

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

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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 Paul Gilroy's roots/routes dichotomy which ultimately affects her reconstruction of Nigeria as her Imaginary Homeland. Starting 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 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 that represents a nurturing heritage source.

Keywords: Nigerian diaspora; travel writing; modernization; Imaginary Homelands; roots/routes

(Re)Imaginando y (re)visitando la patria en *Looking for Transwonderland:*
Travels in Nigeria de Noo Saro-Wiwa

Este artículo analiza el libro de viajes *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria* (2012), de Noo Saro-Wiwa, y la ambivalencia de su autora en relación con la actual modernización de Nigeria, que afecta a Saro-Wiwa como escritora diaspórica a la hora de narrar el viaje a su país natal. Mi objetivo es argumentar que la posición que ocupa la autora, al sentirse

simultáneamente local y extranjera, conlleva una reformulación de la dicotomía *roots/routes* de Paul Gilroy, que finalmente afecta la reconstrucción que Saro-Wiwa hace de Nigeria como *Imaginary Homeland* o patria imaginaria. Partiendo de la posición liminal de la autora como *prodigal-foreigner*, este artículo se centra en analizar lo que Saro-Wiwa percibe como la esencia de Nigeria, y el modo en el que inscribe al país en la dicotomía modernidad/autenticidad, presentando ambas categorías como mutuamente excluyentes. Las contradicciones de esta división se relacionarán con el rechazo que Saro-Wiwa manifiesta hacia la modernidad, y con su deseo de preservar las tradiciones nigerianas. El enfoque adoptado pretende subrayar hasta qué punto su inclinación hacia la preservación del patrimonio cultural nigeriano, a costa de la modernización del país, puede asociarse con la necesidad diaspórica de tener una patria imaginaria a la cual recurrir como fuente de legado cultural.

Palabras clave: diáspora nigeriana; literatura de viajes; modernización; *Imaginary Homelands*; *roots/routes*

I. INTRODUCTION

When *Lonely Planet* states 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” (2007, 453) than to the fact that it “has produced music and literature whose influence spreads far beyond the continent” (2007, 453). As we read on, this kind of discourse progressively shifts its focus towards the marketing, exoticizing and otherizing of Nigerian landscapes and cities, championing an image that is intended to appeal to adventurers who dare to visit the “Dark Continent.”

Leaving *Lonely Planet*'s neocolonialist discourse 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). Afro-pessimism's main danger 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” (2011, 9). This can be appreciated in fiction writing, as Kehinde states, by discussing, among other works, Ben Okri's “Laughter Beneath the Bridge” (1993) and Chika Unigwe's “Retail Therapy” (2005), where Lagos is depicted as a wasteland where “unemployment, oppression, social stratification and neglect [...] [constitute] a death trap for the masses who have nothing in the midst of plenty” (Kehinde 2007, 234-235). In some cases, such as the *Lonely Planet* guide mentioned above, Afro-pessimism may even entail twenty-first-century Orientalist travel writing practices (Said [1978] 2003) which recall the empire's “obsessive need to present and re-present its peripheries and its others continually to itself” (Pratt [1992] 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, 28-29). Afropolitans, “not citizens, but Africans, of the world” (Selasi 2013, 528), advocate “redefining” and “complicating” Africa, while refusing to “oversimplify” and “essentializ[e]” Africanness (529) (see also Eze 2014; Ifekwunigwe 2003). 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 such as Chimamanda Adichie, Ben Okri and Helon 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 article, Noo Saro-Wiwa's *Looking for Transwonderland* (2012), responds to the absence of nonfictional representations of Nigeria and explores to what extent Saro-Wiwa's (re) vision and (re)creation of Nigeria in her travelogue are affected by her belonging to its diaspora. Daughter of the Ogoni activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, Noo Saro-Wiwa was raised

in London, and her travelogue recalls summer visits to Nigeria during her childhood. Yet, Noo Saro-Wiwa recounts that, after her father's execution in 1995, an execution which provoked Nigeria's eviction from the Commonwealth of Nations, her links with Nigeria were "severed" (Saro-Wiwa [2012] 2013, 7), for the country came to symbolize "fears and disappointments" (8). In this regard, *Looking for Transwonderland* is the tool through which she conveys how she overcame these feelings by means of journeying through her homeland. At the same time, the journey alters the configuration of her diasporic identity, since she struggles to negotiate her position as "part-returnee and part-tourist" (9).

