

## Sojourners from Black Britain



The 1990s under the Sani Abacha dictatorship became grim years. Wole Soyinka, realizing that his life was threatened—there would indeed be a number of political murders—escaped by canoe across the river to neighboring Benin. He then spent years in exile, connected to American universities, and in transcontinental diplomatic/oppositional shuttle traffic.

What the times were like in Nigeria can be glimpsed in Chigozie Obioma's well-received first novel *The Fishermen* (2015), about four young Igbo brothers in Akure, in Yorubaland—thus already somewhat diasporic. Early in the book, their father, a bank employee, reads his newspaper and exclaims, "If there is any justice in this world, Abacha should soon be mourned by his witch of a wife." Perhaps somewhat bordering on myth, the tale offers a scenery of civilian-soldier, North-South tensions sometimes turning into violence, fragmented memories of war, expatriate preachers both mobile and resident, a difficult family life (the bank has just transferred the father to its Yola office, far to the northeast of the country, so he would have to become a long-distance commuter), and a local madman. The brothers get into trouble; finally, one of them may or may not make it to Canada, with a family friend who has already moved there.

Ken Saro-Wiwa, author of *Sozaboy* (see chapter 15), remained in Nigeria, and became a victim of the country's history and its geography. He belonged to the Ogoni, a small group of about half a million people in the Niger Delta. When the area was part of the Eastern Region, and then initially of Biafra, the Ogoni were ill-treated by the majority Igbo. When the federal order of Nigeria continued to split into more states, they were in Rivers State. The Ijaw people, dominant in that state, did not do much for the Ogoni either. Worst of all, they were in oil country, and the activities of the Shell Company were devastating for the Ogoni habitat.

But Saro-Wiwa was not a passive victim—rather more a public intellectual-political activist, somewhat in the Wole Soyinka mold. We have seen that his academic career had taken him from Ibadan to Nsukka. Leaving that behind after Biafra's secession, he had become an administrator in a part of the Niger Delta back under Nigerian control. He went on to engage in various enterprises, as well as to write prolifically. Most of his writings were published in Nigeria, including *Sozaboy*. He produced satirical TV shows as well.

There was also, however, a political resistance involvement in the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). This led to a certain internal conflict among the Ogoni, as there were older chiefs who were more accommodationist toward the sitting military regime. A number of these were attacked and killed at a meeting. Saro-Wiwa was not there, but as this was in the time of the Abacha dictatorship, and as Abacha had no doubt found Saro-Wiwa an inconvenient critic, he seized the opportunity to accuse him of planning the murder. And so, in November 1995, Saro-Wiwa was executed by hanging, together with eight other MOSOP leaders.

They were buried in Port Harcourt. Of Abacha's misdeeds, the killing of Saro-Wiwa was probably that which drew most international attention.<sup>1</sup> For one thing, Nigeria was suspended from the Commonwealth for a period. (It does not seem, on the other hand, that the controversial work of the Shell Company in the Niger Delta was much affected.)

As it turns out, Saro-Wiwa's territorial linkages were as complex as the man. Like many Nigerians, he had a strong allegiance to his village of origin, out there in the Delta. His office, however, was in his house in Port Harcourt. And he sent his wife off to London, with his and her children, so that they could go to British schools. Yet these children had to come back to Nigeria during their long holidays so that they could imbibe the atmosphere of the village, even if Saro-Wiwa did not give them so much attention himself. The London-based wife eventually became less enthusiastic about that arrangement, and stopped coming along, partly because it turned out that Saro-Wiwa was now polygamous and also had children with another wife. On one occasion, however, he had taken three of his expatriated children on a long car journey, with a chauffeur, to see more of the mother country: Abuja, Jos, Kano.

By the time of the MOSOP events and their father's execution, the London Saro-Wiwas were utterly turned off as far as the fatherland was concerned. In 2005, however, some of them returned to have his remains reburied in the original home village; it had taken forensic

tests to identify these after the first grave had been located. Several years later, one of them, his daughter Noo Saro-Wiwa, came back for a longer visit. After studying at British and American universities, she had become a journalist, and had been writing tourist guide materials on Africa and other parts of the world—so, finally, back to Nigeria. The result was the travelogue *Looking for Transwonderland* (2012). We might also think of it as creative nonfiction.<sup>2</sup>

Noo Saro-Wiwa's journey through Nigeria this time, stretching over four months, would to an extent retrace the route which, as a twelve-year-old, she had traveled with her father—going north, even to Maiduguri at the other end of the country.

