CONTESTATIONS OF NATIONHOOD AND BELONGING IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN WOMEN TRAVEL WRITING

CUESTIONAMIENTOS SOBRE NACIONALIDAD Y PERTENENCIA EN LA NARRATIVA DE VIAJES CONTEMPORÁNEA DE MUJERES AFRICANAS

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Abstract

Contemporary African travel writing produces interesting possibilities redefining the directions of the genre. One of these promises manifests in how the crisis of nationhood and belonging impacts subjects' navigation of sites of travel. African travel narratives by women foreground fractured intimacies encumbering journeys, especially when subjects travel «home». Such texts extensively grapple with the complexities of negotiating the personal and the collective in a bid to unravel belonging.This article examines two travelogues by African women: Leah Chishugi's *A Long Way from Paradise: Surviving the Rwandan Genocide* and Noo Saro-Wiwa's *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria* as explorations of how reading precarities of nationhood through embodied travel re-imagines private journeys as a means to tease out public anxieties of nationhood and belonging. In the process of narrating precarious journeys, African women complicate the travelogue into a political statement of belonging and its paradoxes.

Keywords: Un/belonging; Nationhood; African travel writing; Contact zone.

Resumen

La narrativa de viajes africana contemporánea revela posibilidades interesantes que
redefinen la dirección que está tomando el género. Una de estas atractivas promesas
es la forma en la que la crisis de nacionalidad afecta a los sujetos, especialmente
cuando se manifiesta en cómo los individuos negocian los lugares de viaje. En la
narrativa de viajes contemporánea escrita por mujeres africanas, las complejidades
de la (no)pertenencia se ven realzadas por las especificidades que trastocan los viajes
narrados. Esto se debe a los diferentes niveles a los que las autoras negocian lo pri-
vado y lo público en lugares de viajes. Este artículo examina dos crónicas de viajes
escritas por mujeres africanas: *A Long Way from Paradise* de Leah Chishugi y *Looking
for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria* de Noo Saro-Wiwa. Abordo estos textos como
exploraciones de las formas de leer cuestiones de nacionalidad precaria a través del
viaje del propio cuerpo y que al mismo tiempo re-imaginan la manera de usar los
viajes privados para exponer ansiedades públicas sobre nacionalidad y pertenencia.
Sugiero que, en las crisis postcoloniales nacionales, los sujetos no solo están expuestos
a una híper-visibilidad y vigilancia que impacta de forma variada las posibilidades
de movilidad a su alcance, sino que también revelan una vulnerabilidad que traspasa
lo privado a las políticas públicas de pertenencia. En este artículo demuestro que las
viajeras, en el proceso de narrar viajes precarios, complican la crónica de viajes, que
se vuelve una declaración política sobre el concepto de pertenencia y sus paradojas.

Palabras clave: (no)pertenencia; nacionalismo; narrativa de viajes africana; zona de
contacto.

1. INTRODUCTION

The last decade of the 20th century saw a rise in critical attention to travel writ-
ing. What marks a turning point for this decade are the innovative approaches
to critical work. A number of these critical works explore travel writing's
colonial and imperial background, a fact which is often linked to patriarchy.
Critics like McClintock or Pratt suggest that the patriarchal undertones in the
genre propagate colonial discourse and in the process silence travel writing by
women and colonial «others». Part of this colonising rhetoric stems from the
reported domesticity of both colonial «others» and women, an assumption
which has led to the consolidation of the longstanding view of both groups
as non-travellers (McClintock 36). Postcolonial trends in travel writing and
criticism serve to, borrowing from Ngugi wa Thiong'o, «move the centre» by
foregrounding this periphery. Holland and Huggan refer to this kind of writing

as counter-travel and insist that it transgresses the Eurocentric confines of the genre (22). This article considers travel writing by women and colonial «others» as counter-travel writing because they push back against the colonial and patriarchal undertones in the genre. In the process, they initiate new ways of thinking about travel and travel writing.

When key proponents of counter-travel writing such as Pratt or Holland and Huggan explicate this form in Africa, they rarely talk of African women travel writing. African women have always travelled and written about their journeys. Granted, the vast majority of critical work on women's travel writing in Africa, has focused on European women travel writing (Moffat 9). For instance, Colbert's bibliographic reflection on British women travelling in the 18th century which makes note of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's letters that record her journeys in Africa and Asia. Colbert notes that the genre's intermingling of the public and the private spheres «sanctioned women's participation» albeit reluctantly due to the masculine nature of the form and the publishing industry (156). In negotiating such complex barriers, women stretched the limits of the genre by challenging accepted forms of self-representation (Colbert 164). European women travel-writers' journeys into the colonies in the 18th and 19th centuries enabled an entry into both the genre and discussions about gender boundaries (Loth 108-109, 117). However, European women travellers found themselves in a paradoxical position. While travel enabled European women to contest boundaries of gender and genre within the colonial context, it also positioned them as colonisers in the eyes of the colonised.

A case in point is Mary Kingsley's solo journeys, *Travels in West Africa,* which reproduce stereotypes about Africans positioning her narrative as widening the superiority/inferiority binary common in imperial travel writing. While she claims to advocate for a more humane view of the «other», the discourses of imperialism that she is trying to detangle herself from are nonetheless still ingrained in her writing. This is the contradiction the European female traveller to Africa finds herself in. To fully understand the significance of female travel writing in Africa, it is thus not right to take European female travelling in Africa as representative of the form in the continent. As demonstrated by the critics above and others, such texts reveal insights into

the complexities of travelling as female, nonetheless, they cannot account for the reality of travelling as African and woman in Africa.

