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**Títol: (Re)Imagining and (Re)Visiting Homelands in
Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria (by Noo
Saro-Wiwa)**

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Abstract

Through the analysis of Noo Saro-Wiwa's *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria* (2012), this paper will explore the ambivalent perception towards modernity in present-day Nigeria which affects Saro-Wiwa as a diasporic traveler writer visiting her motherland. It will be argued that the author's position as an insider/outsider leads to a reformulation of Gilroy's Roots/Routes theory which ultimately affects her reconstruction of Nigeria as her Imaginary Homeland. Departing from an analysis of her liminal position as a prodigal-foreigner, this paper will consider what is perceived as the essence of Nigeria, and how Saro-Wiwa inscribes the country within the mutually exclusive dichotomy modernity/authenticity. The contradictions of such a binary division will be related to Saro-Wiwa's rejection of modernity, and her desire to preserve Nigeria's traditions. The approach taken aims to underline up to what extent her inclination towards the preservation of cultural heritage over modernization can be associated with her diasporic need to have an Imaginary Homeland representing a nurturing heritage source.

Key words: Nigerian diaspora, travel writing, modernization, Imaginary Homelands, Roots/Routes

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When *Lonely Planet*, the paragon of guidebook writing, sustains that, “as a travel destination, Nigeria seems more a place to avoid than to book a flight to” (Andrew et al. 2007, 453), it is to be wondered whether their aim is to persuade or rather dissuade future travelers. Nigeria is constructed and translated for tourists as a place more likely related to “corruption, ethnic violence and email scams” (453) than to the fact that it “has produced music and literature whose influence spreads far beyond the continent” (453). This kind of discourse progressively shifts its focus towards marketing, exoticizing and Otherizing Nigerian landscapes and cities, championing an image that appeals adventurers daring to visit the Dark Continent.

Neocolonial practices aside, fictional and nonfictional representations of Nigeria from the mid-1980s onwards tend to convey Afro-pessimism, “the belief that the continent and its populace is hopelessly imprisoned in its past, trapped [in] a vicious cycle of underdevelopment, and held hostage to corrupt institutions” (Gikandi 2011, 9). The argument can be made that the main danger of Afro-pessimism resides in its perpetuating “traditional Western notions of Africa as the ‘other’ of modern reason and progress, [which] seems to be the only logical response to political failure and economic stagnation in Africa” (9). This tends to entail twenty-first-century travel writing Orientalist practices. More precisely, it recalls “latent Orientalism”, whose “unanimity, stability, and durability [appear to remain] constant” (Said 2003, 206), still echoing the empire’s “obsessive need to present and re-present its peripheries and its others continually to itself.” (Pratt 2008, 4)

Counter to Afro-pessimism runs Afropolitanism, “a way of being in the world, refusing on principle any form of victim identity [, yet being] aware of the injustice and violence inflicted on the continent and its people” (Mbembe 2007, 28-9). Afropolitans, “not citizens, but Africans, of the world” (Selasi 2013, 528), advocate for “redefining” and “complicating” Africa, yet refusing to “oversimplify” and “essentializ[e]” Africanness (529) (see also Eze 2014; Ifekwunigwe 2004). The master narratives constructed by history, guidebooks, and the media are rejected, encouraging Afropolitans’ multifaceted insights into modern Africa. Still, despite the turn-of-the-century image of Nigeria offered by authors in the diaspora (Cohen 2001, ix)¹ such as Adichie, Okri, and Habila, “very little has been written about [modern Nigeria] in a straightforward, nonfictional but personal way” (Bures 2012). In this respect, the object of this study, Noo Saro-Wiwa’s *Looking for Transwonderland* (2012) (hereafter *Transwonderland*),

¹ For further information on diasporic communities see Cohen’s definition in relation to their “inescapable link with their past migration history and [...] co-ethnicity with others of a similar background.” (2001, ix)

gives response to the little presence of nonfictional representations of Nigeria. This paper will explore up to what extent Saro-Wiwa's (re)vision and (re)creation of Nigeria in her travelogue are affected by her belonging to its diaspora. Specifically, the focus will be on her perception of and reaction towards Nigeria's modernization in her five-month journey, struggling to negotiate her position as "part-returnee and part-tourist." (Saro-Wiwa 2013, 9)²

Travel writing theory has traditionally presented patterns of journeying where the itineraries feature stages such as "Departure, Passage and Arrival" (Leed 1991, 23). Departure stands for the detachment from a context (56), its essence resides "not only in the anxiety of parting but also in the resulting dividedness of self as one takes leave of a localized identity" (44). The Passage entails "an experience of motion across boundaries and through space [...] [where] the passenger becomes more conscious of self as a 'viewer' or 'observer'" (56). Finally, Arrival is the attachment to a context (56), "a process of 'identification,' as the traveler identifies the place and as the place identifies the [...] traveler" (85). However, this framework is altered in journeys where members of diasporic communities (re)visit their birthplace.

