but suddenly Granny Ticey gave blood curdling yell” (16). It is also evident in Grandpa Tom’s burial:

a few hours later after the mutilated body has been washed with loving care, they put a black linsey suit on Grandpa Tom and laid him out on a cooling board. The next evening, after dusk, all the slaves gathered around the pine coffin they had made for him and Brother Ezekiel led them in his song, ‘I am a poor way- faring stranger’. Afterwards he prayed and said, ‘ashes to ashes, and dust to dust’ and the rude coffin was lowered into a hole dug in the Georgia clay, sprinkled with lime, and covered again with clay. (69)

It is observed that disobeying or opposing the moralities and values of a community may impose fines and some other punishments. Whipping is regarded as such kind of punishment. In Africa, whipping the children is a common technique for training them to be better individuals. But, this practice has changed in the United States into another mode of practice during the slavery. The adults usually experience it whenever they do any wrong. In a passage which follows the one quoted, this experience is given:

Formerly whipping served both whites and Negroes as an accepted form of discipline and as a convenient outlet of sadism. The grandparents of the present young colored parents were themselves whipped by their white masters. The majority of old Negroes, in contrasting the present with the past, bring up the point of corporal punishment, saying 'They can't whip us now like they used to'. The slaves adapted whipping as the approved way of correcting and punishing faults Although whipping was a pattern taken over from the masters, and still survives among their descendants, today the failure of Negro parents to whip their children may be criticized as 'aping the whites' It is a newer white pattern which is gradually displacing the old. (Frazier, 67)

In *Beloved*, Sethe remembers her bitter experience of whipping. The whipping comes in the past of the book, immediately before Sethe's escape. Schoolteacher has whipped her despite the fact that she is pregnant, and the wounds have become infected. When Amy, the 'white girl,' who finds Sethe in the wilderness, unfastens the back of Sethe's dress and sees the festering, unhealed wounds on her back, the talkative girl is rendered uncharacteristically speechless:

Sethe guessed it must be bad because after that call to Jesus Amy didn't speak for a while 'It's a tree, Lu. A chokecherry tree. See, here's the trunk. It's red and split wide open, full of sap, and this here's the parting for the branches. You got a mighty lot of branches Tiny little cherry blossoms, just as white (93)

The chokecherry, as is evident by its name- a tree with sour and poisonous fruit. This is a tree of American south, occasionally referred to as 'black chokecherry' because of the dark color of its offspring. Despite the allusive nature of this example from the natural world, the chief power of the image comes from the language that Morrison selects. It is the body, and not the intellect, which speaks the most powerful witness to the brutality of slavery.

Vyry in *Jubilee* also experiences such kind of severe whipping when she tries to run away with her children. "It was a well-known fact that if a slave ran away and was caught in the act, flogging was the punishment. She could expect a

whipping” (171). But the punishment is so severe that she fell unconscious and a half-died state.

It was a raw –hide coach-whip used to spur the horses. He twirled it up high over his head, and when he came down with it he wrapped it all the way around her body and cut neatly into her breast and across her back all at the same time with one motion while the whip was a-singing in the air. It cut the air and her flesh and cried “zing” and Vyry saw stars that were red and black and silver . . . her head felt as if it would split open . . . The whip burned like fire and cut the blood out of her. . . . It hurt so badly she felt as if her flesh were a single molten flame . . . When she heard the whip go “zing” the second time and felt the stars rocking in her head . . . She gritted her teeth and smashed her head hard against the post in order to steel herself once more to bear the pain . . . the third time . . . Everything went black . . . and she fainted.

She never did know how many lashes he gave her, whether he cut her the required seventy-five times as he was told to do, or whether he quit short of that number, thinking. She was already dead and further beating was useless. (172-173)

Richard gets the punishment of whipping when he sets the house on fire. His mother gets angry and starts whipping.

You almost scared us to death”, my mother muttered as she stripped the leaves from a tree limb to prepare it for my back.