In discussing the (re)formulation of Saro-Wiwa's diasporic identity during the journey, Paul Gilroy's roots/routes dichotomy (1993) acquires a new dimension inasmuch as travel writing does not usually involve diasporic subjects returning to their motherland. Gilroy's seminal theory discusses migrants and diasporic communities finding new ways of belonging and remarks that "modern black political culture has always been more interested in the relationship of identity to roots and rootedness than in seeing identity as a process of movement and mediation that is more appropriately approached via the homonym routes" (1993, 19). This has been understood as a vindication of the fluidity of diasporic subjects which implies that "the grounded certainties of *roots* are replaced with the transnational contingencies of *routes*" (McLeod [2010] 2012, 250; emphasis in the original). Following this train of thought, Gilroy intertwines the creation of routes to the transnational character of identities and the fragmentation that arises in journeying between countries, rather than when wandering through one's own land. Yet, Saro-Wiwa's position as a returnee traveler-writer prompts the creation of a new type of routes, which I will define through the oxymoronic expression "Homeland Routes," and which stands for the physical journey through her motherland. Such a journey favors her coming to terms with and reattaching to Nigeria, after years of detachment as a result of the trauma that her father's death implied. Traversing Nigeria and tracing Homeland Routes allows her to reflect on her personal history and the history of the country as she visits unknown places and cultures, thus (re)discovering the fluidity of her identity.

Additionally, the creation of Homeland Routes motivates the formation of new roots, which I define with the oxymoron "Fluid Roots." The term differs from Gilroy's roots in that it neither evokes a feeling of fixed identity linked to a specific place nor an absolutist discourse of a nationalist or ethnic belonging. Tracing Homeland Routes allows Saro-Wiwa to remap her sense of belonging as she rediscovers Nigeria, hence creating Fluid Roots which facilitate the synthesis of her diasporic transnational nature with her rootedness to her native country. That is to say, her insider/outsider status allows her to reconnect with her motherland during her journey. Furthermore, while Gilroy's routes can be considered a substitute for fixed cultural roots, in Saro-Wiwa's context Homeland Routes and Fluid Roots are complementary, since the tracing of the former fosters the generation of the latter.

Following this line of thought, the tracing of Homeland Routes is related to Saro-Wiwa's reformulation of what Rushdie defines as "Imaginary Homelands" (1991, 10), a paramount term in analyzing diasporic negotiation of identities and (un)belongingness. To borrow Rushdie's words: "physical alienation [...] means that [diasporic subjects] will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost" (10), which leads them to "create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands" (10). In this regard, the notion of travel literature as a hybrid genre, where authenticity and storytelling elements are intertwined (Korte [1996] 2000, 10), engages with the possibility of (re)writing or (re)constructing Imaginary Homelands, unreal by definition, while tracing Homeland Routes. *Looking for Transwonderland* can, then, be considered Saro-Wiwa's rewriting of her Imaginary Homeland, though not (re)created from abroad, as Rushdie (1991) originally formulates, but rather from Home.

As I will attempt to show in the following sections, at the end of the journey, Saro-Wiwa may have reformulated her conception of Nigeria as her Imaginary Homeland, but despite her actual return and her physical presence in Nigeria, the country remains imaginary to her. This is seen in her ambivalence towards modernization in present-day Nigeria, and her perception of its essence during her five-month journey through the country. I will begin by locating *Looking for Transwonderland's* position within the genre of travel writing, and by exploring Saro-Wiwa's oscillating attitude towards modernity and what constitutes the essence of contemporary Nigerian cities. In her view, the country's attempts to modernize itself are often deemed not only inauthentic but also a failure. This I shall relate to her thoughts on the clash between modernity and tradition in her descriptions of the most nurturing experiences during the journey, being those involving contact with Nigeria's heritage. To conclude, I will associate her desire to preserve Nigerian traditions with her diasporic need to have an ancestral home representing a heritage source, while at the same time enjoying the modernity of England, her chosen home. In wanting traditions to be preserved, Nigeria becomes a place for her mind to turn to, her Imaginary Homeland, revis(it)ed in *Looking for Transwonderland*. However, the conflictive nature of Saro-Wiwa's desires will be analyzed, since in spite of her longing for the preservation of traditional ways of life, modernization is at times described as allowing the preservation of ancestral areas and practices, corruption being harshly criticized in terms of its role in preventing Nigeria's development.