Her portrait of Lagos, not a city of which she had much previous experience, is mostly similar to those offered over time by other observers: Cyprian Ekwensi, Chibundu Onuzo, Nnedi Okorafor, even that Swedish traveler Artur Lundkvist almost two-thirds of a century earlier. Chaotic traffic, dangerous “area boys,” new skyscrapers crumbling, here and there a remaining low Afro-Brazilian building, a National Museum falling dark with a power failure, affluent Victoria Island with sophisticated shopping and cosmopolitan eateries. She could stay with Aunty Janice, an old friend of her mother's. Aunty Janice's husband had been in an early cohort of Nigerian diplomats, and the couple had been posted here and there in Europe. Drawing on that experience, Aunty Janice had established a fashion business in Lagos, and even now, decades later, she felt this was the place to be, eventful all the time: “It's crazy, but I like it.”

Already in the metropolis, it struck Noo that Nigerians were the most fervently religious people she had ever come across. Evidently, Pentecostal brands of Christianity had struck the country particularly from the 1980s on, allowing a sort of escape from the hardships of everyday life. There were clearly American ingredients in this, even as it all blended into Nigerian thought and expression. In her time in Lagos, she heard “hairdressers singing their hallelujahs at salons; evangelical radio stations resounding in Internet cafés; bus passengers collectively breaking out into ovine choruses.” Aunty Janice, who had crossed over into this from Catholicism, noted that this had turned Nigerians into the happiest people in the world, according to the ranking in a World Values Survey she had read.

In Lagos and elsewhere, Noo would do her local travel by *okada* motorcycle taxis or *danfo* minibuses. Renting a car did not appeal to her—she “lacked the curious mixture of patience and bloody-mindedness required to negotiate Nigerian traffic successfully.” Her long-distance travel was by road or air. Seeing a locomotive rattling

along a rail somewhere, she was reminded of a train journey she had once made as a child, with two siblings, as part of her father's "educational sadism." A journey from Port Harcourt to Zaria (which would have passed through Kafanchan) in 1989 had taken half a week, and had really been "a no-no for respectable people of sane mind . . . a sweaty, shit-stained odyssey."

From Lagos she moved on to Ibadan and its surroundings, which turned out in large part to offer disappointments. The university, her father's alma mater, seemed no longer to offer any very satisfying academic experience. The old facilities were there, but severely overcrowded. As working conditions were poor, the university was the victim of an academic brain drain. Reputable scholars were off to the United States, South Africa, and elsewhere. Students found that assigned textbooks were unavailable or too expensive. Fraternities, which had once started out as debating clubs with high-minded social goals, had morphed, apparently from the 1980s Babangida years on, into sinister armed cults with odd rituals and outside connections, through which people in political power could threaten any oppositional elements. (We may remember from chapter 6 that in a story in *The Thing around Your Neck*, Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie describes a similar development on the University of Nigeria campus at Nsukka, although that was perhaps a bit more innocent.) Attractive women students might fly off to Abuja to become weekend consorts of politicians, and return to Ibadan with cash and new material assets. Yet there were still also ambitious students, planning to continue for higher degrees, whether in Nigeria or abroad, or dreaming of becoming writers.

On a Saturday morning, there was what might appear to be an improbable campus event: a dog show. The canine contestants were in large part Rottweilers, pit bull terriers, Alsatians.

The Transwonderland Amusement Park at Ibadan, from which Noo Saro-Wiwa derived the title for her book, she had found described in one of her rather out-of-date guidebooks as the closest thing Nigeria had to a Disney World. That turned out to be not very close. As a child, she had been an amusement park enthusiast. Now she found this one decrepit, with rides mostly standing still. As one attendant persuaded her to try the Ferris wheel, she found she was alone up there, watched by a small crowd from below. She bought tickets for some boys to join her on the Dragon roller coaster ride, and they screamed together as the rusting carriages plunged precariously down the old tracks.

From Ibadan she also made an excursion to Osogbo to see the sacred shrine that, particularly through the efforts of Susanne Wenger (see chapter 6), had become recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Again, Noo found the site in decay, although a number of sculptures still showed Wenger's distinctive style; unkempt and fading, they could fit into the color of the surrounding forest. In old age, Wenger had been disgusted by what was happening to her creation. The authorities had sold off parts of the sacred grove to property developers. At festivals, soft drink sellers proclaimed that gods would bless customers who used their beverage brands to pour libation.