The abovementioned stages do not suit Saro-Wiwa's experience, specifically in what concerns her Arrival. While London unambiguously stands as her point of Departure, her fluid diasporic identity complicates the description of her Passage, not allowing the identification of a moment of Arrival per se, for she belongs in Nigeria even if she is also a tourist. Saro-Wiwa's Passage can even be interpreted as a secondary journey, encompassed within the main one. After spending three weeks in Lagos, she sets forth on a tour, heading northwards, and eventually southwards, traversing Eastern Nigeria. This route can be taken as containing a new Departure, Passage and Arrival in itself. For, the familiarity of her native south is left behind as Saro-Wiwa starts her adventure in the unknown north, where her dislocation will predominate due to the cultural clash between Nigeria's north and south. Thus, signaling a better perceived moment of Arrival.

The aforesaid foreshadows the fact that Gilroy's Roots/Routes dichotomy (1993, 19) may acquire a new dimension if travel writing involves diasporic subjects returning to their motherland. Gilroy's seminal theory discusses migrants and diasporic communities finding new ways of belongingness, their identity being understood not as fixed or rooted, but rather "as a process of movement and mediation that is more appropriately approached via the homonym routes" (19). In this sense, Saro-Wiwa's position as a returnee traveler-writer prompts the

² In subsequent references to Saro-Wiwa's *Transwonderland*, only page numbers will be used.

creation of a new type of Routes, hereafter Homeland-Routes, which stand for the physical journey throughout her motherland. Such a journey favors her coming to terms with and reattachment to Nigeria, after years of detachment. Additionally, the creation of Homeland-Routes motivates the formation of new Roots, hereafter Fluid-Roots. Fluid-Roots differ from Gilroy's Roots in that they no longer evoke a feeling of fixed identity linked to a place, but rather articulate how Saro-Wiwa's fluid character allows her to reconnect with her motherland during the journey, even after her long-lasting absence. That is to say, tracing Homeland-Routes allows her to remap her sense of belongingness as she rediscovers Nigeria, hence creating Fluid-Roots, which facilitate the synthesis of her diasporic transnational nature with her rootedness to her motherland. In this regard, the creation of Fluid-Roots while in route can be conceived as following a chain of signifiers in the continuous process of diasporic identity construction, thus recalling Derrida's *différance*.

Rushdie's "Imaginary Homelands" (1991, 10) is similarly paramount in analyzing diasporic negotiation of identities and (un)belongingness. To borrow some of Rushdie's words: "physical alienation [...] means that [diasporic subjects] will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost" (10), which leads to "create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands" (10). Following this line of thought, the notion of travel literature as a hybrid genre, where authenticity and storytelling elements are intertwined (Korte 2000, 10), engages with the possibility of (re)writing or (re)constructing Imaginary Homelands, unreal by definition, while tracing Homeland-Routes. *Transwonderland* can then be considered Saro-Wiwa's rewriting of her Imaginary Homeland, not (re)created from abroad, as Rushdie originally formulates (1991, 10), but from home.

In this respect, the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that, at the end of the journey, Saro-Wiwa may have reformulated her conception of Nigeria as her Imaginary Homeland, but it still remains imaginary. Specifically, the aim is to prove her ambivalence when she reflects (on) what modernization entails in present-day Nigeria, and to relate it to what is perceived as Nigeria's essence. For that purpose, the study will depart from locating *Transwonderland*'s position within the genre, and exploring Saro-Wiwa's role as "prodigal-foreigner" (Knowles 2014, 40), which shall be essential in relation to her oscillating attitude towards modernity. Then, the focus will turn to what constitutes the essence of contemporary Nigerian cities, and how the country's attempts to modernize itself are often deemed not only as inauthentic but also as a failure. This will be juxtaposed with Saro-Wiwa's perception of the most nurturing experiences during the journey being those involving contact with Nigeria's heritage,

accentuating the clash between modernity and tradition. In this context, the relevance of the family and patronage in present-day Nigerian politics will also be analyzed. To conclude, her desire to preserve Nigerian traditions will be associated with her diasporic need to have a home representing a heritage source, while enjoying the modernity of England, her chosen home. Needless to say, this would imply that Nigeria should remain stuck in time, becoming a place for her mind to turn to, her Imaginary Homeland, revis(it)ed in *Transwonderland*.

