

AGONIZING TRAVEL SUAIVENESS IN NOO SARO-WIWA'S *LOOKING FOR TRANSWONDERLAND: TRAVELS IN NIGERIA*

Dr. R. Rexmart

Assistant Professor of English, Department of English and other Foreign Languages
Faculty of Science and Humanities, SRM Institute of Science & Technology, Ramapuram,
Chennai – 600 089. Tamil Nadu, India.

rexmartr@srmist.edu.in

Dr. Jiny Amos Y.

Assistant Professor of English, Department of Science & Humanities, Vel Tech High Tech
Dr.Rangarajan Dr.Sakunthala Engineering College, An Autonomous Institution
Avadi, Chennai - 600 062

dr.jinyamos@velhightech.com

Dr. Ramya A.

Assistant Professor of English, Department of Science & Humanities, Vel Tech High Tech
Dr.Rangarajan Dr.Sakunthala Engineering College, An Autonomous Institution
Avadi, Chennai - 600 062

ramya.a@velhightech.com

Abstract

The research seeks the diffident vision towards innovativeness in the modern-day society through the study of Noo Saro-Wiwa's *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria* (2012). Travel to Nigeria recompences the author's understanding of Nigeria. It aids the author to overcome her inner traumatic experiences. The paper scrutinizes Saro-Wiwa's diverse vantage point in the travelogue such as the colonial parodies which she has experienced after her father's death, the fears and unhappiness about her own native place and also her travel to each region of the country towards the encounter of the thread that binds them all composed. The bangs of binary separation like class and colour would be connected to Saro-Wiwa's disowning of modernity, and the desire to preserve Nigeria's ethnicities. The clue taken to the goals best part up on what possibilities the feeling towards the preservation of social bequest over innovation or transformation which can be associated with the diasporic necessity to have an imaginary or made-up homeland on behalf of a nurturing bequest cause. The paper brings out the thematic notion of trauma in the edifice of the narration which evidently sets out to resolve the ancient traumas.

Keywords: Colonial parodies, insights, Nigeria, psychological trauma, and travel.

Travel stories are considered as non-fictional prose forms that chronicle the individual experiences and elucidations of a traveller about the places he or she visits. African literature has an extensive literary practice. It entails a form of exertion in diverse languages and numerous genres moving from oral works to written works. Africans challenge their freedom and further, African writings are published in book form. The themes involve the clatter between indigenous and colonial cultures, denunciation of European suppression, conceit in

the African past, and aimed at the continent's independent future. Ample contemporary African travel literature divulges disenchantment and dissention with contemporary events.

Noo Saro-Wiwa was born in Nigeria (1976) and raised up in England. Her initial manuscript *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria* (2012) is a travel memoir. Her father Ken Saro-Wiwa, an environmental avantgarde was assassinated by a dictator in Nigeria. Being a Nigerian, she did not have any association with the native soil after her father's demise. She had a repugnance towards the mother country. She remained absent from her native land for ten years. Later when she returned to the native soil, she had re-experienced with Nigeria. In the travelogue Noo Saro recounts her viewpoints on Nigeria as a stranger and an insider. Travel to Nigeria is not only a physical expedition but also a psychological travel which benefits her to get purge on the psychological trauma which she has experienced.

Noo Saro-Wiwa's travel memoir, *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria* offers a touching study of the complexities and challenges of exploring her homeland, Nigeria. The study delves into the theme of "Agonizing Travel Suaveness" as portrayed in Saro-Wiwa's narrative, examining how the author navigates the dualities of beauty and hardship, nostalgia and disillusionment, privilege and struggle in the context of her travel experiences. Her distinctive writing style immerses readers in the vibrant landscapes, diverse cultures, and rich history of Nigeria while also shedding light on the less glamorous realities of travel in a country marked by political instability, social tension, and economic disparity. Through her encounters with a colourful cast of characters – from eccentric tour guides to resilient locals – Saro-Wiwa grapples with the contradictions and conundrums that define her quest for connection and identity in a land both familiar and foreign.