Next on the itinerary was Abuja. The visitor noted that local cars had number plates with the motto "Centre of Unity"—yes, she reflected, the new capital seemed to have united Nigerians in the view that it was the dullest place on earth. Traffic-free highways passed shopping malls and glass-covered buildings gleaming with *passé* futurism. Yet Fulani herdsmen could still move their cattle along the side of the roads.

In Abuja, Noo Saro-Wiwa stayed with her brother. Although he had never used anything but public transportation in London as they grew up, and had been an expert on getting from anywhere to anywhere by bus or Underground, he now sat in the back seat behind his chauffeur—he had become an *oga*, a bigman. It turns out that in a spirit of reconciliation with the civilian government, Ken Saro-Wiwa's son had been offered a job as a senior civil servant, and had accepted it. With him and his circle, then, Noo could discuss corruption and nepotism.

On to Kano, where one senses that there is a cultural distance between Noo and the surrounding Hausa society of the Deep North. There were fewer English-speakers than in the South, and Noo did not dress like local women. She encountered one Black American woman who had already converted to Islam back at home in Miami, and then migrated to Nigeria to marry. This informant argued that Hausa women could actually be more powerful than they might appear. From behind the scenes they could run significant businesses. On the whole, it seems that in Kano, Noo was often in the company of expatriates and descendants of expatriates. She went to see the durbar parade at the end of Ramadan, a quasi-traditional festivity, although actually a colonial-era invention, again with numerous dressed-up expatriates in the audience. And then it seems she was most at ease back in the hotel room, watching her favorite Nollywood series on television.

It appears that Maiduguri was the low point of her journey: a dusty hotel room, unreliable electricity supply, a particularly dispiriting market place, unworkable ATM machines when she needed some more cash. Not much, it seems, that would draw her particular curiosity—but obviously Boko Haram was not around yet. After that, a visit to the mountain kingdom of the Sukur people was a more comforting experience: the Sukur were Hausa-speaking Christians, probably one-

time migrants from Cameroon, and the king was a pleasant, relaxed eighty-seven-year-old, nowadays without much power.

Jos had been Noo's favorite Nigerian city on that childhood journey with her father: an old tin-mining town on a high plateau with a cool climate by Nigerian standards. But it had obviously grown a lot since then. Noo hurried to the local museum, which was unusual in showing the typical housing of Nigerian regions in an open-air setting: Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, Tiv, and Nupe, and a replica of Zaria's Friday Mosque. The whole thing, however, was in need of repair. The silver-haired caretaker said there was a lack of funding. Noo remembered, too, the old museum restaurant, where she had once had the best fried plantain she had ever eaten. Now it was replaced by a Chinese eatery, where she could get sweet-and-sour chicken.

We may remember from chapter 17 that Morayo Da Silva, the aging San Francisco expatriate whom we encountered in Sarah Ladipo Manyika's *Like a Mule Bringing Ice Cream to the Sun*, had spent some of her childhood in Jos. And we have seen in earlier chapters, too—as, for example, in examining Cyprian Ekwensi's Biafra War novel *Divided We Stand*—Jos has drawn its population from near and far in Nigeria.<sup>3</sup> Among the people coming in from nearby on the plateau, a fair number were Birom people, still keeping some distance from the world religions when Tai Solarin visited them fifty years earlier. Now Noo Saro-Wiwa found them in the Christian corner—and thus in an adversary relationship to those Muslim Hausa and Fulani whose numbers in Jos were increasing, leading to violent conflict.

A stop in Bauchi (a city we may remember from Ibrahim Tahir's *The Last Imam*, in chapter 13), not so far from Jos, offered a certain amount of pleasure. There was the tomb of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Nigeria's first prime minister, murdered in the first military coup in 1966. Tafawa Balewa was a notably uncorrupt politician, and his grave was simple. But in the company of a student group, Noo could watch a videocassette tape of Tafawa Balewa's first speech to the newly independent country. On exhibit was also the small Sony TV set he had received as a personal gift from Queen Elizabeth.