Most of the journeys undertaken by African women remain unrecorded or are silenced in records[1]. In fact, most of these travels are functional and form part of the everyday realities of life. With this in mind, I agree with Ní Loingsigh that «few critical projects have considered the important contribution of Africans themselves to the development of the genre» (2). There is an urgent need to re-conceptualise what qualifies as travel in order to recover a lot of African travel and travel writing. A lot of oral narratives within the continent (for example, epics) are framed with a journey motif but in analyses of travel writing they are left out. Such epics include *Fumo Liyongo* among the Swahili, *The Epic of Sundjata* among the Mali, and *Shaka Zulu* among the Zulu, all of which follow a structure similar to the imperial form where travel is considered a masculine endeavour as well as a dangerous undertaking. Tales of migration and historiographies of communities orally passed down from generation to generation by griots also map experiences of mobility within communities in the continent. These and other forms of narratives of mobility need to be recovered and explored as travel writing, thus opening up nodes that are otherwise closed to anyone intending to study travel writing in Africa and its forms.

Records of early travel writing by African women are wide and varied. Examples of such travellers and travel narratives include Princess Salme Bint Said Ibn Sultan al-Bu Saidi of Zanzibar who wrote her accounts of journeys and life outside Africa. Noni Jabavu's *Drawn in Colour: African Contrasts* is another example where a comparative account of her journeys both in South Africa and Uganda is given. Damilola Ajenifuja's *They Will Eat Me in Calabar* captures her experiences in Nigeria's National Youth Service Corps when she is sent to far parts of Nigeria leading her to question her understanding of nationalism. These texts by African women envisage travel as a means of

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1. In ethnographic writing, natives that travelled alongside the European ethnographers such as informants and porters were considered service providers and not necessarily travellers. This misrepresents the reality of travel in the continent (Clifford 19). Pratt also makes note of the irony in how early European travellers to Africa solicited the services and guidance of natives and proceeded to 'discover' what the natives already knew (198).

writing the self and the nation in a manner that centres the gendered subject (Jones 182). They focus on dynamics of gender in the space of travel but still explore complexities in issues of ethnicity, nationalism, and class.

Contemporary travel writing by African women deals with similar issues but with a more urgent, aggressive tone, and disregard for the conventions of the genre. Examples from this phase of travel writing include Veronique Tadjo's *The Shadow of Imana: Travels through Rwanda*, Zukiswa Wanner's *Hardly Walking*, Alba Kunadu Sumprim's *A Place of Beautiful Nonsense*, and Maskarme Haile's *Abyssinian Nomad: An African Woman's Journey of Love, Loss, and Adventure from Cape to Cairo*. These robust interventions aggressively push for a visibility of the poetics and concerns of African women in travel writing. Most of these works are experimental and transgressive. Contemporary African travel writing by women demonstrates the capacity of travel writing to be a «site of discursive contention» (Khair 10). These narratives experiment with the limits of private and public in relation to the politics of belonging and more. This rich blossoming of the genre has ensured a resurgence in scholarly interest that explores the discursive possibilities of the genre in Africa. It is within this background that I explore Leah Chishugi's *A Long Way from Paradise* and Noo SaroWiwa's *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria* as «postcolonial recuperative project(s)»; projects that consider gender dynamics as well as nationalism as key variables in the way women mediate un/belonging (Ní Loingsigh 1).

I consider travel an «arena of agency» where journeys enable women to test the limits of conventional forms of belonging and becoming (Smith x). I find Smith's conceptualisation of agency useful in teasing out the nodes of un/belonging of women in spaces and how they counter such limitations. This article traces characters that in Smith's terms are displaced from spaces they consider home and prioritise «gendered citizenship, diaspora, and the (de)colonization of subjectivity» (xv). For this category of people, agency is embodied. I examine embodied agency in relation to how women negotiate un/belonging and dis/claim nationhood. To explore this angle, I approach the texts through Butler's idea of embodiment and the ways in which gendered subjects in motion are at once navigating cultural limitations signalled by their bodies but also transgressing the limitations, thereby initiating a dissonance that is central to the acquisition of agency.

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin contend that postcolonial literatures are concerned with the connection between displacement and place, a link that emerges because of the postcolonial crises of the nation. The texts selected explore instances of dislocation that arise from narrow definitions of belonging framing the contemporary crises of nationhood in many former colonised nations. In the texts under analysis, crises triggered by war, political instability, and economic exploitation are central to how characters navigate, are displaced from spaces they initially considered home, and define a sense of self. Chishugi's text explores journeys within Rwanda during the civil war of the late 1950's and the 1994 genocide. At the centre of these upheavals are contested notions of belonging and citizenship in Rwanda. Saro-Wiwa's text on the other hand, indirectly engages with the after-effects of the Biafra war of the 1960's where South Eastern Nigeria pushed for secession and the successive coups in the 1960's to 1990's. At the centre of Nigeria's political upheavals is conflict over the control of the oil reserves in the country.

2. SURVEILLANCE AND HYPER[IN]VISIBILITY IN LEAH CHISHUGI'S *A LONG WAY FROM PARADISE: SURVIVING THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE*

A Long Way from Paradise: Surviving the Rwandan Genocide (2011) has largely been read as a narrative of war. Reading it from a travel perspective foregrounds a key sub-genre of African travel writing: enforced travel. The nature of instability within this form of travel reveals complex nuances in how mobility is either enabled or restricted. Forceful dislocation often puts subjects in a vulnerable position where the degrees to which they are allowed access is taken out of their hands. I argue that reading a memoir of war through the lens of travel can offer original insights about memory, place politics, and its affects hence illuminating realities about the connection between mobility and belonging.