2. THE PRODIGAL-FOREIGNER: A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY AWAY FROM DARK TRAVEL

To understand Saro-Wiwa's formulations on Nigeria's modernity, it is essential to unravel both *Looking for Transwonderland's* role within postcolonial travel writing, and the strategies she uses to inscribe herself within an insider/outsider position. Travel writing theory has traditionally presented patterns of journeying where the itineraries

feature stages such as “departure, passage and arrival” (Leed 1991, 23). “Departure” here stands for detachment from a context (56), its essence residing “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 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 stages mentioned above do not suit Saro-Wiwa’s experience, specifically in what constitutes her arrival. While London unambiguously stands as her point of departure, her fluid diasporic identity complicates the description of her passage, not permitting the moment of arrival per se to be identified, for she belongs in Nigeria even if she is also a tourist. Saro-Wiwa’s passage could even be interpreted as a secondary journey, encompassed within the principal 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 construed as itself containing a new departure, passage and arrival, given that the familiarity of her native south is left behind as Saro-Wiwa starts her adventure in the unknown north, where her dislocation predominates, thus signaling a clearer perceived moment of arrival.

Despite describing the uncertainty of what she is to encounter in the northern territories, Saro-Wiwa does not fall into patterns of otherizing or exoticizing Nigeria. In this regard *Looking for Transwonderland* proves to be an instance of “countertravel writing” (Holland and Huggan [2000] 2003, 21; emphasis in the original) insofar as it resists “neocolonial process[es] by which cultural ‘otherness’ is assimilated, reproduced and consumed” (48; emphasis in the original). Edwards and Graulund argue that such is the potential of postcolonial travel literature that countertravel narratives are not merely writing back weapons with which to question the Eurocentric perception of the genre (2011, 2), but rather offer “frames of reference that exist outside the boundaries of European knowledge production” (3). In this sense, as a postcolonial traveler-narrator, Saro-Wiwa shapes *Looking for Transwonderland* as a writing back tool.

Postcolonial travel accounts also challenge Orientalism as the underlying paradigm manifested in what Foley and Lennon call “Dark Tourism,” a term employed “to signify a fundamental shift in the way in which death, disaster and atrocity are being handled by those who offer associated tourism ‘products’” ([2000] 2006, 3). They further analyze how “the politics, economics, sociologies and technologies of the contemporary world are as much important factors in the events upon which this dark tourism is focused as they are central to the selection and interpretation of sites and events which become tourism products” (3). Since Foley and Lennon’s analysis does not focus on countries with a history of colonialism, for the purpose of this essay I will employ Clarke, Dutton and Johnston’s concept of “Dark Travel” (2014,

221), which I consider more appropriate in that it specifically refers to postcolonial contexts. In dealing with African travel writing 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 sense always already 'shadowed' by the legacies of colonialisms past and present. (221; emphasis in the original)

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 [2000] 2003, 15). In contemporary African travel narratives, such meaning-making strategies are mocked and denounced in works like Binyavanga Wainaina's satirical proposal on "How to Write About Africa" (2005). Saro-Wiwa, however, 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 [1996] 2000, 153). In a recent talk in the British Library, Saro-Wiwa underscored that more African writers should turn to travel rather than novel writing (Akinwolere, Edwards and Saro-Wiwa 2014). She engages with the Afropolitan spirit and advocates the feasibility of de-Westernizing the genre—thus allowing African readers to identify themselves with the traveler-narrator—and explores subtexts which non-African traveler-writers cannot grasp. In this regard, *Looking for Transwonderland* challenges *Lonely Planet's* discourse and, as Birrell points out in his review of the memoir, "peels away many of the clichés that envelop Nigeria, [revealing] both the beauty and brutality of this slumbering superpower" (Birrell 2012). Saro-Wiwa maintains that her perspective as an outsider granted her the distance necessary to observe, and hence *Looking for Transwonderland* tries to picture a non-idealized, non-pessimistic view of Nigeria (Africa Book Club 2013). Nevertheless, she reclaims her Nigerianness, and thus, her belonging. Hence, *Looking for 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 what Knowles has recently referred to as the "prodigal-foreigner," a traveler "occupying a liminal position in a transnational space [...], neither accepted nor rejected, not entirely 'at home' nor totally 'alien'" (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, which has its parallels in Saro-Wiwa's return to Nigeria. "Situated between identities, cultures, and languages" (Knowles 2014, 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), a feature that establishes yet another connection with Ondatjee’s memoir. However, the pivotal role that Ken Saro-Wiwa has, both in the germination of his daughter’s project and in her conception of the country, is evident in the travelogue’s recounting of Noo Saro-Wiwa’s intention of coming to terms with Nigeria, long after her father’s death.