The Prodigal-Foreigner: A Sentimental Journey Away From Dark Travel

To understand Saro-Wiwa's formulations on Nigeria's modernity, it is paramount to unravel both *Transwonderland*'s role within postcolonial travel writing, and the strategies used to inscribe herself within an insider/outsider position. *Transwonderland* is an instance of "countertravel writing" (emphasis in the original; Holland and Huggan 2003, 21) insofar as it resists "neocolonial process[es] by which cultural 'otherness' is assimilated, reproduced and consumed" (emphasis in the original; 48). As a postcolonial traveler-narrator, Saro-Wiwa shapes *Transwonderland* as a writing back tool. In this sense, Edwards and Graulund argue that such is the potential of postcolonial travel literature that countertravel narratives are not merely writing back weapons questioning the Eurocentric perception of the genre (2011, 2), but rather offer "frames of reference that exist outside the boundaries of European knowledge production." (3)

Of equal importance, postcolonial travel accounts challenge Orientalism as the underlying paradigm manifested in the so-called "Dark Tourism" (Foley and Lennon 2006, 3)³. In African travel writing, Dark Tourism, or Dark Travel, involves

a set of cultural practices pertaining to the experience, and importantly, the discourse of travel in sites that are marked as 'dark' (i.e. traumatizing, disturbing, unsettling) either by dint of their history or their present commodification [...]. Postcolonial travel is in a

³ Foley and Lennon's definition of Dark Tourism focuses on how, "death, disaster and atrocity are being handled by those who offer associated tourism 'products'" (2006, 3). However, Clarke, Dutton and Johnston's concept of "Dark Travel" (2014, 221) is more appropriate in this context, for it specifically refers to postcolonial contexts.

sense always already ‘shadowed’ by the legacies of colonialisms past and present.

(emphasis in the original; Clarke, Dutton and Johnston 2014, 221)

Dark Travel “concerns the ‘emplotment’ of Africa and Africans within specific Western scripted narratives” (Dunn 2007, 485) dictated by a still existent “imperial I/eye” (Holland and Huggan 2003, 15). In contemporary African travel narratives, such meaning-making strategies are mocked and denounced in works such as Binyavanga Wainaina’s satirical proposal on “How to Write About Africa” (2005). Saro-Wiwa steers clear of the holistic perceptions and essentialist practices which Dark Travel connotes. In like manner, she avoids subscribing theories in which travel writing is either “demonized” (Edwards and Graulund 2011, 1) or deemed as fundamentally imperialist in its essence and practices (Korte 2000, 153). Saro-Wiwa rather underscores that more African writers should turn to travel instead of novel writing (Akinwolere, Edwards, and Saro-Wiwa 2014). She engages with the Afropolitan spirit and advocates for the feasibility of de-Westernizing the genre, allowing African readers to identify themselves with the traveler-narrator, and explore subtexts which non-African traveler-writers cannot grasp.

Transwonderland challenges *Lonely Planet*’s discourse as it “peels away many of the clichés that envelop Nigeria, and reveals both the beauty and brutality of this slumbering superpower” (Birrell 2012). Saro-Wiwa sustains that her perspective as an outsider granted her with distance to observe, and therefore *Transwonderland* attempts to picture a non-idealized non-pessimistic view of Nigeria (Africa Book Club 2013). Nevertheless, she reclaims her Nigerianness, and thus, her belongingness. Hence, *Transwonderland* intertwines “deep familiarity and surreal strangeness, a sense of knowing and not knowing a country.” (This Is Africa 2015)

In this respect, Saro-Wiwa epitomizes the figure of the “prodigal-foreigner”, a traveler “occupying a liminal position in a transnational space [...], neither accepted nor rejected, not entirely ‘at home’ nor totally ‘alien’” (Knowles 2014, 52). Knowles introduces this concept in relation to Michael Ondaatje’s memoir *Running in the Family* (1982), which depicts his experience as a returnee in Sri Lanka, paralleled in Saro-Wiwa’s return to Nigeria. “Situated between identities, cultures, and languages” (52), Saro-Wiwa’s (re)vision of her homeland constitutes a (re)construction of the country in which her foreigner-self contributes as much as her native-self. In this context, the term “prodigal” implies homecoming and “a reconciliation between returnee and father-figure” (41), which in Saro-Wiwa’s case is not materialized, for

“there is no father-figure to return to” (41). However, Ken Saro-Wiwa, whose execution in 1995 provoked Nigeria’s eviction from the Commonwealth of Nations (Falola and Heaton 2008, 233), has a pivotal role both in the germination of his daughter’s project and in her conception of the country. Noo Saro-Wiwa conveys how, after her father’s death, her links with Nigeria were “severed” (7), for the country came to symbolize “fears and disappointments” (8). *Transwonderland* recounts her intention of overcoming those feelings and coming to terms with Nigeria, years after her father’s death. In this manner, her revis(it)ing Nigeria allows her to reconnect with her past. This idea, together with her representing a prodigal-foreigner, is reinforced in reading the preface of the travelogue, where she acknowledges:

Re-engaging with Nigeria meant disassociating it from the painful memories lurking in my mind [...]. I needed to travel freely around the country, as part-returnee and part-tourist with the innocence of outsider, untarnished by personal associations. Then hopefully, I could learn to be less scared of it [...] and consider it a potential ‘home’.