It irritated Noo Saro-Wiwa that so many streets and squares in Nigerian cities were named after rather ill-reputed past politicians, including military dictators—Babangida Square, Sani Abacha Road. But when she pointed this out, it seemed that this was not so much a matter of continued reverence. Rather, these sites had been named when the potentates in question were still alive and strong, and after their death they remained there, often run down, as another indication of Nigerian unconcern with the obsolete.

In the early 1960s, John Pepper Clark's new American acquaintances may have assumed that back at home, he may have mingled with wild animals as part of his Nigerian everyday life, and were surprised that he wanted to go to the zoo—see chapter 16. Noo Saro-Wiwa, for her part, wanted to make some wildlife excursions part of her Nigerian experience, but it was not so easy. In the North, she had taken a side trip to the Yankari Game Reserve, but apart from some trivial monkeys, most of the animals just failed to show up. Fortunately, there was a rainforest wildlife reserve in the Southeast where she could meet with both gorillas and chimpanzees. But on the whole, it was clear that Nigeria had not done much to safeguard the habitats of what had once been a more striking fauna. Up in the northeast, not so far from Maiduguri, she was told, there had once been giraffes.

Now, however, Noo Saro-Wiwa could head south. Calabar, in the southeast on the coast, was perhaps her favorite Nigerian city—she might have preferred it, rather than Abuja, as the national capital. For a period, at least, it stood out as a model of good governance. The streets were clean. The museum, in an old colonial-era building, told the story of how the slave trade had transformed the local Efik people “from fishermen and farmers into Anglophile traders.” It was a museum that compared very favorably with the slave trade museum she had already visited in Badagry, west of Lagos. Rather accidentally, too, she was invited to the wedding of a friend of a new local friend whom she had met while standing in admiration of her house. It was a lively affair, with a band playing highlife music, an emcee announcing the arrivals of chiefs and other notables, and the groom and his entourage shuffling in accompanied by drumbeats. And then the food was served, jollof rice and goat meat.

Yet not even Calabar could be all wonderful or all that it claimed to be. It was a bit odd, for one thing, that it served as a comfortable asylum for the Liberian warlord and ex-president Charles Taylor and his family (until he was extradited and sentenced for a variety of war crimes through internationally organized court proceedings). And a shopping mall on the outskirts of the town, once even shown on CNN, turned out to be more or less a mirage.

From here on, Noo Saro-Wiwa did not exactly move on a straight path. Benin, on the other side of the River Niger and a little further on yet, was a must for somebody interested in Nigerian tourism potential, even as it was evidently a place where she had no really close contacts. She offers her readers a short sketch of the historical glory of the Benin Kingdom (not to be confused, of course, with the current Republic of Benin, the country to which Wole Soyinka had to escape by canoe),

and hints at current conflicts at the court of the traditional ruler, the *oba*—conflicts between old-style aristocracy and recent plutocracy.

Later, eastward again along the coast, to Port Harcourt. Here her stay was not so relaxed. This was her old home town, and she could stay in the house where she grew up, as it was still in the family. But she was alone there now, and she could not venture out in the streets by herself, as everybody warned her that the environment was too dangerous. Port Harcourt had become the turf of competing organized crime gangs, with political connections, doing business in kidnappings, blackmail, and stolen oil from the Delta.

Only a little distance away, however, there was Bane, the ancestral village of the Saro-Wiwas, where as a boy her father had started his business career (earning money to continue his schooling) by selling palm wine in the village streets. And it was also where he was now buried. Younger people were leaving the village, migrating to jobs in cities. Yet here was indeed the one place on earth that felt like hers: her genes alone, she felt, granted her an undisputed claim to the land.

Finally, Lagos again, before she would return to London. She enjoyed the comforts of Ikoyi and Victoria Island. She had some slight quarreling, too, with Auntie Janice about what role religion could play in future Nigerian development. The mostly secular Noo argued for strong and honest leaders, and a people coming together to support them, not just through prayer. In her future scenario, the country could also arrive in a postpetroleum era, “growing crops, maintaining extended family networks, worshipping deities.” A small part of her, she confessed, momentarily entertained the idea of moving back to try and help develop Nigerian tourism—but then the next, more durable, thought was that it would most likely turn out to be a quagmire, and she was grateful to her father for insisting on raising children who would be able to choose where to live.