In this manner, her revis(it)ing Nigeria allows her to reconnect with her past and overcome her adverse feelings towards her homeland. This idea, together with the fact of her representing a prodigal-foreigner, is reinforced in the preface:

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’. (Saro-Wiwa [2012] 2013, 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 who are visiting home, as suggested in *Running in the Family*, and as Doris Lessing’s *African Laughter* (1992) brings to the foregrounds in her “re(dis)cover[ing] the [Zimbabwe] of her youth” (Korte [1996] 2000, 173). In Saro-Wiwa’s narration, the contrast between events that had taken place in the past and those taking place during the journey illustrates the slipperiness of memory. When recalling her childhood, her desire for a more modern Nigeria remains a constant, in contrast with her adult desire to preserve its heritage. Furthermore, she reveals that in her youth, before her father’s death, her parents forced her to travel there year after year (Saro-Wiwa [2012] 2013, 3), a fact that influenced her vision of Nigeria as a child, and her desire for its modernization, which in retrospect she considers biased. By the same token, *Looking for Transwonderland*, as the rewriting of her Imaginary Homeland, may well also be tinged with biased (re)views concerning her need to find and preserve Nigeria’s cultural legacy, which has been progressively lost with its modernization.

In the light of the above considerations, Saro-Wiwa’s status as a prodigal-foreigner and postcolonial traveler-writer 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, Saro-Wiwa’s memoir epitomizes the critical side of travel writing: “its capacity to expose and attack the invasive practices of mass tourism” (Holland and Huggan [2000] 2003, 3), inasmuch as it bears witness to travel writing’s “challenge to prevailing stereotypes and cultural myths of place” (3). Thus, as she traces her Homeland Routes and discovers new sides

to her character and her motherland, Saro-Wiwa conveys the transnational nature of Afropolitanism, offering a view of Nigeria that does not necessarily correspond with that proposed by guidebooks and other diasporic authors' narratives.

3. *Danfós*, 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, even though they will not have equal relevance at the end of the journey in her reimagining of her homeland. I will develop these points in relation to four episodes:¹ her description of Lagos' corruption; her impressions on the Transwonderland Amusement Park (Ibadan); her visit to the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove (Osogbo); and her depiction of the capital, Abuja. In commenting on her perceptions on Nigeria, her mockery never tarnishes her descriptions of the country's tribal heritage and traditional practices. Her satirical remarks are exclusively directed at mocking Westernization and the blatant pretenses of grandeur she finds. 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" (Saro-Wiwa [2012] 2013, 12). Similarly, she considers the motto printed on Lagos' car plates, "Centre of Excellence," "a ridiculous conceit if ever there was one" (12).

As a traveler-returnee, her foreigner perspective allows her to see the religious, political and social veil which clouds the judgment of many Nigerians. At the same time, she feels free to speak frankly, endorsed as she is 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. *Danfós* can be interpreted as microcosms of Lagos where religion, politics and begging are placed at 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 vein, the chaotic traffic, which *Lonely Planet* regards 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), as "initial identifications

¹ In the analysis of Saro-Wiwa's journey offered in this paper I shall follow the chronological order presented in the travelogue.