(9)

As a prodigal-foreigner, the author discloses the artificiality of her Imaginary Homeland by means of juxtaposing childhood memories of her visits to Nigeria (up to 1990), and her adult experiences on the road. This now/then dichotomy seems to be a recurrent trademark in diasporic traveler-writers visiting home, as *Running in the Family* suggests, and as Doris Lessing’s *African Laughter* (1992) brings to the forefront in her “re(dis)cover[ing]” the [Zimbabwe] of her youth” (Korte 2000, 173). In *Transwonderland*, the contrast between events that took place in the past and those taking place during the journey illustrates the slipperiness of memory. When recalling her childhood, her desire of a more modern Nigeria remains a constant, which is contrasted with her adult desire of preserving its heritage. Furthermore, she reveals that she her being forced to travel there year after year (3), a fact that influenced her vision as a child and her desires of modernity, now deemed as biased. By the same token, *Transwonderland*, as the rewriting of her Imaginary Homeland, may also be punctured with biased (re)views regarding her need to find and preserve Nigeria’s cultural legacy, progressively lost with modernization.

Saro-Wiwa’s status as a prodigal-foreigner and postcolonial traveler-writer also reveals her condition as a transnational subject, which connotes a “fluid attitude to questions of race and class, travel and belonging, home and away” (Knowles 2014, 14). Consequently,

Transwonderland epitomizes “the critical potential of travel writing[:] its capacity to expose and attack the invasive practices of mass tourism [, and challenge] prevailing stereotypes and cultural myths of place” (Holland and Huggan 2003, 3). Thereby, Saro-Wiwa conveys the transnational nature of Afropolitanism by means of offering a view of Nigeria that does not necessarily correspond with the one proposed by guidebooks, and other diasporic authors’ narratives.

Danfos, Corruption and *Jagga Jagga*: (De)Coding Urban Modernity

This section will introduce what Saro-Wiwa perceives as Nigeria’s essence, that is, its heritage, and the messiness of Nigerian life. Although their respective relevance in the reimagining of her homeland will differ at the end of the journey. These points will be developed in analyzing four episodes: her description of Lagos’ corruption; her impressions on the Transwonderland Amusement Park; her visit to the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove; and her depiction of Abuja. Henceforth, the role of irony in criticizing modernization should be borne in mind, her satirical remarks being exclusively directed to mock Westernization and blatant pretenses of grandeur. Conversely, mockery never tarnishes descriptions of Nigeria’s tribal heritage and traditional practices. This can be appreciated from the very beginning of her journey, in her wry response to the sign that reads “Welcome to Lagos”, “almost chilling in its apparent sarcasm, like some kind of sick joke” (12). Similarly, she considers the motto printed on Lagos’ car plates, “Centre of Excellence”, as “a ridiculous conceit if ever there was one.” (12)

As a traveler-returnee, the foreigner perspective allows her to see without the religious, political, and social veil which clouds the judgment of many Nigerians. Meanwhile, she feels free to speak frankly, endorsed by her cultural affiliation to the country and its strange familiarity. In her belief that corruption is ingrained in modern Nigeria, hustling and manipulation are promptly introduced as “the lifeblood of Nigeria’s economy” (23). Perhaps the best illustration of this point is the description of the bustling activity taking place within Lagos’ danfos, the characteristic Nigerian minibus-taxis. Arguably, danfos can be interpreted as microcosms of Lagos where religion, politics and beggary are put on the same level. As a traveler, the danfo is a means to see Lagos passing in front of her eyes, both because it moves throughout the “twenty-first-century urban jungle” (23), and because the preachers, hustlers and beggars entering danfos are regarded as metonymic representations of Nigeria’s essence. In this line, the chaotic traffic, regarded as “jammed with speed freaks” (Andrew et al. 2007,

458), can be considered a metonymy of Nigeria's chaotic way of life. As will be explored in relation to Abuja, Saro-Wiwa learns to yearn and respect chaos as a symbol of Nigerianness.

Incidentally, her (re)actions in the danfo bear witness to the impossibility of determining a moment of Arrival as perceived by Leed (1991, 85), for "initial identifications [are] normally based upon the appearance and manner of transport used by the guest" (101). Saro-Wiwa remains in silence, a sign of her strangeness, consciously avoiding being identified as an outsider. This grants her with freedom to observe and describe hawkers, hustlers, beggars and preachers alike. Ironically, for all of them, danfos are "especially handy for securing a captive audience" (22). As if in a rehearsed performance, one after the other stand against the passengers, trying to persuade them to join a church, buy a motivational pamphlet, a product to improve women's fertility, or just to give them some Nairas (21-2). In this context, "belief, and specially self-belief, seems a vital ingredient in helping people get through life in Lagos [...] in an environment that punishes the unambitious, the sick and the incapacitated" (23). Against this background, modernization equates decay in a country where bribery, nepotism and political corruption diminish "the quality and quantity of everything in the country, including [Nigerians'] self-esteem." (24)