In one way, nonetheless, she was inclined to agree with Auntie Janice. About Lagos, she writes, “I realized that Lagos is in fact one of Nigeria’s greatest success stories. It’s an achievement when 15 million people across 250 ethnic groups can live together relatively harmoniously in an unstructured, dirty metropolis seemingly governed by no one.” A nice place to visit, it seems after all, even if she did not want to live there.

Other observers have had similarly strong, but mixed, feelings: love-hate relationships with the country, variously distributed over experiences and places. Noo Saro-Wiwa’s reporting journey across Nigeria actually had a predecessor some twenty-five years earlier, with a writer whose background was in some ways similar to hers and in other ways different. I met Adewale Maja-Pearce in 1992, at a

UNESCO-related conference held in a small Swedish town of medieval origins, seen as suitable for such events. He was not too happy about the conference organization, and made that clear, but he and I got along well, and I was pleased when soon afterward he sent me two books of his, both then fairly recently published: *In My Father's Country: A Nigerian Journey* (1987) and *How Many Miles to Babylon?* (1990).

Maja-Pearce's family name did not come with the fame of Noo Saro-Wiwa's, but it was certainly rooted in old Lagosian respectability. His paternal grandfather was born in 1878 and, mission-educated, had become a minister in the Methodist Church—also a justice of the peace, a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, and an official Member of the British Empire. But it was his wife, the grandmother, who had been a highly successful trader and who could therefore fund the children's training overseas. Not all of them did so well. One son failed in his studies and eventually became a taxi driver in New York. But the son who became Maja-Pearce's father studied medicine in Britain, and, while a student, he met and married Maja-Pearce's Scottish mother. On qualifying as a surgeon, he took her back to Lagos with their London-born young son Adewale.

That turned out not to be a happy marriage. They lived in Ikoyi, the upscale suburban island, still mostly racially segregated.<sup>4</sup> From his window, the boy Adewale could observe their expatriate neighbors' sedate garden parties, to which his parents were not invited. The parties that his father threw, on the other hand, were noisy, rambunctious affairs with a hired band: "men and women, dressed to kill, drank, shouted and danced all night." Those expatriate neighbors were invited but never showed up.

Having a British wife may have been a sort of trophy for a successful been-to (a term Maja-Pearce does not use in his book), but at the same time it was a union wasted in local Nigerian circles. So Adewale's father spent an increasing amount of time with a new girlfriend and had a child with her. There were quarrels at home, and eventually separation. Mother and son returned to London. Father and grandfather—the surgeon and the Methodist minister—also came into serious conflict, as the latter disapproved of his son's lifestyle, sided rather more with his British daughter-in-law, and was later unhappy about the rumor that in the son's new household, after a remarriage, there were apparently *juju* practices.

By then, however, Adewale had had his early education in primary schools with European teachers and mostly expatriate children, becoming, he later wrote, "a proper little colonial with a faultless English accent." He never learned Yoruba, his father's first language.

Back in England, in time, he went for higher education and took a master's degree at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

He had had one earlier short visit to Nigeria after his father's death, and then came up with the idea of a second trip to write a book. It became a lively journey, in terms of sights and sounds, experiences, and interactions. As far as military regimes were concerned, Maja-Pearce happened to be in the country when General Buhari was overthrown by General Babangida, so it was not yet Abacha time. If Americans had found John Pepper Clark a tough visiting interlocutor in the 1960s, Nigerians may have found a counterpart in Adewale Maja-Pearce in the 1980s.

His agreement with his publisher allowed for a two-month journey through Nigeria—half as much as Noo Saro-Wiwa's, so this had to be rather hurried. And this would be by car only, share taxis in the regular Nigerian way. No flights, and “one might as well forget the trains”—someone he talked to had made the journey by rail from one end of the country to the other, and “he made it sound as close to purgatory as one is likely to experience in this lifetime.” (This was about the same time as Noo Saro-Wiwa had her childhood railway journey.)

So Maja-Pearce hit the road. This would involve changing cars here and there, as there would not always be direct cars heading for the cities he wanted to go to, and that could involve some waiting time. Moreover, the rides would not always be so comfortable—for one thing, they could feel downright dangerous. The Peugeot 504s, which were the most commonly used cars, were referred to as “flying coffins.” On one of his first longer road journeys, from Ilorin in northern Yorubaland to Kaduna, seven hours mostly in the dark, the driver slammed his foot on the accelerator as he left the city limits behind, and “the speedometer did a complete circle”; he also kept chewing kola nut to stay awake. He would overtake trucks uphill on a bend, and it would seem like there were millimeters between the truck and a meeting vehicle.