[are] normally based upon the appearance and manner of transport used by the guest” (101). Inside the *danfo* Saro-Wiwa remains silent, a sign of her strangeness, consciously avoiding being identified as an outsider. This, though, grants her the 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” (Saro-Wiwa [2012] 2013, 22). As if in a rehearsed performance, one by one they stand in front of the passengers, trying to persuade them to join a church, buy a motivational pamphlet or a product to improve women’s fertility or just to give them some *nairas* (21-22). 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 in fact equates to 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 same 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 analyses of the country, and specifically Lagos, as a metonymy of Nigeria. Neither does she introduce detailed descriptions of personal experiences where she is in danger, thus distancing *Looking for 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 [is] out of control” (Andrew et al. 2007, 458)—one of the first pieces of information offered by *Lonely Planet*—Saro-Wiwa hardly gives voice to any anxiety in this respect. Rather, she focuses on censuring what provokes Nigeria’s deterministic environment, unquestionably alluding to the culture of corruption. In this context, the selection of the information that she presents the reader with can be related both to the rewriting of her Imaginary Homeland and to the creation of new Fluid Roots, as she progressively achieves her purpose of coming to terms with the country which she rejected due to her family history. Equally important is her criticism of Nigerians’ religious fervor, since “years of economic struggle and political corruption seem to have focused Nigerians’ attention on God more strongly than before” (Saro-Wiwa [2012] 2013, 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 toward Ibadan and Abuja, where Homeland Routes will be traced further, fostering her reattachment to Nigeria and the ultimate creation of Fluid Roots, but also prompting somber reflections on modernity. From Ibadan, she progressively heads northwards, where she spends some weeks before heading southwards, through Eastern Nigeria. Thus, Ibadan is her first stop after leaving Lagos; there she visits the university her father attended and the Transwonderland Amusement Park. Transwonderland is promptly demystified as an epitome of the modern Nigeria that she longed for during her childhood, which she

now regards as a Western-influenced wish. What she imagined as a “Disney-esque promised land that was lustrous, modern, kitsch and fun” (98) is judged with her adult perception of modernity as being full of “fake textures and colours” (98). In spite of this, Saro-Wiwa admits that, as an adult (tourist), she 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 appreciated worldwide; her “foreigner-self,” though, 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 in fact finds it “a forlorn landscape of motionless machinery [...] A handful of people walk[ing] around the decrepit park, surveying the desolation” (99). Yet Saro-Wiwa wonders how in a country where “nothing ever lasts” (100) Transwonderland and other similar institutions “kept going long after their 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 continues in her deeming Babangida, the head of the military government when Transwonderland was erected, a clown. She considers him “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 the scene of the clothes-washing clowns, 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 Government 2016, 6), Transwonderland can be analyzed as an allegory of post-independence Nigeria. Saro-Wiwa’s comments on the title of her travelogue reinforce this idea, for she reveals that *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” (Saro-Wiwa [2012] 2013, 304). Although, as just shown, her belief of modernity as detrimental is already evident from the very beginning. Nonetheless, her rather ambivalent approach can be clearly appreciated in her visit to the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove, where she heads on leaving Transwonderland. The Sacred Grove is a Yoruba religious site which she describes, “after the inglorious kitsch of Transwonderland” (102), as one of Nigeria’s “more authentic sights” (102). In this context, the labeling of what she considers authentic conveys a (re)presentation of the country in terms of the mutually exclusive dichotomy modernity/authenticity, whereby modernity compromises tradition. In this sense, Saro-Wiwa’s notion of

authenticity does not stand for an Orientalist view of the country and its heritage, but rather as her attempt to protect what she considers areas, values and practices free from “corruption’s iron fist” (205). Incidentally, she often finds such values, practices and places in rural areas, far from the cities’ scams and bribed politicians. Hence it can be interpreted that Saro-Wiwa’s reference to the Yoruba Sacred Grove as ‘authentic’ aims to suggest incorruptibility, thus standing in opposition to corrupt modern institutions like Transwonderland. Against this background, the dichotomy modernity/authenticity runs throughout the work, as one might expect, associating modernity with Westernization. Nevertheless, in tracing Homeland Routes Saro-Wiwa discovers that situations in which modernity and corruption are not intertwined may also arise.

An insight into such situations presents itself in her visit to the Yoruba Sacred Grove. Due to its recent history, the situation of the grove threatens the feasibility of perceiving authenticity and modernity as fixed binary opposites. “Overrun by urban development” (106), only the support of an Austrian artist in the 1960s enabled the preservation of the 600-year-old Sacred Grove (106). Yet, Saro-Wiwa laments that capitalism and the government’s mismanagement have led to the selling off of some portions of the Grove to property developers (109). Although, at first sight, it may appear that modernity and capitalism have done nothing but damage the Grove, the author cannot skirt the fact 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), making it thus impossible to disassociate herself from the West. The foregone conclusion, at this early stage of the journey, is the impossibility of sustaining the antithetical dichotomy modernity/authenticity to describe Nigeria. This manifests an inherent contradiction in Saro-Wiwa’s standpoint towards modernity, with her first presenting it 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 (modernist) Western activist. Concurrently, this point illustrates her difficulties in reshaping her Imaginary Homeland as she continues tracing Homeland Routes, for even if her new Fluid Roots advocate reattachment to Nigeria and the preservation of its heritage, she cannot deny her in-between position as a transnational individual.

