Research Paper Literature

Journey to Homeland: A Reading of Noo Saro-Wiwa's Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Noo Saro- Wiwa's Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria is a travel memoir. Her travel to Nigeria amends her perception of Nigeria. It helps her to overcome the psychological trauma she has undergone. The present paper analyses Saro- Wiwa's different perspectives in the travelogue like the colonial illusions which she has after her father's death, her fears and disappointments about her own native place and her travel experiences to every region of the country to find out the thread which holds them all together.

KEYWORDS Nigeria, colonial illusions, perception

African literature has a long literary tradition. It consists of a body of work written by African writers in different languages and various genres ranging from oral literature to written literature. After the world war, Africans began demanding their independence and more African writings are published. The themes encompass the clash between indigenous and colonial cultures, condemnation of European subjugation, pride in the African past, and hope for the continent's independent future. Much of contemporary African literature reveals disillusionment and dissent with current events.

Noo Saro- Wiwa was born in Nigeria in 1976 and raised in England. Her first book *Looking for Transwonderland*: *Travels in Nigeria* (2012) is a travel memoir. Her father Ken Saro-Wiwa, an environmental activist is murdered by a dictator in Nigeria. Being a Nigerian she doesn't has any correlation with her native soil after her father's death. She has an aversion towards her mother country. She stayed away from her homeland for ten years. Later when she returns to her native soil, she rediscovers and comes in terms with Nigeria. In the travelogue she narrates her perspectives on Nigeria as an outsider and an insider. Her travel to Nigeria is not only a physical journey but also a psychological journey. The travel helps her to get rid of the psychological trauma which she has undergone.

Colonial influence makes an indigenous to take critical decisions at crucial stratum. The civil war has thrown up an avalanche of historical and creative works with various perspectives. Saro-Wiwa's father Ken Saro-Wiwa a Nigerian writer, is an outspoken critic of military rule in his country. He is a prominent activist for environmental causes and minority rights. He started a campaign against government corruption and environmental degradation. He is arrested and imprisoned and finally hanged for being an activist. Saro-Wiwa's connection with her motherland severed off after her father's death.

Saro-Wiwa's passion for travelling makes her to visit many places and write travel guidebooks. After visiting so many places she feels that she has to visit her motherland. She visits different parts of Nigeria. She views Lagos as a congested place with aggressive driving, heavy traffic, edginess, fortified robberies and swarming sewage. She is warned that she may anticipate danger at any moment in Lagos. But the road sign "WELCOME TO LAGOS"(9), gives her a message of warmth and optimism.

The slave port at Badagry exposes the consequence of slavery. Saro-Wiwa along with Mabel visit the port of the Yoruba people's Oyo Empire. From the early sixteenth century it became a place for shipping slaves. More than half a million people are captured from other parts of Nigeria, Benin, and Togo and they are sent across the Atlantic to America. The museum is owned by the local Chief Mobee, descended from the long line of chiefs who have presided over the slave trade since Badagry's origin in 1502. Shegu Mobee, the chief's grandson shows a set of chains worn by insolent slaves. The slaves are led to a beach known as the Point of No Return, where they are ready to be shipped abroad. The venue of the Black Heritage Festival is the beach. It is launched in 2001 to celebrate Nigerian history. Many African Americans, Brazilians and Nigerians attend the festival. They play music and pray. They dance and celebrate African culture. Saro-Wiwa is not able to understand the concept of people gathering on a beach to remember slavery.

Corruption in Nigeria is a continuation of traditional system of patronage. She says that in Nigeria corruption and nepotism are dominant. The policemen do not take action without bribes and licenses are not granted until the bribe is given. Politicians corrupt the common people and use their money to maintain patronage and influence in Nigeria. Saro-Wiwa portrays the luxurious life lead by the politicians. She comes to know that people who sell generators bribe the NEPA workers to sabotage the electricity grid inorder to boost demand for home power supplies. Politicians live very comfortably without bothering about the poor conditions of Nigeria. They have private helicopters inorder to avoid dangerous roads. On seeing the corrupt nature of the politicians, the author raises many questions:

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)

Colonial fantasy makes Saro-Wiwa to detest the periodic family trips back to Nigeria. To her, West African country lacks familiar comforts. By some guesstimate she finds out Nigeria have more than 400 ethnic groups. Historically the country's politics have been dominated by a competition between Hausa and Fulani Muslims concentrated in the north, the Yoruba in the southwest and the Igbo in the southeast. Saro-Wiwa has traveled to nearly every region of the country, seeking to understand what holds them all together.