I was lashed so hard and long that I lost consciousness. I was beaten out of my sense and later I found myself in bed, screaming, determined to run away. (7)

For most African communities, ostracizing an individual or family is thought to be the most severe punishment that could be met out to anybody. It is almost considered to be equal with death, because the person or family would not be allowed to share a communal life. There would be no visits to the family, nor exchange of greetings or things. So severe is this punishment that every member of the community fears it, and would do everything possible to avoid it. If the ostracizing is imposed by the Community Elders upon a person or family in Africa, the ostracizing in America occurs psychologically to the person himself, as a part of receiving punishment to certain crimes, which has done by himself/herself. It is evident in *Beloved*, Sethe after killing Beloved, ostracizes herself from the rest of the community. “For twelve years, long before Grandma Baby died, there had been no visitors of any sort and certainly no friends. No colored people. Certainly no hazelnut man with too long hair and no notebook, no charcoal, no oranges, no questions” (14). When Paul D visited the house, he

realizes the impact of being alone in the house, how it affects the growing up Denver.

I can't live here. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I can't live here. Nobody comes by. Boys don't like me. Girls don't either".

"It's the house. People don't--"

"It's not! It's not the house, it's us! And it's you"

"Denver!"

"Leave off, Sethe. It's hard for a young girl living in a haunted house. That can't be easy". (17)

They are deprived of the society. Later, it is Denver who comes out and seeks help from the community to end up this psychological ostracizing of Sethe. All this shows up the factor that breaking morality affects the harmony of community, family and individuals in both African and Afrikan communities. That is, their belief is strong in all the way back to Africa.

The morality of individuals includes marriage, raising children, and fulfilling familial obligations which are considered to be religious. Marriage agreements usually involve both part of parents of bride and bride groom. And binding the couple is accompanied by exchanging gifts, which is regarded as a way of thanking the parents of the couple for bringing up their child in good moralities and values. For younger generations, each family should have the

responsibility to inculcate the values and morals in children's mind. Their morals lie mainly in caring and obeying elders and parents.

The fifth element of African traditional religion is the presence of religious leaders. Religious leaders have a special significance both in the communities in Africa and America. They are considered to be the agents of divinities, and have the power to execute communal law and morality and also to impose and collect fines from the defaulters. Leaders are the people who impart religious wisdom and guidance to believers. They are regarded as natural leaders because they are in direct service to God and dedicate themselves to the deities for life. They offer sacrifices and make verbal demands on the behalf of believers.

Roots depicts such a traditional African religious leader and his activities in the community. The religious leader in Juffure is known as Alimamo. He has the responsibility to call others for the prayers, lead prayers, and rituals, etc. "Kajali Demba, the village alimamo, began, calling men to the first of the five daily prayers that had been offered up to Allah for as long as anyone living could remember" (1). During the naming ritual, he said

...a prayer over the calabashes of sour milk and munko cakes

Then the alimamo turned to pray over the infant, entreating Allah to grant him long life, success in bringing credit and pride and many children to his family, to his village, to his tribe- and, finally, the

strength and the spirit to deserve and to bring honor to the name he was about to receive. (3)

During the Harmattan wind season, the Alimamo acts as an intermediate person between the visible and invisible worlds: “Each evening in the village now, the alimamo led the prayers for Allah to send the rains. And then one day, excitement filled Juffure when some gentle winds stirred up the dust- for those winds meant that the rains were soon to come.” (46).

But in the New World, religious leaders are known as preachers who preach the Word of God, help those who try to run away, strengthen the psychologically sick people and infill the hope of living and freedom in the suffering Afrikans. As will be demonstrated in greater detail, *Jubilee*'s Brother Ezekiel is such a preacher in the Judaeo- Christian tradition. “Brother Ezekiel was a powerfully built, stovepipe-black man. He was neither young nor old. He was plantation preacher at least among the slaves” (11). “And Vyry was delighted to be going to Rising Glory Baptist Church to hear. Brother Ezekiel preach about God” (48). In the beginning of the novel, he acted as a savior and provides hope to dying Hetta by showing her daughter Vyry. He helped those who plan to run away from slavery. When Randall Ware needs to relay a message to Vyry about her escape, it is through Zeke: “The door to freedom was still closed in her face and she did not know the magic password to open the door. Brother Ezekiel read,

“There’s going to be a war and to set the black slaves free. When the war is over I will come and get you. Wait for me” (198). Zeke’s emissary function is not limited to Ware and Vry. He serves as a conductor on the Underground Railroad. Lucy, a Dutton house slaves mysteriously escapes from the plantation with the help of Zeke. Coincidentally, “Brother Zeke was absent, but no slave mentioned this as a coincidence and the white folks did not notice” (127).