This narrative offers an autobiographical account of Leah Chishugi's escape from Rwanda during the genocide in 1994. The narrator is at a friend's café next to the airport when the shooting of President Juvenal Habyarimana's plane happens, which escalates already existing historical tensions between Hutus and Tutsis into full blown war. The ripple effect of the shooting is that the *Interahamwe* and many other Hutus embark on a countrywide

manslaughter of Tutsis and moderate Hutus[2]. Chishugi, her six-month-old baby, her son's carer, and other Tutsis who were in the café are helped to temporary safety by a friend who is part of the UN peacekeeping mission. They are moved to Chez Lando and later to the Hotel Mille Collines. The subsequent powerlessness of the UN peacekeepers forces Chishugi and her two charges to escape to eastern Congo. The journey is marred by many stops where they face the vicious violence of the *Interahamwe*. The narrator continuously grapples with paranoia and suspicion forcing her to travel further to a number of African countries before finally settling in the UK where she acquires permanent asylum.

This narrative explores the ideologies of racial purity at play in the history of Rwanda culminating in the genocide. These ideologies frame un/belonging in bodily terms. Mamdani observes that in the pre-colonial period, the Tutsi were considered non-indigenous while the Hutu, who make up the majority in Rwanda, were perceived as indigenous (70). Mamdani draws this distinction from various myths of origin among the Rwandans. He suggests that the colonisers exploited these differences to gain control of Rwanda, in the process cementing the rhetoric of the Hutu and Tutsi as subject races and not ethnicities (Mamdani 71). While this differentiation was largely framed in terms of the economic activities of the groups, a number of scholars have noted distinctive physical differences which explain the hypervisibility of Tutsi bodies and discriminate violence against them during the genocide. Jean Hiernaux, a physical anthropologist, notes that Tutsis have a «general elongation of physical features: long and narrow heads, faces, and noses, narrow thorax and shoulders relative to the stature» (qtd. in Mamdani 42). Gerard Prunier also locates the difference in the physique when he observes that Tutsis have a Cushitic origin unlike the Hutu who he claims to be Bantus (qtd. in Mamdani 176). These anthropologists affirm the controversial view that differences between Hutu and Tutsi are embodied.

After independence, these discourses of difference and propaganda emanating from them cast the Tutsi as alien fuelling the civil war in 1950s. The narrator notes that the civil war forced her family to relocate to Congo

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2. The *Interahamwe* was the militia arm made up of extremist Hutus largely responsible for the mass murder during the genocide.

(23-24). Such propaganda became widespread within public discourse after the civil war, both in Rwanda and Eastern Congo. The narrative hints at the role the media played in the circulation of the myths weaponizing Tutsi bodies through the figure of a radio presenter, Cantono, who repeatedly stirs hatred for Tutsis (Chishugi 58). The narrator's first personal encounter with the discourse of Tutsi alienness emerges in a school environment. The school children are indoctrinated into an awareness of the distinctive features separating Tutsis from the rest and use this to taunt her and her sister. The narrator is conscious of this distinction as she observes: «[t]he main difference between us was in appearance. Tutsis were generally taller and lighter-skinned than Hutus, with longer, thinner necks and noses» (Chishugi 14). This profiling makes the subject self-conscious of her body before and during the genocide. The body has been transformed into a weapon of differentiation.

Butler argues that the body is always figured through a cultural inscription external to it (*Gender Trouble* 129). Butler's iteration captures how the labelling of bodies in Rwanda was done to define inclusion and exclusion. Butler notes that such signification is political as it defines measures of surveillance and control (*Gender Trouble* 133). The marking of physical features initiates a deeper form of control. The genocide mapped some people as Rwandan and others as outsiders. This marking is a result of cumulative and constant redefinition of boundaries. The narrator notes that the term «*inyenzi*» (cockroaches) is extended to refer to the Tutsis excluding them from the category of human and Rwandan. In equating the Tutsi to *inyenzi*, they are marked as repulsive hence headed for expulsion. The narrator explains the place of this term in the Rwandan cultural discourses of purity. She argues that in Rwanda, home cleanliness is central to the way communities are forged. She cites cases of cockroach infestation that force the occupants of a house to call for fumigation teams who exterminate the pests. When the *Interahamwe* speak of Tutsis as cockroaches, they are buying into the dominant discourse of purity in Rwanda that demands extermination of the impure. In the mind of the *Interahamwe*, Tutsis were not like cockroaches, they had become cockroaches. Bodily features are used by the *Interahamwe* to identify, mark, exclude and exterminate Tutsis. This echoes Butler's argument that «terms that confer 'humanness' on some individuals are those that deprive certain other individuals of the possibility of achieving that status» (*Undoing Gender* 2). What

Butler affirms here is the reality that bodies act as metaphors for signification whereby certain features or the lack of are used to define acceptance or rejection.