As we shall see, the author’s fluctuating perception will continue falling into the same patterns throughout the journey. Perhaps nowhere more clearly than during 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 pretense of modernity. As in Lagos, those pretenses are mocked with respect to the motto printed on Abuja 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).

In this part, she recollects visiting the capital as a child, when “Abuja was the type of city [she] dreamed about [...] [in] fantasizing about how Nigeria *ought* to be” (110; emphasis in the original). 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 [...] slang for ‘messed up’” (243; emphasis in the original). Interestingly enough, Nigeria’s *jagga jagga* has a negative undertone which proves to 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, Saro-Wiwa openly admits feeling an outsider in Abuja, where she finds only “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 the fact that she misses the *okadas* and the mobility that they represent, lead her to discover a new character trait related to Afropolitans’ mobility. Hence, the experience highlights the constant reconfiguration of diasporic subjects’ fluid identity. What is more, her missing of 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 contain 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 her dislocation becomes apparent in her witnessing of what she considers failed attempts at modernization. That said, 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.

4. 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 the travelogue:

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)

After traversing Nigeria's middle belt, Saro-Wiwa journeys through the northern provinces of Kano, Nguru, Bauchi, Jos, Yankari, Maiduguri and Sukur, where her southern language, customs, religion and clothes emphasize her dislocation and foreignness in her own country due to the cultural clash between Nigeria's north and south. From northern Sukur, she takes a flight to Cross River State to visit the southern territories of Calabar, Port Harcourt, her native town, and Ogoniland, the land of her ancestors, before returning to Lagos. I will focus here on three representative episodes in her process of reimagining her Homeland while constructing *Homeland Routes*: a Durbar ceremony in Kano, her description of a village in Sukur and an epiphany in Calabar when she heads southwards. The first two episodes take place in the north, "foreign enough to make [Saro-Wiwa] feel like a tourist" (138), a feeling she longs for after 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" (138-139). 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, making her feel more "foreigner" and less "prodigal" than she has felt in more modern areas of the country. Nevertheless, the north will 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 foreign to [Saro-Wiwa]" (143).

In Kano, Saro-Wiwa attends the annual Durbar festival in the Muslim Hausa-Fulani culture. Saro-Wiwa is amazed by the ancestral ceremony, whose aim is to display grandeur and pay homage to local leaders. Delighted with the majesty of the ceremony and the colorfulness of the northern warriors' attire, she reflects on how sad it would be "ever to see it disappear in the name of modernization" (161), for she considers it "the only chance for a community to display orderliness, glamour and rectitude in an otherwise shabby and incompetent world" (161). Saro-Wiwa goes as far as stating that the end of the annual Durbar represents Kano's return "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 for later on, is now associated with indignity. In a similar vein, she recognizes that “this sort of traditional [method of] rul[ing]—the amount of patronage involved, the (governmental) expense of maintaining palaces and emirs’ salaries—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 it “imperative for civilian politicians to maintain their positions of political power at all costs” (Falola and Heaton 2008, 8) since access to government funds is restricted to those with influence, a fact which results in violence and manipulation surrounding elections. When in Abuja, Saro-Wiwa criticizes Nigeria’s present 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.” This leads her to wish for the preservation of Kano’s ancestral Durbar, which entails the perpetuation of a (non-modern) patronage system. What can be deduced in this context is that her need for (re)engaging with her motherland and generating Fluid Roots dominates over her rejection of corruption and bribery. 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 the fact 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, some of the ancestral practices that she defends are injurious for modern Nigeria as a developing economy.

On 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 traveler-writers depicting their motherland try 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 a modernless future, which of course is unachievable.