In this line, novels written from the diaspora often picture a disturbing futureless Lagos, "mysterious[ly] housing the past and determining or destroying the future" (Kehinde 2007, 232). Conversely, Saro-Wiwa does not endorse her descriptions with omens of futurelessness, thus resisting Afro-pessimistic or dystopian analysis of the country, specifically of Lagos as a metonymy of Nigeria. Neither does she introduce detailed descriptions of personal experiences in which she is in danger, distancing *Transwonderland* from travelogues such as Teju Cole's *Everyday is for the Thief* (2014). In spite of being a woman traveling alone in Lagos, whose "crime rate out of control" (Andrew et al. 2007, 458) is one of the first pieces of information offered by *Lonely Planet*, she barely emphasizes her anxiety. She rather focuses on censuring what provokes Nigeria's deterministic environment, unquestionably alluding to the culture of corruption. Equally important is Nigerians' religious fervor, since "years of economic struggle and political corruption seem to have focused Nigerians' attention on God more strongly than before" (63). In this vein, Saro-Wiwa believes that Nigerians' "reliance on God to change material circumstances will ultimately hold [the country] back even more than corruption." (304)

After three weeks in Lagos, Saro-Wiwa heads northwards, where Homeland-Routes will be further traced, favoring her reattachment to Nigeria and the ultimate creation of Fluid-Roots, but also prompting somber reflections on modernity. Ibadan is her first stop on the road, where she visits Transwonderland Amusement Park. Transwonderland is promptly demystified as an epitome of the modern Nigeria that she longed during her childhood, now regarded as a Western-influenced wish. The “Disney-esque promised land [,] lustrous, modern, kitsch and fun” (98), is judged with an adult perception of modernity entailing “fake textures and colours” (98). In spite of that, Saro-Wiwa admits that, as an adult (tourist), still wishes somehow “for Nigeria to ‘achieve’ and be a place that people admire and want to visit; a credible tourist destination” (98). Admittedly, her “prodigal-self” is revealed in her remaining desire for Nigeria to be worldwide appreciated; her “foreigner-self” is equally present in her need as a traveler to make the most of her journey.

Although her guidebook describes Transwonderland as “the closest thing Nigeria has to Disney World” (98), she finds instead “a forlorn landscape of motionless machinery [...]. A handful of people walk[ing] around the decrepit park, surveying the desolation” (99). Yet, Transwonderland “kept going long after [its rides] economic viability had expired, like twitching corpses that refuse to die” (101). In this context, the author satirically describes a group of men hand-washing their clown costumes, “making unwitting mockery” (101) of a plaque praising Transwonderland’s status as an “ultra-modern” (101) amusement park. The irony remains in Babangida being deemed a clown. The head of the military government when Transwonderland was erected is called “a comic Roman emperor too inept to provide for his people, yet equally incapable of offering them a long-lasting distraction from their poverty” (101). In contemplating this scenery, she concludes that her “childhood dreams of a modern, artificial Nigeria were stalled for the time being.” (101)

Still advertised as one of Ibadan’s main touristic attractions (Oyo State 2015, 6), Transwonderland can be analyzed as an allegory of post-independence Nigeria. Saro-Wiwa’s comments on the title of the travelogue reinforce this idea, for she reveals that it *Looking for Transwonderland* stands for “a symbol of the Nigeria [she] wanted to experience, the Nigeria separated from the murder and the dictatorship” (Public Radio International 2012). At the same time, she maintains that Transwonderland has fallen into decline, and that the same could be said about Nigeria since independence (Public Radio International 2012). Transwonderland as a trope remains present throughout the journey, one of Saro-Wiwa’s conclusions being that “the mirage of a Transwonderland-style holiday wasn’t worth chasing” (304). Although, as just

shown, her belief of modernity as detrimental is already evident from the very beginning. Nonetheless, her rather ambivalent approach is clearly appreciated in her visit to the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove, a Yoruba religious sight described, “after the inglorious kitsch of Transwonderland” (102), as one of Nigeria’s “more authentic sights” (102). The labeling of authenticity conveys a (re)presentation of the country in terms of the mutually exclusive dichotomy modernity/authenticity, whereby modernity compromises tradition. This code runs throughout the work, as one might expect, associating modernity with Westernization. Nevertheless, due to its recent history, the situation of the Yoruba Sacred Grove threatens the feasibility of such a binary division.

“Overrun by urban development” (106), only the support of an Austrian artist allowed to preserve the 600-year-old Sacred Grove (106). Yet, Saro-Wiwa laments that capitalism and government mismanagement have led to the selling of some portions of the Grove to property developers (109). Although, at first sight, it may appear that modernity and capitalism have nothing but damaged the Grove’s situation, the author cannot bypass that it was the Austrian artist’s education that “had given her the wherewithal to travel to Nigeria [...] and revive the Yoruba cult” (109). This leads her to wonder whether westernization is the Sacred Grove’s nemesis or its savior (109). The riddle can be related to the figure of the prodigal-foreigner, since Saro-Wiwa’s desire to protect her cultural legacy from capitalism is intertwined with her acknowledgement that her own “foreign upbringing and education had diluted [her] cultural identity” (109), being thus impossible to disassociate herself from the West. The foregone conclusion, at this early stage of the journey, is the impossibility of sustaining a binary thought in which the antithetical dichotomy modernity/authenticity describes Nigeria. This manifests an inherent contradiction in Saro-Wiwa’s standpoint towards modernity, first presented in stark opposition to authenticity, but later on admitting that the line dividing both categories is porous. In this case, what is seen as authentic, the Sacred Grove, might not have been preserved, had it not been for a Western activist.