Having demonstrated the hypervisible nature of the Tutsi body I wish to explore how the gendered subject negotiates movement in volatile spaces of travel. Hypervisibility mapped on bodies demands extensive masking strategies for the travelling subject to gain access to spaces of travel. Chishugi's navigation of Rwanda is doubly complicated by her being Tutsi, and her being a woman, both being features that mark her as outsider. Both of these traits are visible in her body hence darkness serves as the most obvious and readily available form of camouflage. The narrator points out several times that they needed the veil of darkness to try and escape the *Interahamwe* who were everywhere. It is in the enveloping darkness that the narrator's friend in the UN transports them all the way to the Mille Collines. Her journeys across Rwanda take place under the veil of darkness. Darkness is also useful when the narrator is in Mozambique and needs to cross the border to South Africa. Since she does not have proper travel documents, she is smuggled across the border at a time where her invisibility is guaranteed. The smugglers insist that midnight is the hour of crossing (Chushugi 192). If we are to follow Butler's assertion, visibility of the body is imperative for the production and projection of «fantasies feared and desired» (*Gender Trouble* 134-136). Invisibility on the other hand confers a dissolution of the site of projection. It is ironical that in moments of vulnerability, darkness becomes the site of solace and protection. This is a shift from the conventional ways in which darkness has been approached in travel writing. In many instances, darkness has been used to indicate unknowingness or precarity.

Throughout Rwanda the narrator survives and accesses mobility by disrupting and manipulating the conventional cultural performance of race and gender. Following Butler, Noland argues that when bodies disrupt given marks of identity, they create a dissonance (194, 196). This dissonance, as Noland notes, is what is agential. In the same way Butler talks of gender as a performance, it is clear that in this text, race (if we conceptualise Hutu and Tutsis in line with Mamdani's conception) is also a performance pegged on physicality. Through performances that camouflage her «Tutsiness» the narrator participates in subversive acts that create room for possibilities of

movement. The rejection of her position as insider, which is snatched from her by the politics of war, is a sign of her embracing the position «other», the accepted «other» as a site of agency. One strategy of embracing «other» is that of camouflaging her body. The narrator posits:

> A lady in Mille Collines gave us a traditional Senegalese dress called *boubou*. Rwandise women don't wear this kind of outfit so we hoped we would look foreign. Donata and I were both wearing jeans and T-shirts that showed off our tall slim bodies. Tutsi women have very different bodies from Hutus–generally we are long and slender, while Hutus are shorter and broader. We gratefully put on the Senegalese robes to conceal our shapes and our true identity. (Chishugi 71)

The narrator is consciously aware of the way her body is a risk in the volatile space of the genocide. Since she has been marked female and Tutsi by virtue of her physical features, she plays on the obvious elements of this physicality to recreate the image of an accepted outsider and negotiate mobility. By wearing the *boubou*, she initiates what in Butler's terms is an «etc.», something extra at the centre of which there is dissonance and agency in performance. The *boubou* enables the narrator to forego her filiation to Rwanda and forge an affiliation with Senegal. It masks her «Tutsiness» and produces nodes of agency in her performing «Senegalness», a marked and accepted foreignness which is quite useful in this moment of enforced and surveilled mobility. The narrator completes the transformation by speaking French with an Arabic accent.

This performance marks off two significant elements of insider/outsider relations. In the space of cultural extermination, to be Tutsi is to be a Rwandan without claim to the inside identity; it means to be the rejected Rwandan who is a danger to the survival of the accepted Rwandans who proclaim ownership of the nation. Thus, while to be Tutsi is to be part of the Rwandan nation, it points to a non-belonging insider. This positions the Tutsis as «ethnic strangers» through political violence (Mamdani 33). Wearing the Senegalese *boubou* and speaking Arabic-accented French demonstrates the subject's adoption of non-belonging as a viable subject-position. It also establishes the inventiveness of subjects rejected to identify alternative modes of belonging. Foreignness affords the narrator and her charges unpoliced access to mobility, which they urgently need to escape the genocide. Chishugi's rejection of the

Kinyarwanda language, Rwandan nationalism, and belonging are strategic means of acquiring freedom within the site of precarious travelling. What stands out in this instance is the confirmation that «reexperience offers the possibility that through repetition, through reenactment, the subject may experience her own moving body as an embodied sign» (Noland 191). Such an awareness in the moving body forces it to produce its own imprints. The woman whose body is marked as impure negotiates survival by negating the politically charged signifiers of self-hood and redefining the self.

The prevalence of checkpoints in sites of travel maps access and restriction. Checkpoints in conventional forms of travel are seen in the form of border control at entry/exit points where movement is regulated and managed. In enforced travel, such conventional checkpoints become redundant and others more stringent and volatile emerge. Throughout the narrative, Chishugi makes note of the many instances where at checkpoints (roadblocks), bodies of Tutsis and moderate Hutus would be lying in the open. This display of violence signals the intention of the checkpoints to act as centres for open extermination of Tutsis. Checkpoints acted as physical marks of surveillance and violence. To overcome this policing, the narrator disrupts her Tutsi status by performing the acceptable alien status. At one checkpoint, the narrator claims relation to a Burundian Hutu professor married to a French Malian woman. She gets through the checkpoint with ease due to her performed foreignness. At other checkpoints, she is forced to pretend not to understand Kinyarwanda at all. These performances by the narrator destabilise the contact zone making it a fluid and flexible site where dominance and vulnerability are not given but negotiated. The narrator capitalises on her vulnerability and inventiveness to override the *Interahamwe*'s power. Vulnerability then becomes a position of strength that one can harness to overcome the status quo in the contact zone.

In South Africa, the reality of the just ended apartheid forces her to face other forms of racial discrimination and exclusion. While in Rwanda, it was her physique causing her trouble, in South Africa her skin colour becomes a burden. The discomfort brought about by racism makes the narrator feel the need to run again. She says: «I wasn't going to feel safe anywhere in Africa» and finally books a flight out of South Africa to England where she is given asylum (Chishugi 230). She points out that «it was October 1997. More than

three years had passed since I had fled Rwanda. I had travelled through many countries and hadn't felt ready to put down roots in any of them. Maybe England would put an end to my wanderings for good?» (Chishugi 237). The narrator's journey was in search of a sense of belonging. However, the question mark at her arrival in England suggests continued unbelonging for the dispossessed figure. The repetitive performance of embodied outsiderness has created a sense of alienness in the subject which mar any attempts at belonging.