On a religious perspective, Brother Ezekiel teaches the Word of God to those who gather in the swamped woods.

Brother Ezekiel nearly always chose his text from the Old Testament, dwelling upon the great leaders of the Hebrew people, the prophets, the kings, the judges and the men whom God had used to lead this people. His favorite and most prominent figure was Moses and the story of his leading the children of Israel out of Egypt, one of the House of Bondage, to a vision of the Promised Land. (45)

Through the story of Moses, he tries to infill the hope of freedom for Afrikans and thus guides Afrikans in an optimistic way.

Brother Ezekiel grew eloquent as he told the biblical story, but his voice softened to a whisper either from strain or fear as he admonished his flock to have faith in God and He would send them

a Moses, a deliverer to free His people and prove to the world what the Bible says about a servant being worthy of his hire. (46)

He is a man who knows to read and write, and with his knowledge he escapes many. Thus, he acts as a preacher for a religious and social empowerment.

Contrary to Brother Ezekiel, *Black Boy's* preacher- Richard's grandma-is a woman, who thinks that knowing how to read and write should strictly prohibited since these both are demonic activities. It is clear from her words; “that's the Devil's work!”. she shouted. My grandmother was as nearly white as Negro can get without being white, which means that she was white. The sagging flesh of her face quivered” (39). Granny is a strict religious preacher who adheres to her own beliefs and discipline. She charges and blames all of Richard's activities with a notion that “I had learned about “foul practices” from reading Ella's books, and when I asked what “foul practices” were, my mother beat me afresh” (45). Granny is an ardent member of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. And being a preacher, she maintains a hard religious regime in the home. “There were prayers at sunup and sundown, at the breakfast table and dinner table, followed by a Bible verse from each member of the family. And it was presumed that I prayed before I got into bed at night” (111). She has led certain all-night ritualistic prayer meetings, and prepares lunch for the all-night praying session.

The religious prayers are different in *Black Boy*:

The elders of her church expounded a gospel clogged with images of vast lakes of eternal fire, of seas vanishing, of valleys of dry bones, of the sun burning to ashes, of the moon turning to blood, of stars falling to the earth of a wooden staff being transformed into a serpent, of voices speaking out of clouds, of men walking upon water, of God riding whirl winds, of water changing into wine, of the dead rising and living, of the blind seeing, of the lame walking; salvation that teemed with fantastic beasts having multiple heads and horns and eyes and feet; sermons of statues possessing heads of gold, shoulders of silver, legs of brass, and feet of clay; a cosmic tale that began before time and ended with the clouds of the sky rolling away at the Second Coming of Christ; chronicles that concluded with the Armageddon; dramas thronged with all the billions of human beings who had ever lived or died as God judged the quick and the dead....” (102).

Thus, the preacher Granny acts as a strict preacher with inhuman mentality towards her family.

But, Baby Suggs in *Beloved* is an ‘unchurched preacher,’ who is driven to bed to think about the colors of things by the un-Christian ways of white Christians. Morrison writes:

She became an un-churched preacher, one who visited pulpits and opened her great heart to those who could use it. In winter and fall she carried it to AME's and Baptists, Holinesses and Sanctified, the church of the Redeemer and the Redeemed. Uncalled, unrobed, unanointed, she let her great heart beat in their presence. When warm weather came, Baby Suggs, holly, followed by every black man, woman and child who could make it through, took her great heart to the clearing. (102)

She creates a ritual, out of her own heart and imagination, to heal former slaves and enable them to seek a reconciliation with their memories, whose scars survive long (even generations) after the experience of slavery has ended.

The most significant difference between Baby Suggs's version of spirituality and that of the white religions which is depicted in the novel is her disdain for rules and prohibitions to define morality, as well as her rejection of definitions in general. For instance, according to Baby Sugg's morality, good and evil are indefinable, not based on absolute knowledge; they are part of a situational ethics. "Everything depends on knowing how much", she said and "Good is knowing when to stop" (198). Because the white people don't know "when to stop", as Suggs says, slavery pushes the limits of the human capacity of suffering. The story of Halle's going mad, Sethe's murder of her baby, Paul D's

memories of Mister and the bit- all demonstrate the connection to the white slave holding society's immorality, its lack of human limitations on its actions, that reciprocates in the minds of its victims as too much suffering to be endured.