Her reminiscences of her childhood experiences at her homeland create embarrassment and cultural dislocation. She calls her motherland as unglamorous and godforsaken land. During her childhood days, she hates spending her holidays in Nigeria. Her parents have great love towards their homeland. As Indigenous they feel that they are nothing without their

country. Saro-Wiwa's mother refers to her homeland Nigeria as 'home' and her surrey residence as 'house'. Her father carpeted his hallway in green to match the colour of the national flag.

Poverty plays a vital role in vandalizing the people. Ogene defines poverty as a "state of being poor, lacking the basic necessities of life and suffering from inferiority as a result of this condition" (web). To get money some of the poor Nigerians smash holes in the pipes in order to steal fuel. They do not have money to purchase fuel. Often accidents occur due to carelessly lit cigarettes or paraffin lamps. Sam's friend Ade is a very poor man. Ade steels oil because he needs money to pay for the naming ceremony of his child. He dies in a very pitiable condition.

The Nollywood film director Teco Benson tries to reform the Nigerians through his films. He opines that the people are ignorant about the corrupt nature of the politicians. He says that he can expose the truth to the people through his films. The Nigerians love Nollywood films however bad the film is. Most of the Nollywood films portray the culture of Nigeria. As insiders Nigerians love to watch a film reflecting their own culture.

Saro-Wiwa's visit to Ibadan city, where her father attended university reminds her father. Her father worshipped the concept education. Ken Saro-Wiwa feels that giving his children a good education is the pinnacle of his achievements as a parent. Noo Saro-Wiwa visits the university and meets many people. People at the university share their knowledge about their country. Faith Odele, the president of the student association points out the positives and negatives of the university. He says, "The curriculum needs to be more relevant to society" (89). She compares the past and the present condition of the university. She says that the lecturers are more dedicated in the past but at present they are not much dedicated. Students at the university have also changed. They do not do anything with interest instead they do everything for namesake. Faith says that sometimes the lecturers stifle creativity and they don't allow the students to think on their own. Lecturers fix lectures according to their own personal schedules. She shows the English department library and complaints that the recent books are not found in the library. Even the prescribed books are not available in the library. She also complains that the department's computer is allowed to use only by the lecturers. Lecturers are allowed to use the computer twenty-four hours a day but students are not allowed to use it. The students at the university suffer a lot due to their financial difficulties. They raise money by making beads, baking cakes, selling mobile phone recharge cards, typing and photocopying for colleagues, etc.

After pointing out the negatives, she points out the positives of the university. She says that she has learnt to write poems only after attending the university and it helped her to throw away her diffidence. After graduation, she desired to become a professional poet, and to write essays and dramas for the people. But the people are not interested to read the books written by Nigerian authors. She feels that she can't be a successful writer as she is a Nigerian. Only diasporic writers can be successful.

Michael, a Nigerian settled in Italy reveals the mindset of both Nigerians and the Europeans. He perceives Nigerians as, "louder, brasher, more noticeable than other Africans, who seem mild and timid in comparison" (104). Nigerians are not scared of anyone and they are trying their level best to succeed in all possible ways. Michael has an aversion towards the west. He rages with anger. He tells 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 optimistic. He has a hope that one day he will be able to return and build a house in his homeland Nigeria.

The concluding part of the travelogue is very poignant. She visits her family's village Bane. Reaching Bane she is reminded of her family. She sees her father's bungalow. Her grandfather's compound is filled with many graves. It is their tradition to bury the dead next to their homes. The author recollects how her father's skeleton is assembled and buried in a very poignant manner. Saro-Wiwa feels sorry for her father. After visiting her homeland she says that it is not a joyful homecoming but the dislike for her homeland has diminished. She has started to love her heritage, the dances, the masks, the music, the baobab trees and the drill monkeys. Travelling to her homeland has helped her to cure her emotional fear of the country. She says, "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 meditates on the artificial temperament of the nation, which like so many other African nations can seem a whimsical concoction of colonialism.

Works Cited

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