From this narrative, it is clear that political instability exists within Africa in many forms. Mobility was and continues to be informed by body politics both in the continent and beyond. The cases of xenophobia in South Africa or ethnic violence in many African nations indicate a prevalent sense of embodied exclusion that defines most forms of enforced mobility in the continent. While this may seem to be a postcolonial crisis, mobility has always been marked by otherness and strategies of exclusion. However, what this narrative reveals is the inventiveness of African women in navigating embodied forms of racial, ethnic, gender, and political exclusion. Through ingenious negotiation of bodies, subjects redefine borders of self-definition and travel.

3. ANXIETIES OF FAMILY AND NATION IN NOO SARO-WIWA'S *LOOKING FOR TRANSWONDERLAND: TRAVELS IN NIGERIA*

Noo Saro-Wiwa's travels are situated within the background of her complicated relation with Nigeria. She is the daughter of Ken Saro-Wiwa, an iconic Nigerian author and activist known for his literary masterpieces criticising corruption in the Nigerian dictatorial leadership of the 1980s. Ken Saro-Wiwa championed the rights of the Ogoni people against the autocratic government of Sani Abacha and the environmentally destructive oil extraction practices in Nigeria, which led to his hanging by the Abacha regime in 1995. Saro-Wiwa is haunted by an underlying rocky relationship with her father, his murder, and a negative image of Nigeria drawn from this past.

Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria (2012) traces Saro-Wiwa's return to Nigeria compounded by this complicated history with father and fatherland. This journey affords Saro-Wiwa a chance to come to terms with the complexities of desiring the Nigeria that her father fought for and the

realities of the failures of the nation to live up to this fantasy. This journey acts as a purgation from the trauma she associates with the country. Texts such as this that involve healing, act as «authorial searches for closure» (Gagiano 270). They offer both a personal and a public re-engagement with affective spaces thus initiating the healing process. Gagiano's examination of Saro-Wiwa raises a significant issue: she notes that Saro-Wiwa's book offers «something more complicated than a travel book» in its exploration of the traumas of the family and critique of the nation (270). Building on Gagiano, I approach this text with the view that recovery is part of the potential of the travel book and not outside it. Journeying and recovery are complicated by the nodes of private and public within the travelling subject.

Saro-Wiwa approaches Nigeria as a tourist destination as well as homeland. This is affirmed when she remarks «I needed to travel freely around the country, as part-returnee and part-tourist with the innocence of the outsider, untarnished by personal associations» (Saro-Wiwa 21). Saro-Wiwa's present journey is complicated by hauntings from her past. To divest of this, she locates herself as tourist, a position that she hopes would silence her filial ties and enable an objective exploration of Nigeria. According to Thompson, apologetic framing in women travel writing is a strategy that women employ to veil their intelligence regarding spaces travelled (140). Women provide apologias to dis/claim authority. Saro-Wiwa's tourist subject-position provides a disclaimer regarding her knowledge of Nigeria. This also enables her to be excused from ethical responsibility and thus gain freedom to explore her anxieties and haunting with Nigeria in an honest manner.

Saro-Wiwa approaches Nigeria through anxieties of her past with the nation, and her relationship with her father. These anxieties form what I consider precarity in her travels. They stem from her father's betrayal of her mother by having another family in Nigeria when they were growing up and his obsessive activist work that culminates in his murder by Abacha's regime. The journey to Nigeria can then be read as a mapping of the family and the self; a remapping of belonging with the state, at the core of which is the contestation of oil as a resource. Saro-Wiwa belongs to the class of diaspora that partly identify with an idea of a homeland in Africa but hold no nostalgic memories of the same. In every encounter with Nigeria, she compares the country to her diasporic home and the past she remembers of Nigeria.

Therefore, Nigeria is explored through a lens that is complicated by past traumas and foreign desires. At the beginning of her journey, she indicates that

> Nigeria was an unpolluted juggernaut of pain, and it became the repository
> for all my fears and disappointments; a place where nightmares did come
> true. […] Nigeria sapped my self-esteem; it was the hostile epicentre of a life
> in which we languished at the margins in England, playing second fiddle in
> my father's life. I wanted nothing to do with the country (8).

Nigeria represents her trauma and anger with an absent father while growing up in the UK. At the same time, its affective rubbing is realised through the ties at the personal and collective levels.

The inscription of trauma is very personal for Saro-Wiwa, it is located in the earliest form of marking through naming. Naming is an identity marker. Just like gender is performed through language and discourse, and projected onto the body, for Saro-Wiwa her name extends beyond the body; it is embodied in the personal haunts that tie her name to her traumas. There is no better example of Butler's assertion that «the body is always under siege» in this narrative than in the naming practice which is both cultural and political (*Gender Trouble* 130). Saro-Wiwa indicates that: «[h]aving the name Noo (pronounced 'gnaw') is a heavy cross to bear. Not only is it the same word for 'crude oil' in Khana – the most unpoetic of injustices», it is also mispronounced in most parts of the world (Saro-Wiwa 289). In the Ogoni culture, the father is charged with naming of children. Through this name, Saro-Wiwa is strongly attached to both the nation's major economic activity–drilling of oil – and its political and social repercussions. If we put into perspective the fact that her father's assassination was partly due to championing for environmental consciousness and social corporate responsibility of the oil companies, the complex web of attachment and discontent with Nigeria become clear.