Yet Maja-Pearce survived all that, and saw much of Nigeria, although much of it only hurriedly. Kaduna, Zaria, Kano, Lokoja, Abuja, Jos, Yola, Maiduguri . . . . The person he had planned to see in Maiduguri was away, so he hurried back to the motor park for the next stop on his itinerary. He had really gone there only to be able to say that he had been there. (Maiduguri would be the Timbuktu of Nigeria travelers—the ultimate faraway city—if not the end of the world, then at least as far from Lagos as you could get.)

Lokoja in the 1980s turned out to be a glorified village at a filthy, sluggish river; nowhere was that hotel balcony where he had imagined

enjoying a leisurely meal. So again, back to the motor park he went, to find a seat in a car for Benin. And yes, it turned out he would have to change in a town in between.

Interestingly, while on his journey through the North, the son of a Yoruba doctor developed a sort of preference for this part of Nigeria—rather unlike Noo Saro-Wiwa. In a way, he argued, it was not only more peaceful, but also more civilized. Islam brought a greater sense of continuity with the past. Northerners came across as more self-reliant than their Southern counterparts. Missionary activity might have given the latter a head start in twentieth-century life, but it had also left them with “a species of schizophrenia which goes a long way to account for the levels of brutality that is a dominant feature of life in the south.”

Nonetheless, it was mostly in the South that Maja-Pearce could pursue one of his main interests: in Nigerian writing. Here, certainly, he could again be very opinionated. Mostly he would not refer to any of the better-known Nigerian fiction writers by name, but discussed styles, genres, and recurrent weaknesses.

Again, there is a fair amount of crime writing, but not so much of higher quality (see, too, chapter 9). Maja-Pearce chose one example, from Fourth Dimension Publishers, Enugu. He enjoyed it, getting through it in a single sitting. But he found it garishly violent, very likely inspired by the hardboiled writing style of Americans such as James Hadley Chase, whose books were widely available in small local bookshops, as well as on the shelves of bigger-city chain supermarkets.

The Onitsha chapbooks got some passing, slightly ironic mention, as the traveling commentator made his quick visit to the market. There was a taxi waiting to go to Lagos.

In Ibadan, he had some unpleasant experience of poor service at the university library, when he tried in vain to look up some references to one well-known early Nigerian writer. He also ran into an old acquaintance, someone who had been a prefect and thus a respected senior pupil in the Lagos school where Maja-Pearce had gone as a child, and who was now a doctor and an aspiring novelist. But Maja-Pearce was again unimpressed with the results. The problem, in his view, was that someone like this had too little and too narrow knowledge of that language in which he felt he must write; he could not handle it with the familiarity and ease of a native speaker of English. Yet with London as the center of the literary world, that was the language he had to work in. And he would prefer a bad review in the *Times Literary Supplement* to a favorable review in the Lagos *Daily Times*.

At the University of Calabar, on the other hand, there was Uche, a poet and playwright preferring to write in Igbo to reach a local

audience. Maja-Pearce liked to hear this—but was told there were problems. Uche would have liked to return to his village, but he could not support his family there. Furthermore, he had spent four years in London writing a dissertation. If after such a venture he came back to the village, his neighbors there could only conclude that he was a failure.

What, then, could one do with Nigeria's languages, hundreds of them? Maja-Pearce arrived at the opinion that they must have different futures. Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba had large numbers of speakers, and there could be a strong literature in each of them. A half-dozen other languages might survive in more marginal existences. A great many others, with very few speakers, hardly had any such prospects. Conservative, backward, even reactionary—they were probably best left to die in peace.

Uche, in Calabar, also had a colleague who dropped by, and whom Maja-Pearce knew by reputation as an "experimental novelist." He brought a copy of his latest book, and the visitor had a quick look at the first few sentences. There was nothing that would change his mind: "When I hear the word experimental applied to a writer I run a mile."

Other kinds of issues concerned him as well. Here and there in the book, questions are raised about the situation of women in Nigerian society: on the one hand, some of them, past and present, have been powerful and respected; on the other hand, they seemed to this visitor to be often ill-treated, even suffering minor or major violence in their marriages. Perhaps his parents' unhappy relationship played a part in his thinking here.