Yet, the author’s fluctuating perception will continue falling into the same patterns throughout the journey. Perhaps nowhere more clearly perceived than in her next stop, Abuja, where, in spite of the Sacred Grove episode, there is a new attempt to (de)code the essence of the (un-)Nigerian. Oddly enough, Abuja, the capital, is labeled as un-Nigerian as a result of its pretenses of modernity. As in Lagos, those pretenses are mocked in relation to the motto printed on Abuja’s car plates, “Centre of Unity”, which “describes Abuja perfectly, since the city seems to have united Nigerians in the view that it’s the dullest place on earth” (111). This comment

further reinforces Saro-Wiwa's claim that "try as it might, Abuja hasn't quite reached that ever-shifting benchmark of 'modernity'." (113)

She recollects visiting the capital as a child, when "Abuja was the type of city [she] dreamed about [...], [in] fantas[is]ing about how Nigeria *ought* to be" (emphasis in the original; 110). As in Transwonderland, she promptly acknowledges that her childish eyes could not see accurately, that they "couldn't articulate [Abuja's] sense of inauthenticity and fabrication" (110). Even if "that fantasy of Abuja as an upmarket urban paradise had been partially realized" (111), the city had an "eerie thoroughly un-Nigerian serenity" (126). The author considers it a "shame that [Abuja] could only achieve its orderliness by stripping itself of everyday Nigerian life" (126). What the city lacks, Nigeria's essence, seems to remain in Lagos' chaotic rhythm, the so-called "*jagga jagga* of Nigerian life [...], [a] slang for 'messed up'" (emphasis in the original; 243). Interestingly enough, Nigeria's *jagga jagga* holds a negative connotation which will be relevant in Saro-Wiwa's conclusions at the end of the journey, for she admits that the chaos, far from being an "embarrassment to [their] politicians [...] [became] vital for to their [mischievous] operations." (121)

In these circumstances, she openly admits feeling an outsider in Abuja, where she can only find "reminders of the real Nigeria" (112) among its "cleanliness and dreary order" (112). Significantly, an aspect which condemns Abuja to un-Nigerianness is the banning of *okadas*, the motorcycle-like taxis, which together with *danfos* are the most popular means of transport in Nigerian cities. As a traveler, *okadas* "appealed to a downwardly mobile side to [her] character [she] hadn't known existed" (128). In keeping with this line of thought, her detachment from Lagos, its means of transport, and its traffic, which metonymically represents Nigeria, prompts the rediscovery of the self-in-motion. In other words, her feeling of strangeness in Abuja and her defamiliarized descriptions, together with her missing *okadas* and the mobility that they represent, lead her to discover a new trait of her nature related to Afropolitans' mobility. Hence, the experience highlights the constant reconfiguration of diasporic subjects' fluid identity. What is more, her missing an element considered quintessentially Nigerian arouses a feeling of (re)attachment to the country, thus creating Fluid-Roots.

In essence, Lagos, even if corrupt, is considered to have the quintessence of present-day Nigeria, its chaotic *jagga jagga*. In Transwonderland, Saro-Wiwa leaves behind her childhood dreams of a modern Nigeria, heading to Abuja, where attempts of modernization are described

as a failure, prompting her dislocation. Notwithstanding, Lagos, Transwonderland, and Abuja are purely urban landscapes, which is relevant in the sense that the contradictions of her discourse arise in non-urban scenarios. As the episode of the Yoruba Sacred Grove reflects, and as the following section will illustrate, rural landscapes bear witness to the impossibility of completely isolating modernity from tradition.

Traditional Contexts: Patronage, Masquerades and the Nigerian Family

The tenor of this section will be defined by Saro-Wiwa's consideration of the experiences involving traditional cultural practices being the most nourishing part of her journey. As she observes at the end of *Transwonderland*:

I had come to love many things about Nigeria: our indigenous heritage, the dances, the masks, the music [...]. I, the progressive urbanite, had become a lover of nature and pre-colonial, animist ceremony [...]. Yet Nigeria, for all its sapphire rivers and weddings and apes, couldn't seduce me fully when all roads snaked back to corruption. (304)

Three representative episodes in her reimagining her Homeland while constructing Homeland-Routes will now be detailed so as to interpret her conclusion: a durbar ceremony in Kano, her description of a village in Sukur, and an epiphany in Calabar. Two of the episodes take place in the north, "foreign enough to make [Saro-Wiwa] feel like a tourist" (138), something which she seeks in leaving Abuja:

Without family connections here, I planned on exploring the region as [...] a pure tourist [, so] I could replace my increasing emotional baggage with a (metaphorical) knapsack and travel lightly. That was the plan, at least. (138-9)

The passage contains a proleptic insight, for she will not travel as "lightly" as she intends. On the contrary, the north will progressively increase her dislocation, feeling more "foreigner" and less "prodigal" than she has felt in more modern areas of the country. Nevertheless, the north will also deepen her feeling of belongingness to her tribal group, the Ogoni people, for her identity is essentialized into being "very much an Ogoni and a Christian" (143). This is first

perceived in Kano, described as “the true north [...] [, its] weaker Western cultural influence [being] very foreigner to [Saro-Wiwa].” (143)

In Kano, Saro-Wiwa attends the annual Durbar in the Hausa-Fulani culture. Delighted with the grandeur of the ceremony and the colorfulness of the warriors’ attire, she reflects on how sad it would be “ever to see it disappear in the name of modernization” (161). She goes as far as stating that the end of the Durbar represents Kano’s “revert[ion] to the chaos and indignity of modern life” (162). A thought-provoking reference, since the same chaos which was praised before, and will be longed later on, is now associated with indignity. In a similar vein, she recognizes that the Durbar implies a “sort of traditional rule [involving an important] amount of patronage” (161) that entails “the (governmental) expense of maintaining palaces and emirs’ salaries [, which] seems inefficient and outdated in any part of the world” (161). Hence, modernization appears to be a much more viable option, insofar as patronage hinders Nigeria’s economic progress. Its practice makes “imperative for civilian politicians to maintain their positions of political power at all costs”, since access to government funds is restricted to those with influence, which results in violence and manipulation surrounding elections (Falola and Heaton 2008, 8). When in Abuja, Saro-Wiwa criticized present-Nigeria’s patronage, where “politics and resource control [are] intertwined” (122). The inherent contradiction remains in the fact that as an Afropolitan she regrets the presence of a system which holds Nigeria back; yet, as a traveler-returnee, willing to reconnect with Nigeria, she needs to reengage with the “authentic”. In this case, this leads her to wish the preservation of Kano’s ancestral Durbar, which entails the perpetuation of a (non-modern) patronage system.

Additionally, when patronage and modern Nigeria’s political system are discussed, Saro-Wiwa brings into focus the role of the Nigerian family as an institution, and how politicians are expected to bring wealth not only to their family but to their village or tribal group. Saro-Wiwa bemoans that Nigeria “[hasn’t] yet dismantled centuries of extended family and ethnic bonds” (122), pointing out that “corruption and nepotism increase when pressure is placed on successful individuals to look after dozens of clinging family members” (123). Therefore, she implies that some of the ancestral practices that she defends are injurious for modern Nigeria as a developing economy.

In leaving Kano, her northern journey takes her to Sukur, a World Heritage Site at the top of the Mandara Mountains (198). Described as a “Stone Age mountain kingdom [...] [whose] people still live in stone dwellings and employ Stone Age techniques” (198), Sukur

epitomizes what would be advertised, subscribing Dark Travel practices, as an African village where travelers can go “back in time”. In this sense, as Graulund indicates, even if subaltern traveler-writers aim to avoid imposing their views while observing and transmitting their experience, they may nonetheless “slip into the rhetoric of authenticity” (2011, 58). In this respect, even if Saro-Wiwa does not fall into patterns of exoticizing the Dark Continent, after contemplating Sukur’s landscape and “placid simplicity” (204), she “yearn[s] for [Nigeria] to throw itself back to an Iron Age [...], at the mercy of nature’s caprices, not corruption’s iron fist” (205). This desire will be echoed later on in her saying that the country “might be better off [without its oil industry], anyway; [for it] seems innately prepared for a simple, back-to-basics future” (303), an oxymoronic expression, similar to “modern-less future”, which of course is unachievable.

Here, it is not an ambivalent line of thought, but rather one of Sukur’s villagers, that destabilizes her antithetical ideas involving modernity and the dichotomization of modernity/tradition. Far from wishing the preservation of Sukur’s Stone Age “perfect simplicity” (204), the local man longs for the government to take actions and create “social amenities” (204) to attract tourists, and yield benefits to build educational and health facilities (204). Thus, he clearly advocates for Sukur’s modernization; on the contrary, Saro-Wiwa, as a foreigner-returnee, defends the preservation of its culture and landscape. In it is interesting to notice that the villager’s embedded voice constitutes an essential trademark of postcolonial travel writing, and contrasts with canonical colonial travel accounts in which “landscape is written as uninhabited, unpossessed, unhistoricized, [and] unoccupied even by the travelers themselves” (Pratt 2008, 50). The contact between the native and the traveler represents what Pratts describes as encounter in the “contact zone”, “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (7). Although Pratts’ definition deals with paradigmatic colonizer/colonized relations, the encounter between the villager and Saro-Wiwa may be regarded as taking place in a postcolonial contact zone, free from impositions, since Saro-Wiwa is both a native to the country and a traveler. The importance of that contact remains both in the process of interaction, and in Saro-Wiwa’s portrayal of the villager’s position towards Sukur’s situation even if it differs from hers.