All these features bring to the factor that Afrikan Christianity is a unique religion which is entirely different from the so called European Christianity or American Christianity .That is, Afrikans mix African beliefs and practices with Catholic rituals and theology, which result in the formation of entirely new Afrikan Christianity. From discussion of African and Afrikan religious beliefs and practices in this chapter, it is clear that Afrikans who have brought to the New World embraced Christianity forcefully as seen in *Roots*, and find comfort in the Biblical messages of spiritual equality and deliverance. Gradually, non-institutionalized Afrikan churches have established in slave quarters and subsequently, church becomes a major role in the liberation of Afrikans from social, mental and emotional bondages. This concept has clearly shown in *Beloved*, *Jubilee* and the second part of *Roots*.

But when Afrikans start earning education and are capable of reading and writing, they understand the double game that the religion has been played in their life. Consequently, they reject Christianity as it is irrelevant to Afrikan experience and the quest for liberation. They criticize Afrikan churches as having helped to accommodate them to inferior status by advocating "love your enemy" and "hope

for ultimate reward in Heaven”. This trend is visible in *Black Boy*. When religion comes in the 21st century of Afrikan adults, *The Sell Out* shows that the Afrikan youth replaces church and beliefs with science. Religion plays a little role in their lives and they are interested more to empower themselves through scientific ways. Thus it has proved that Christianity is harmful for slaves and slavery.

Christians, as members of a “universal religion”, have almost same faith in religious facts. But when it comes in America, Afrikan and American Christians differ in significant ways, from the frequency of praying or attending services and also the belief in Heaven and Hell. One of the differences between Afrikan and American Christianity is in the definition of the divinities, or ancestors as ‘intermediaries’ which is very weak in the Holy Bible. The prime importance in Bible is to the Supreme Being, the Father, and everything is controlled and powered by His will. Again the exorcism ritual is completely against the Holy Bible. Bible categorizes these powers as demonic. That is, these powers are obtained, not from the Creator, but from his usurpers, the Devil and his demons. The Bible has clearly and emphatically stated that these beings are enemies of God and their primary involvement with humans is to keep them away from their Creator. According to Christian theology, only God can exercise power and control over his entire universe. Even though the Bible condemns these demonic

beliefs and practices, the potency and powers visually manifested in this area for Afrikans and Africans are powerful.

Afrikans in the American slave colonies also believed in the spirits and their power upon the world. When something bad happens to an Afrikan, his thoughts would go to the notion that because of some witchcraft, his equilibrium with spiritual world seems to be disturbed. Though Christianity teaches these thoughts as mere superstitious beliefs, it is deeply rooted in the Afrikan mindset. Walker portrayed this attitude in *Jubilee*. Mr. Grimes who worked as Master Morris Dutton's servant to monitor slaves and their works, met disasters all on a sudden, and undoubtedly, his thoughts went to the spirit world and witchcraft. Grimes complains to Mrs. Dutton, "no ma'am, I ain't but these niggers is up to something awful. If I knowed who't was I'd strangle them with my bare hands, but this kind of stuff ain't nothing but evil witchcraft and black magic. I reckon I can't fight this kind of stuff. This here is hoodoo!" (67). The reason that Grimes pointed out for his doubt are, "I done lost my youngun, and I done lost my dog. I lost my unborn baby and my wife still sick a-bed. I ain't never been scared of nigras, but if airy nother thing happens, I'm quitting without no further notice" (67). And the evidence for the doubted-witchcraft is that "to cap the climax . . . outside his house . . . found . . . a doll... a fetish made with some of the clothes from the child who had died. The clothes were streaked with blood . . . the face,

which had been buried in the soft clay, had been painted chalk white and marked to resemble his little girl” (66). But, Mrs. Dutton never believes in these notions as Christianity considers these theological issues as mere superstition.