Through these travels, Saro-Wiwa confronts the different twists visible in the country that are tied to her name and her roots. The beginning of her journey at Gatwick Airport in the UK marks the beginning of her negotiation of the ties of Nigeria in herself. The narrator desires for Nigerians to behave in a certain way:

> I wanted to tell *them* not to panic: Nigerians like to shout at the tops of *our*
> voices, whether *we're* telling a joke, praying in church or rocking a baby to
> sleep. I also wanted to tell *them* that *we're* not crazy –decades of political

corruption have made *us* deeply suspicious of authority– but there was no
one to discuss this with, so I had no choice but to sit and watch *our* national
image sink further in the *eyes of the world*. (Saro-Wiwa 1-2, emphasis added)

Her expectation is for Nigerians to represent a particular ideal of modernity
marked by how they are seen by others. The narrator is already taking up the
position of an observer who is doubly complicated. She is estranged from the
Nigeria she observes (by virtue of her tourist identity) and is part of the collec-
tive she refers to (by virtue of her roots). For the narrator, 'the world' stands
for the non-Nigerians, the world that watches Nigerian mannerisms. Gatwick
is the immediate world, however, in the larger scheme of things, it stands for
the Global North. Saro-Wiwa here engages with a longstanding interpretation
of the «other» in the world of ideas and knowledge. She emerges as a subject
affected by the imperial world's understanding of the «other» even when she
tries to detangle herself from this system of knowledge.

The narrator further takes up a collective identity with Nigeria through
the pronoun 'us'. At this point, she locates herself as a native stranger who is
both of and not of the nation. The transitions between 'we' /'us'/ 'them' reveal
a tension in the narrator's un/belonging in Nigeria. While she owns Nigeria
with the collective 'us', she still removes herself from the collective by the
invocation of the distancing 'them'–she is Nigerian but not enough to be
part of what she terms an embarrassing situation. Her distance is enhanced
by how the prologue opens with the narrator being jolted from sleep by this
incident. The mix of 'them' and 'us' complicates boundaries of inside and
outside worlds the subject negotiates. This fits into Thompson's argument
that women travel writing is most often double-voiced (142). Women trav-
ellers straddle a multiplicity of intersectional identities which shape their
experiences of travel. In Saro-Wiwa's case, she negotiates her Nigerianness
(marked by name and roots), foreignness (marked by her position as tourist
seeing Nigeria as destination), rootedness (signalled by her name and its
relationality to the main economic activity of oil drilling) and uprootedness
(signalled by her non-identification with Nigeria). In complicating the 'them'/
'us' positions, Saro-Wiwa allows for the excesses in identity performance to
emerge. As an African female diasporic subject travelling the continent, she
is both native and stranger. She embraces these contradictions of belonging
at the centre of migrant subjects returning «home». She is at home and at

the same time not of home. In the postcolonial context where nationhood is a contested entity as SaroWiwa's is, «being 'in place' leads to an experience of being out-of-place» (Edwards and Graulund 7).

A comparative look at this journey in relation to the earlier journeys where her father made sure they were 'bundled' into Nigeria for the holidays reveals a fracture in the way belonging is imagined by different subjects. In those early journeys, Nigeria was the space where her parents came from – it was 'their' home. It was not the narrator's home as she did not identify with it. She writes: «Come July almost every year, I would pack my bags and prepare to serve my annual sentence in a country where the only 'development' I witnessed was the advance of new wall cracks and cobwebs» (Saro-Wiwa 3). Nigeria was a prison she was forced into. It represented everything her teenage self disliked. Contrary to this view, her parents saw Nigeria differently:

> [M]y parents believed that without their country they were nothing. My mother habitually referred to our Surrey residence as the 'house'. Nigeria was 'home', the place where her parents and siblings lived, where her wilted energies blossomed, and her pale skin toasted to its original brown. At 'home', she sparkled in Nigerian traditional clothing, rather than battling the British winter air in woollen and thick overcoats. At 'home' she was no longer the alienated housewife but the Madam, handing over laundry and shopping lists to the servant while she caught up with old friends. (Saro-Wiwa 5-6)

The narrator tactfully emphasises her parents' Nigeria as an ideal that she has yet to encounter. This exploration of her mother's crisis of belonging reveals how for her, belonging is equated to power and pride. Saro-Wiwa feels alienated from both of these in her current journey.

At the beginning of her journey Saro-Wiwa's foreignness stands out. She describes the language in this space thus:

> Their melodic lingua franca sounded in the streets around me, as foreign to my ears as any language from Cameroon or Ghana. I had arrived in a country I had never lived in, and a city I'd visited only briefly twice before, among a thoroughly foreign-sounding people. It was the most alienating of homecomings. I might as well have arrived in the Congo. (Saro-Wiwa 13)

The estrangement is pronounced when the narrator realises that it is not just the language but everything else about the country that sounds and looks foreign. This entry foregrounds the contradictions of identity and representation.