Traumas confronted by travel writer would make them to be unhappy in the inner self. Over theoretic consciousness grounded on cognitive and psychoanalytical means; the travel writer faces a lot of complications which lead him/her to be in anger or else to be a miserable state. Inhuman events in the society are also the cause for emotional traumas. Sensitivity is the only paraphernalia which separates the living and the non-living things that would opinion to the emotive conceal by means of emotional and psychoanalytical traumas. To each traumatic experience faced in the social order like physical attack, humiliation, harassment, offensive relationship, police cruelty lead towards psychological difficulties.

Colonial impact makes an indigenous to receive critical choices at decisive stratum. The civil war has frightened up an avalanche of ancient and inventive works with several perceptions. Saro-Wiwa's father Ken Saro-Wiwa was a Nigerian author, who is an honest critic of military rule in the country. He is a protuberant activist for environmental reasons and marginal rights. He has initiated a movement contrary to government corruption and environmental deprivation. He is detained and imprisoned and finally is hanged for being an activist in the country. Saro-Wiwa's association with the motherland has detached after her father's death. Psychic and psychoanalytic traumas of Noo Saro-Wiwa is defined by Calvin S. Hall and Gardner Lindzey in *Theories of Personality* as "psychic energy finds concrete expression in the form of actual or potential forces. Wishing, willing, feeling, attending, and striving are examples of actual forces in the personality; dispositions, aptitudes, tendencies, inclinations, and attitudes are examples of potential forces" (91).

Saro-Wiwa's desire for travelling makes her to visit several places and write travel manuals or books. Subsequently visiting several places, she has sensed that she has to visit her

homeland. She visits diverse parts of Nigeria. She opines that Lagos as an overfilled place with violent driving, heavy traffic, anxiety, stirred robberies and crowded sewage. She is cautioned that she may get ahead danger at any instant in Lagos. The select travelogue *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria* conveys that the road sign “welcome to Lagos” (9), bounces her a note of warmth and hopefulness. Roy Bridges in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* notes about the genre as “it is taken to mean a discourse designed to describe and interpret for its readers a geographical area together with its natural attributes and its human society and culture” (53).

The practice of recording details the travels prevailing in the contemporary world. The slave port at Badagry discloses the significance of slavery. Saro-Wiwa along with Mabel visits the port of the Yoruba people’s Oyo Empire. During the early sixteenth century it turns out to be a place for shipping slaves. Further, half a million people are arrested from other parts of Nigeria, Benin and Togo are directed across the Atlantic to America. The arts centre, retained by the local Chief Mobee, falls away from the long line of rulers who have controlled the slave trade during Badagry’s origin in 1502. Shegu Mobee, the chief’s grandson displays a set of manacles worn by disrespectful slaves. The slaves are directed towards a beach acknowledged as the Point of No Return, where they are prepared to be transported abroad. During the time, the Black Heritage Festival is taking place at the beach. It was launched in 2001 to rejoice Nigerian history. Several African Americans, Brazilians and Nigerians were presented at the festival. They used to play music, pray at the festival, dance and rejoice the African culture. Saro-Wiwa is not clever enough to recognize the idea of the people in coming together on a beach towards recalling ‘slavery’.

One of the central themes that emerges in *Looking for Transwonderland* is the idea of “Agonizing Travel Suaveness,” a term coined to encapsulate the paradoxical nature of Saro-Wiwa’s experiences as a traveler navigating the complexities of her homeland. On the other hand, there is an undeniable allure and charm to the landscapes, traditions, and people she encounters, evoking a sense of wonder and enchantment that captivates her imagination and stirs her soul. However, this suaveness is juxtaposed with moments of agonizing realization and discomfort, as Saro-Wiwa confronts the harsh realities of poverty, corruption, and violence that plague Nigeria. Her encounters with beggars, street vendors, and displaced communities serves as stark reminders of the deep-rooted inequality and injustice that pervade the country, challenging her idealized perceptions and forcing her to confront the uncomfortable truths that lie beneath the surface.