Many white Americans could not imagine Afrikans having the capacity to understand the real essence of Christianity. They also feared that extending baptism and Christian fellowship would convince the enslaved of their equality to whites. Consequently, the substance of Christian teaching that most missionaries and slave holders conveyed is focused not on liberation and equality but on divinely ordained racial hierarchy .it is vividly pictured in *Jubilee*.

you must obey the laws of Moses when he says, Thou shalt not Kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not lie! Do you know what these commandments mean? Do you know what will happen when you kill, when you steal, and when you lie? I will tell you. God says He is a God who will never forget the disobedient. He will punish you and your children and your children’s children. (122-123)

In a careful analysis of how Afrikans practice and express their Christian faith, they identify the enduring ways that the tragic American habit of racial oppression and privilege has worked to create a distinctive Afrikan cosmos. They reintroduced the African divinity concept in a Catholic background. The Holy Bible says about the coming of a ‘Messiah’ to rescue the oppressed, and Afrikans

have believed the fore fronting political leaders such as Abraham Lincoln or Martin Luther King as the coming Messiah to free them from bondage. Coming back to the Afrikan religious aspects, the importance of revelation in giving remedies to mankind is a fundamental West African tenet. The role of the forest spirits or Legba, the trickster gives the information for healing the diseased persons. The fact that practitioners of magic are “dependent upon the spirits of the dead ancestry” is likewise purely African. In the New World culture, this spirits help a peculiar person to reopen his or her past and thus heal completely as it is clearly evident in Sethe’s healing. It is, thus, apparent that while Christianity gave to Afrikans much of its own world view in the United States where perpetuation of African gods under their own names was impossible, the process of readjustment permitted the deity to survive under a different designation.

Walker’s *Jubilee* pictures the belief in Abraham Lincoln as the Messiah of blacks. Brother Ezekiel in his preaching describes the story of “Moses and the story of his leading the children of Israel out of Egypt, out of the House of Bondage, to a vision of the Promised Land” (45). Both in the antebellum and post bellum periods, a faith in Christianity prevails in the novels, at the same time belief in the divinities is also visible through the eyes of Vyry. She had never before entertained the faintest idea or hope of freedom, except some dream of an answer to prayer, when God would suddenly appear and send a deliverer like

Moses, and set free all the people who were in bondage such as she” (94). Each time slaves were murdered, or suffered brutalities, the crying for a savior became intense. It is evident in the murder of Grandpa Tom by burning him alive in his hut, Aunt Sally was playing in whispers, “Lord, when is you gone send us that Moses? How long, Jesus, how long?” (69). Later, during the revolutionary war period, Afrikans realized that Abraham Lincoln was the Messiah they were awaiting for a long time during slavery. It is clear in Vry’s words “I was just laying here praising the lawd. I thank God I done see the year of Jubilee. Now, like Simeone, I can pray ‘ lord lettest now . Thy servant depart in peace’. I knows all my peoples going free someday. Mister Lincoln is our Moses and God done told him to make old Pharaoh set my people free” (242-243). But, it is mentioned anywhere that Lincoln was worshipped as a divinity. Thus, the traditional African belief of divinities acquired a new phase in Afrikan religious belief.

The borrowing is never achieved without resultant change in whatever is borrowed, and, in addition, without incorporating elements which originate in the new habitat that, as much as anything else gives the new form, its distinctive quality. In the New World, exposure of the whites to Afrikan practices as well as of Afrikans to European forms of worship cannot but have had an influence on both groups. Certain details of Afrikan religious behavior taken over by whites have actually been remarked. The modes of clapping the hands and patting the

feet find among the whites are to be ascribed to Afrikan influence. But just as the Afrikan has metamorphosed white hymns and folk tunes into spirituals that are different enough to be considered creations rather than modifications, so has he made of Christianity something very much his own.

To conclude, statements of truth and falsity transcend the level of culture. Whether there is a God, whether He is Islam, Christian or Yoruban, whether He is one or many, whether He communicates with His Creation- these are not culturally- conditioned beliefs, rather propositions that inspire acceptance or denial. To make his experience of Christianity is only ever an acceptance or rejection of these prepositions a basic matter of culture, his acceptance or rejection of Europe and its values. In the United States, the identification of Afrikans with Christianity is not an abrogation of African religions. Rather the greatest extent of this is the result of a pragmatic eclecticism of Christianity with some of the marginal elements of African “paganism”. In short, Afrikan religious leaders would sometimes use the cloak of Christianity to provide access to and articulation of the syncretic traditional African religion that is the basis of Pan-African unity.