Following Butler, it is clear that the narrator cannot perform key gestures that define the inside. The narrator's isolation invokes her questioning of the conception of home. The comparison of this space to the Congo is troubling considering the wide usage of the Congo in literary and critical works to signify the exotic and the primitive. In this crisis of belonging, the narrator clings to Nigerias of the mind. The narrator recalls her mother talking of good roads, factories, and good schools as the characteristic of pre-Biafra Nigeria (Saro-Wiwa 15). Could it be that the narrator's mother convoluted reality to cover up for the nostalgia of home? This contradiction between reality and fantasy is a failure of the mind to accept the decrepit state and hence escape into what Rushdie refers to as «imaginary homelands» (10). The narrator's conflation of the great Nigeria in her mother's words and her actual encounters with Nigeria in this journey points to a crisis of returning[3]. Moreover, locating her restlessness regarding belonging in the mother allows Saro-Wiwa to defer reality and delay un/belonging.

The narrator's travels around Lagos and Abuja reveal contradictions of how the oil economy has both enriched and impoverished citizens. For instance, in Victoria Island in Lagos, images of affluence make visible the oil money and its effects on infrastructure. On the other hand, in Tarkwa Bay, she comes face to face with the violence of the oil economy on everyday lives of Nigerians. Her guide informs her of how his friend died due to an explosion arising from illegal siphoning of oil by the poor. Oil as signified in her name is embodied in the lives of those she interacts with leading to a consistent repetition of haunting on the narrator. Abuja fully represents the cleansing of oil money through government projects. The greatest project is the planning and building of the city. The description Saro-Wiwa offers of the city suggests a strict architectural design that gives a façade of progress. The narrator notes that «after *siphoning* Nigeria's assets, politicians and other thieves bring the loot to Abuja where they've created a panorama of semi-laundered splendour– a world-class stadium, the manicured Millennium Park, … and millionaire mansions with giant model aeroplanes playfully attached to their rooftops» (Saro-Wiwa 112, emphasis added). The use of verbal terms that allude to

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3. Salman Rushdie explains that for Diasporic subjects returning is impossible and any time they attempt to they encounter a different space altogether.

oil is Saro-Wiwa's subtle way of linking the problem of corruption to the oil menace as well as to her embodied self through her name.

Her travels finally lead her to where it all began–her home city of Port Harcourt. This is the most troubled space for the narrator as it is the city at the centre of her claims of un/belonging in Nigeria. It is also the site where her embodied sense of travelling becomes profoundly visible. Her genealogical journeys in the physical sense serve as a quest for attachment. This desire is manifested in the way she approaches Port Harcourt. One node of rooting is the home. Saro-Wiwa, in both Port Harcourt and Bane, her father's village, surveys the family homes as a way of connecting with her roots. She is positioned as having a desire to reclaim a connection with Nigeria through her roots. She finds an intimacy with her father through her tour of his office in their Port Harcourt home where she notices that they have similar tastes in books. Even with this sense of connection, she still observes that «[t]he emptiness of the house accentuated that sense of family depletion» (Saro-Wiwa 273). The Bane home on the other hand is a deserted house whose only sense of presence is the haunting produced by the abundant memories of her father in the house and the graves surrounding it. These representations of home confirm that «homes are not neutral places» (George 6). Homes, just like nation-states, are structured around selective inclusions and exclusions. Saro-Wiwa is included because of her kinship ties to these two homes, however, she is alienated by virtue of the fractures within these kinship ties.

These distinctive derivations of home are metaphors of the subject's relation and belonging to the nation-state. Saro-Wiwa's idea of home elucidates George's understanding of the link between home and nationalism. Nationalist discourses position home as a «commonality of time and space» which exploits multiple assumptions of belonging through ‹‹a process of genericism … [and] gentrification›› (George 15). True to George's understanding of anti-colonial forms of nationalisms, which Nigeria echoes, Saro-Wiwa reveals complex tensions that mark nationalism and belonging. Both homes foreground Saro-Wiwa's fatherlessness (both at the personal and national levels) and at the same time reveal a public mourning of unbelonging in her fatherland Nigeria. They also foreground the strong filiative connection the narrator tries to deny to the father[land]. The two 'homes' signify both the loss and attachment that she has with Nigeria. Even though this is her

home, she does not feel at home. A similar reality emerged in Chishugi's text when at the end of her journey she notes that Africa is her mother's home but not hers (273). It is necessary to note that for these subjects, this realisation emerges out of the moment of encounters, anxieties, and desires of belonging which journeys of return produce. In turn, this realisation demands a new formulation of home, and, by extension, of belonging and nationhood.

The narrator's dissociation with home is further effected by the landscapes of Port Harcourt and Bane which are marked by a haunted aura emanating from the disruptive effects of the oil economy. The landscape provides a trigger that initiates a dissociation in the mobile body:

> On the highway towards Ndoni, a minibus had packed at the side of the road, its passengers milling about and motioning for us to keep driving. 'Armed robbery,' Sonny explained… Further ahead of the robbed minibus, a police patrol vehicle had packed haphazardly its doors flung open in haste, its body perforated with bullet holes. Three officers were wading frantically into the thick bush, pushing aside tall grasses with one hand and clutching rifles with the other chasing the armed robbers who had fled into the forest. Minutes later, a radio bulletin reported the kidnapping of two foreigners in Port Harcourt. The dangers of life in the Niger Delta suddenly seemed all too tangible and real…Little of this money benefits ordinary people, least of all Niger Delta people, who have fallen victim to government corruption and the carelessness of the oil industry. Countless oil spills and ceaseless flaring of gas poisons the soil and depletes the rivers of their fish stocks. Age-old farming practices have been disrupted, swelling the numbers of frustrated unemployed men. (417-420)

This description of Port Harcourt is populated with words connoting the violence the oil industry has meted on the locals and their environment. The effects of oil economy on the natives are expounded throughout this chapter leading to Saro-Wiwa's confession that «Rivers State felt like a feral place» (280).