The next noteworthy notion is corruption; Nigeria is a continuance of traditional structure of support. She opines that in Nigeria corruption and discrimination are dominant. The policemen do not take action without bribes, and licenses are not given until bribe is agreed. Politicians corrupt the public and use their money. Saro-Wiwa depicts the comfortable life lead by those politicians. She emanates to know that people who trade generators bribe the NEPA workers to disrupt the electricity grid in order to boost home power supplies. Politicians are living a very comfortable life without worrying about the unfortunate circumstances of Nigeria. They have remote helicopters in order to evade unsafe roads. The corrupt nature of the politicians is depicted thus:

All very convenient, but where’s the joy in owning a fancy car when it has to travel over potholed roads? What was the attraction in living in a palace powered by noisy

private generators instead of the state electricity supply? I couldn't understand why these kleptomaniacs preferred to be kings of a slum rather than live amongst equals in paradise. (121)

Saro-Wiwa hates the periodic family journeys in Nigeria. According to her, West African country absences acquainted comforts. By means of some conjecture she learns that Nigeria has more than four hundred ethnic groups. In the past, the country's politics had been conquered by a rivalry between Hausa and Fulani Muslims in the north, the Yoruba in the southwest and the Igbo in the southeast. Saro-Wiwa has travelled to almost all regions of the country, looking to understand what grasps them all together. Her memories of the childhood experiences at her native land generate embarrassment and cultural disruption. She calls her homeland as low-key and godforsaken land. Throughout her childhood days, she hates spending the holidays in Nigeria. Her parents had excessive love towards their native land. As indigenous they impress that they are nobody without their country. Saro-Wiwa's mother denotes the native land Nigeria as 'home' and her surrey dwelling as 'house'. Her father carpeted the hallway in green towards corresponding the colour of the national flag. Memories play a title role in the contemporary African travel writings.

Through her introspective reflections and candid observations, Saro-Wiwa invites readers to consider the complexities of privilege and power dynamics inherent in travel, as she grapples with her own position as a Western-educated, middle-class Nigerian navigating a society rife with disparities and divisions. Her narrative serves as a powerful commentary on the nuances of identity, belonging, and agency in the context of global mobility, highlighting the ways in which travel can both liberate and limit one's understanding of self and others. Moreover, Saro-Wiwa's exploration of "Agonizing Travel Suaveness" extends beyond the physical landscapes of Nigeria to encompass the emotional and psychological terrain of her journey. As she delves into her family history, cultural heritage, and personal memories, Saro-Wiwa grapples with feelings of nostalgia, longing, and loss, as well as disillusionment with her homeland.

Yet another issue is poverty in Nigeria which discovers a vibrant part in vandalizing the people. Dr. Mbanefo Stephen Ogene outlines poverty as the "state of being poor, lacking the basic necessities of life and suffering from inferiority as a result of this condition" (web). In order to get money some of the poor Nigerians smash holes in the pipes to bargain fuel. They do not have money towards purchasing fuel. Accidents happen frequently due to carelessly lit cigarettes or paraffin floor lamp. Sam's friend Ade, an actual poor man, steals oil for the reason that he wants money to pay for the naming ceremony of his child. His death is realized as an actual pitiable condition.

Saro-Wiwa visits Ibadan city, where her father goes to a university which retells her father. Ken who adores the perception of education. Ken senses that giving his children a decent education is the highest attainment as a parent. Hence Noo Saro-Wiwa visits university and encounters several individuals at the university who share their acquaintances with their country. Faith Odele who was the president of the student association tells of the positives as well as the negatives of the university. He utters, "the curriculum needs to be more relevant to society" (89). The author equivalences the past and the present condition of the university by saying that the lecturers are more devoted in the past than the present ones. Students at the university do not do anything with interest, and as an alternative they do the whole thing for

namesake. Faith conveys that often the lecturers stifle creativity and they do not permit the students to contemplate on their own. Lecturers fix lectures bestowing on their own individual schedules. She displays the English department library and grieves that the recent books are not found in the library, but sadder is, the prescribed books are not existing in the library. She too complains that the Department's computer is permissible to use only by the lecturers twenty-four hours a day. The agony of the students at the university is a lot due to their financial conditions. They earn money by making beads, selling mobile phone recharge cards, typing, baking cakes, and photocopying for colleagues, and so on.