Here, it is not an ambivalent line of thought, but rather one of Sukur's villagers, that destabilizes Saro-Wiwa's antithetical ideas involving modernity and the dichotomization of modernity/tradition. Far from wishing for the preservation of Sukur's Stone Age "perfect simplicity" (204), the local man longs for the government to take action and create "social amenities" (204) to attract tourists, and yield financial benefits with which to build educational and health facilities (204). Thus he clearly advocates Sukur's modernization, while, on the contrary, Saro-Wiwa, as a foreigner-returnee, defends the preservation of its culture and landscape. It is interesting to note 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 [1992] 2008, 50). Contact between the native and the traveler represents what Pratt describes as an 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 Pratt's 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, and as being 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 though it differs from hers.

After experiencing the north, Saro-Wiwa flies to Calabar, in southern Nigeria, where she attends a traditional Nigerian wedding. After witnessing a traditional masquerade ceremony during the wedding, she has an epiphany:²

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. (Saro-Wiwa [2012] 2013, 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, her understanding that modernity is not worth chasing was indeed already present from the beginning of the journey. In this sense, the realization of this fact actually resides in her discovering that her affect towards traditional practices has gradually developed, while at the same time she has discovered flaws in the equally

² In this context, Saro-Wiwa refers to Nigerian tribal ceremonies. However, the word "masquerade" does not only refer to the celebratory ritual but also to the men behind the masks. In this sense, Saro-Wiwa describes "masquerades" as "consumed men who wear masks representing spirits that possess the human body, making their wearers dance" (Saro-Wiwa [2012] 2013, 215).

‘authentic’ *jagga jagga*. At this final stage of the journey, this revelation results from her charting of Homeland Routes, which have a major impact upon the reshaping of her Imaginary Homeland.

Shortly after the wedding, Saro-Wiwa attends a masquerade celebration in Creek Town (Calabar). In contrast with the wedding’s epiphanic masquerade ceremony, this masquerade is presented in a rather forlorn tone, albeit she describes it 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 with this, she is slapped. This episode illustrates the effect which modernization and capitalism may exert upon masquerades, and consequently foreshadows the impossibility of conciliating tradition and modernization, a claim explicitly made by the 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 profound attachment to, but which she truly considers has fallen into “a cycle of corruption and eroded trust [which] locks the country in a tailspin” (123).

Nevertheless, the purpose of her 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. However, although more positive, this new relation with Nigeria may be considered imaginary, just like the old one, for it has been constructed by means of labeling her most thoroughly enjoyed experiences as those which are unreachable from her chosen home.

5. CONCLUSION

Even though she finds present-day Nigeria’s essence both in its cultural legacy and its chaotic *jagga jagga*, Saro-Wiwa directs her affection towards the former. The implication is that the latter carries negative connotations, since Nigeria’s culture of corruption benefits from it, whereas its heritage is associated purely with

cultural growth. In this manner, despite the inherent contradictions of presenting a monolithic description of modernization, Saro-Wiwa decides to defend cultural patrimony to the detriment of what innovation may have to offer. Nonetheless, the rejection of what Transwonderland embodies was in fact latent in earlier stages of her journey, implying that her negative perception of modernity is not acquired, but rather present from the beginning. Still, it increases progressively throughout her journey, its growth running parallel both to her contemplation of the consequences of modernization, and to her desire to preserve her motherland's heritage, as she fragmentally experiences it.

The traveler's intrinsic need for discovering and experiencing different cultural practices plays a pivotal role in her desire to protect Nigerian traditions, reinforcing her in-between position as a prodigal-foreigner. Most importantly, her rejection of her motherland's inauthentic modernization can be interpreted as a need to conceive of England and Nigeria as complementary homes, the latter being her source of cultural heritage while enjoying the former's modernity. In this sense, the artificiality of her Imaginary Homeland, conjured up with childish wishes of modernity, is contested. Notwithstanding, *Looking for Transwonderland*, as a rewriting, can be considered equally imaginary, for past memories and wishes have been replaced with new ones, thus alluding to a present necessity of having a place for her mind to turn to after the creation of Fluid Roots. Hence, despite acknowledging the possibility of change, Saro-Wiwa champions the preservation of Nigerian traditions. Nevertheless, in her recognition of her internal conflict, Saro-Wiwa's rejection of modernization carries an inherent censure that connotes Nigerians' need to react. In this sense, she advocates an urgent need for modern practices to be (re)focused and (re)directed in order for them to stop being at the service of home-grown corruption and Western interests.

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