Every image reveals the reality of the oil economy's wounding on the landscape which in turn produces a re-wounding on the narrator via her name. The intense visualisation of this wounding forces Saro-Wiwa to seek an escape through disembodiment: «[s]leeping was the only way for me to escape the anxiety» (280). Disembodiment contravenes the usual mien in travel writing. Ideally, subjects are disembodied when they want to assume a position of

power in a travelling I/eye that dominates the observed (Pratt 197-201). For Saro-Wiwa, sleep provides an escape from the overwhelming reality of seeing and the haunting attachments it produces on her. Cohn considers sleep a form of «diminished consciousness» (3). She posits that «to sleep is merely to pause from the hurrying whirl of life; to rest after its toil, and struggles, and agitation; to see no sights of pain and grief» (Cohn 118). While Cohn makes this statement in relation to her analysis of Victorian literature, the same could be applied here. Sleep enables the subject to be suspended from contemplating the overload of affective images that are traumatic to both the person and her need to trace a sense of belonging with Nigeria. Following Cohn, sleep only provides temporary reprieve, it does not erase the problem at hand. Subjects in traumatic situations sometimes need a brief respite before they are forced back to the consciousness of contemplating their circumstances. This brief pause, in Saro-Wiwa's case, enables the narrator to rethink the dynamics of the I/eye and relation to the wounding in travelling.

Discerning what 'home' and belonging mean for Saro-Wiwa is a complicated exercise that forces her to turn to language. Saro-Wiwa demonstrates familiarity with Bane in her claim that this is the only place where her name is pronounced correctly: «[f]inally, I was in the one place on Earth where everyone gets it right straight away» (Saro-Wiwa 289). Language is a powerful tool for figuring belonging. Un/belonging is essentially rooted in linguistic terms; through language and inscription identities are constituted (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 133-134). The irony of the matter is that the same language that defines her inclusion is used to exclude her from Bane. She is insider here because of the spark of recognition evoked by the correct pronunciation of her name. But she is outsider, by virtue of her exclusion from the same tongue. Saro-Wiwa is thus a familiar stranger, a complicated subject who cannot fully own her homeliness to this place and cannot fully unyoke herself from the same place. At the end of the journey, Saro-Wiwa accepts her conflicted connection to Nigeria as part of her identity. She notes that while her travel to Port Harcourt was meant as a search for home, she does not necessarily feel at home there. The same is true for Bane. The new formulations of belonging and nationalism that the subject comes to realise in this journey are uncomfortable but necessary. Uncomfortable belonging is the reality of diasporic subjects returning home. Direct engagements with discomforts in

journeys home force the subject to come to terms with hyphenated belonging. By virtue of hyphenation, this is an uncomfortable, tension filled belonging not rooted in geography or filiation, but emergent from the fractures of both filiations and affiliations.

This realisation is the enlightenment gained by Saro-Wiwa from the journey through a new intimacy with the nation via her father. She observes that «[a]s much as he [her father] loved Bane, his attachment to the place was an emotional one that didn't require physical presence» (Saro-Wiwa 296). What this reflection means for Saro-Wiwa is a rethinking of home/away as terms of travel. Travel writing has most often defined home as where travellers depart from as they begin the journey. For Saro-Wiwa, this is discounted as she does not regard her point of departure as home, at the same time, she has an unstable history with Nigeria. Home is not necessarily defined by her genealogical ties with Nigeria since she finds discomfort in many of its cities. Neither is it grounded in her hostland, the UK. Rather, a vision of home is produced by degrees of familiarity and emotional entanglements, which are not necessarily grounded in geographical spaces. Following Clifford, I read Saro-Wiwa's discomfort with location in the physical as transforming how concepts are thought of in travel writing, more specifically, precarious travels where subjects are complicated by traumatic entanglements with places.

4. CONCLUSION: EMBODIED TRAVEL AND COMPLICATIONS OF UN/BELONGING

Chishugi and Saro-Wiwa offer different forms of precarious nationalism which suggest that in the African context, the postcolonial subject does not have an easy way of belonging to a nation. While this is true, female travellers invent ways of finding agency through their narratives of journeys. Where subjects are positioned as outsiders, they invent ways to acquire 'temporary nationalisms' through filiative and affiliative ties. In Chishugi, the body is the most visible signifier of exclusion. However, to access mobility and temporary forms of belonging, the subject manipulates and masks her physicality through use of darkness, costuming, performed accents and alternative nationalisms. Performed camouflaging enables the body to produce alternative marks that are outside of the culturally and politically produced visibility, making the

subject invisible to the violent gaze of the *Interahamwe* and others, eventually leading to free mobility. In Saro-Wiwa's narrative the name is the most obvious signifier of the dislocation of the body. Saro-Wiwa subverts the trauma and wounding in her name through a careful peeling off of the ties to body, place, and politics and uses these anxious ties to mark belonging in Nigeria. While exclusion is mapped through her traumatic ties with father and fatherland (Nigeria) and narrow understanding of home as geographically grounded, the journey becomes an avenue to produce and accept the new formulations of home and belonging. At the end of the narrative, she comes to see belonging as not rooted in place, but a feeling that emerges out of fractured realities of one's pasts and presents.

This examination reveals that travel narratives by African women explore poignant issues of nationalism and belonging in complex ways which are alive to the crises of postcolonialism that mark most African states. It is clear that when authors reject postcolonial derivations of belonging within colonial constructs of nations they end up advocating for flexible nationalisms which incorporate temporary, uncomfortable, acquired and affiliative forms of belonging.

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