Subsequently, she points out the positives of the university, where she has learnt to inscribe poems by throwing away the hesitancy. After graduation, she anticipates to become a professional poet, or to write essays and dramas for the individuals who are not involved in reading books by Nigerian writers. She senses that she cannot be a fruitful writer though she is a Nigerian. Solitary diasporic writers can be fruitful. Michael who is a Nigerian living in Italy divulges the mentality of both the Nigerians and the Europeans. He observes the Nigerians as, "louder, brasher, more noticeable than other Africans, who seem mild and timid in comparison" (104). Nigerians are not afraid of anybody and they annoy their level best to do well in all possible behaviors. Michael has a dislike towards the west. He expresses Saro-Wiwa, "they came to Africa without anybody's permission. Mungo Park, Lord Lugard . . . did they ask us if they could enter here? No!" (104). Michael is seen as an optimist or a hopeful individual. He has confidence that one day he will be coming back and building a house in his native land in Nigeria. It can be perceived over the spec of Peter Barry's *Beginning Theory* "linked with this is the idea of repression, which is the 'forgetting' or ignoring of unresolved conflicts, unadmitted desires, or traumatic past events, so that they are forced out of conscious awareness and into the realm of the unconscious" (97-98).

The final part of the travelogue is emotional. Saro-Wiwa visits her family's village Bane where she finds her father's bungalow. Her grandfather's compound is occupied with numerous graves. It is their custom to bury the dead adjacent to their houses. The writer feels sorry for her father by remembering how her father's skeleton is gathered and buried in an actual poignant manner. By visiting her native land or homeland, she says that it is not a joyful homecoming, but, the dislike for her native land has lessened. She is now on the track to love the heritage, the masks, the music, the dances, the baobab trees, and the drill monkeys. Travelling to the native land has helped out her to cure the emotional fear of the country. She conveys, "travelling here as an adult helped me to finally wipe away the negative associations and start a new relationship with the country, in which I was prepared to embrace the irritations with tentative arms, and invest some of myself" (305). Saro-Wiwa ponders on the artificial personality of the nation, which several other African nations can give the impression of an imaginative mixture of colonialism.

Noo Saro-Wiwa's travel to Nigeria is not only a physical excursion but also a psychological travel which aids her in her catharsis over the psychological trauma which she has experienced. It throws light on her memory with the motherland from which she disconnected herself after her father's death. She alleges that in Nigeria corruption and discrimination are dominant. Politicians are living a happy life without worrying about the unfortunate conditions of the Nigerian masses. Her memories of childhood, and her experiences with her native land led her to a sense of humiliation and cultural disruption.

Throughout her childhood days, she hates spending the holidays in Nigeria. Her parents cherish their native land. Poverty in Nigeria plays a vandalizing role in the lives of the people. Travelling to the native land has aided in curing the fear of the country.

The paper therefore proposes that innovation of thoughts and one's consciousness of what he or she has in life are the initial ideas toward accomplishment and prosperity. Emotional significance based on identity renunciation is the core traumatic psychological scrutiny in Noo Saro-Wiwa's life. She has experienced humiliation in the form of identity refutation and this leaning should be removed and egalitarian personalities should be recognized to live a humanistic life grounded on equality. Psychic and psychoanalytical traumatic thoughts convey the life of the author in the travelogue. Ability in the inner self of a human being is keenly brought out through the impression of personality. Aristotle's concept of catharsis mulls over the emotion of Noo Saro-Wiwa's life. Sensitivity of feeling about the concept of 'pity and fear' was evoked through her life. Traumas confronted in her life is clarified through the psychic understanding. The paper also brings out the mental and emotional difficulties in the life of Noo Saro-Wiwa, which is explicated in the travelogue through the theoretical ideas of trauma or personality.

The research conveys Saro-Wiwa's search for "Transwonderland" – a mythical place of enchantment and transformation – becomes a metaphor for her quest for meaning, connection, and reconciliation with a country that both captivates and confounds her. Through her vivid storytelling and evocative prose, Saro-Wiwa invites readers to embark on a soul-stirring odyssey of self-discovery and self-acceptance, as she confronts the ghosts of the past and the uncertainties of the future with courage, compassion, and grace. *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria* offers a compelling exploration of the theme of "Agonizing Travel Suaveness," as Noo Saro-Wiwa navigates the complexities of travel, identity, and belonging in her native land. Through her poignant reflections, vivid descriptions, and candid revelations, Saro-Wiwa invites readers to grapple with the dualities of beauty and hardship, nostalgia and disillusionment, privilege and struggle that define the traveler's journey through Nigeria and beyond. Her narrative serves as a testament to the power of storytelling to bridge divides, foster understanding, and inspire empathy, as human being embarks on the own quests for connection and transformation in an ever-changing world.

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