After experiencing the north, Saro-Wiwa flights to Calabar, where she attends a traditional Nigerian wedding. Having witnessed the masquerade featuring the wedding, she has an epiphany:

This, I realized, is what Nigeria does best. The weddings, the humour, the music – often too visceral to convey in our tourism brochures – were what made Nigeria special. It was an epiphany for me. The concept of ‘Transwonderland’ with all its artifice and modernity wasn’t our strength right now, but it didn’t matter. The alternative was so much better and richer. (215)

Whereas the epiphany appears to reside in her realization that the preservation of Nigerian traditional practices is a “richer” and “better” alternative than pursuing modernity is, her understanding that modernity is not worth chasing was already present from the beginning of the journey. Hence, the epiphany actually resides in her realization that her affect towards these practices has progressively developed, while she has discovered flaws in the equally “authentic” jagga jagga. At this final stage of the journey, this epiphany results from the charting of Homeland-Routes, having a major impact upon the reshaping of her Imaginary Homeland.

Shortly after the wedding, Saro-Wiwa attends a masquerade celebration in Creek Town (Calabar). This masquerade is presented in a rather forlorn tone, albeit described as “scarily compelling” (218). In contrast to the traditional wedding masquerade, Creek Town’s masquerades expected money in exchange for being photographed (218). Surprisingly, when Saro-Wiwa does not comply, she is slapped. This episode illustrates the effect which modernization and capitalism may exert upon masquerades, and subsequently foreshadows the impossibility of conciliating tradition and modernization, a claim explicitly made by she author:

I was starting to acquire a taste for the indigenous. Where would Nigeria be without those exciting weddings and (non-aggressive) masquerades [...]? They had been the best part of my journey so far, the things that made this country worth visiting. Relinquishing our traditional heritage might be worthwhile if we could replace it with a modern, developed society, but at the moment we’re stumbling into a crack between two worlds. (227)

Her earlier assertion, at the Yoruba Sacred Grove, that there are instances in which tradition and modernity can be intertwined, and that the preservation of the former may even be dependent on the latter, clearly contrasts with this explicit reference to their mutual exclusion.

This seems to affect her final conception of present-day Nigeria, whose nature and traditional practices she feels deep attachment to, but nevertheless “couldn’t seduce [her] fully when all roads snaked back to corruption.” (304)

However, the purposed of the journey is accomplished, it “ha[s] cured [her] emotional fear of the country” (304), and “helped [her] to finally wipe away the negative association and start a new relationship with [Nigeria]” (305). This bears witness to the final (re)generation of Fluid-Roots that allow her to “maintain a relationship with Nigeria “from [her] chosen home” (305), England. Nonetheless, although more positive, this new relation with Nigeria may be considered as imaginary as the old one, for it has been constructed by means of labeling her most thoroughly enjoyed experiences as those being more authentically Nigerian, and therefore unreachable from her chosen home.

Conclusion

Even though present-day Nigeria’s essence is found both in its cultural legacy and its chaotic jagga jagga, Saro-Wiwa directs her affection towards the former. The implication is that the latter entails negative connotations, for Nigeria’s culture of corruption benefits from it, whereas its heritage is purely associated with cultural growth. In this manner, despite the inherent contradictions of presenting a monolithic description of modernization, Saro-Wiwa decides to defend the cultural patrimony in detriment of what innovation may offer. Nonetheless, the rejection of what Transwonderland embodies was already latent in earlier stages of the journey, implying that her negative perception of modernity is not acquired but rather present from the beginning. Still, it progressively increases, its growth running parallel both to her contemplating the consequences of modernization, and to her desiring to preserve her motherland’s heritage, as she experiences fragments of it.

Travelers’ intrinsic need of discovering and experiencing different cultural practices plays a pivotal role in her desire of protecting Nigerian traditions, reinforcing her inbetween position as a prodigal-foreigner. Most importantly, her rejection of her motherland’s inauthentic modernization can be interpreted as a need to conceive England and Nigeria as complementary homes, the latter being her source of cultural heritage while enjoying England’s modernity. In this sense, the artificiality of her Imaginary Homeland, conjured up with childish wishes of modernity, is contested. Notwithstanding, *Transwonderland* as a rewriting is equally

imaginary, as far as past memories and wishes have been replaced with her present need of having a place for her mind to turn to and to relate her just created Fluid-Roots to. Hence, despite acknowledging the possibility of change, Saro-Wiwa champions the preservation of Nigerian traditions. Nevertheless, in her recognizing her internal conflict, Saro-Wiwa's rejection of modernization carries an inherent denounce that connotes Nigerians' need to react. In this sense, she advocates for an urgent need for modern practices to be (re)focused and (re)directed in order to stop serving corruption and Western interests.

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