At another level, and relating to one particular national event, he was critical of the treatment of Africa in international news reporting. As the Buhari-to-Babangida regime change had occurred while he was in Nigeria, he had offered one British newspaper to do an article on it. It turned out it had sent out one of its own journalists from London to report on it quickly and return. At some later point, he had run into this newsman, who had told him that with African news stories, he would hardly ever need more than twenty-four hours in the country to know what was going on. Often he did not even need to leave the airport. For Maja-Pearce, this was the attitude that so often resulted in the misrepresentation of African realities. You could not treat the United States or Poland like that. "But Africa is different; Africa is simple."

As his return to Britain after these two months approached, Adewale Maja-Pearce became increasingly depressed. On the one hand, he had become fascinated by Lagos. He could now understand what people meant when, like Noo Saro-Wiwa's Auntie Janice, they said they could

live nowhere else: “There is an energy and a vitality about Lagos which challenges the visitor. Everybody is on the make; everybody is hustling twenty-four hours a day.” On the other hand, his own relationship to Nigeria was still as ambiguous as when he started out on his journey. Nothing had really been resolved. But he was also beginning to realize that nothing could be resolved.

Yet then there was that other book, a few years later: *How Many Miles to Babylon?* It is a multifaceted long essay on life in his mother’s country—or, rather, what it had turned into for him. It is a more introspective book than his Nigerian reportage, about his self, in terms of race and, more importantly, culture. Here is also a harsh portrait of 1970s multiracial Britain and the young Maja-Pearce’s interactions with people who were only half-heartedly turning into Black British—of Caribbean and African background, living partly in some nostalgic fantasyland, partly perhaps in a world of petty crime—outsiders, “wogs,” “jungle bunnies” in some arrogant native parlance.<sup>5</sup> Maja-Pearce has periods in Canada and in Ireland as well, and imagines going to live in yet other parts of the world. Ireland reminds him of Nigeria: “the same extended family arrangement where everybody was your cousin, no matter how distant, and there was the same place of the religious as an integral part of everyday life.”

He had in fact planned to do this book rather more in the style of *In My Father’s Country*, an account of a journey through Britain. That, however, did not work out so well. He did not find so many outgoing, talkative strangers along the way, rushing to make his acquaintance—among the British, “the notion of individual space is firmly rooted in the national psyche.” As a sort of pilgrimage, he went to the cemetery in a Scottish Highlands village, where he found the headstone of his maternal grandparents, a couple who had cared for him when as a child he had come back to Britain. As his grandfather had once in his youth walked away from that village, away from the hardships that again and again became the fate of Celtic people at the outskirts of the United Kingdom, Maja-Pearce reflected, he had begun the moves across borders, between continents, that would characterize the lives of so many of his descendants.

And evidently the Nigerian experience accounted for in *In My Father’s Country* was not enough for Adewale Maja-Pearce. The year after the publication of *How Many Miles to Babylon?*, there would be that slim volume of essays named *Who’s Afraid of Wole Soyinka?* By now he was Africa editor for the journal *Index on Censorship*, and series editor for the Heinemann African Writers Series, publishing so many of a generation of African authors. The title essay of *Who’s Afraid of Wole*

*Soyinka?* has its point of departure in Soyinka's politically provocative speech at a Lagos event celebrating his Nobel Prize, where in front of a rear-admiral who was second-in-command of the ruling junta, he had told the military to get out of politics, in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa. The point was that those who were wrongly in power, and who misused it, had reason to be afraid of free speech, from Soyinka and others using it effectively.

In his writings for *Index on Censorship*, Maja-Pearce reported on African affairs generally, but with a center of gravity in Nigeria. And he would indeed return to Lagos for extended periods, commenting on Nigerian affairs for the *New York Times*, the *London Review of Books*, and the British journal *Prospect*. He also published locally, even to the extent of running a small publishing house. A recent Wikipedia entry tells us that he lives in Surulere, an inland Lagos neighborhood, in a property passed down in the family. Not a return to Ikoyi, but perhaps as close to a sense of home as someone like Adewale Maja-Pearce could well think of.<sup>6</sup>

## Notes

1. A wide-ranging book edited by Abdul Rasheed Na'Allah, *Ogoni's Agonies* (1998) describes the African and international response to the killing of Ken Saro-Wiwa. Wole Soyinka has an extensive account of his efforts to mobilize world opinion in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* (2006: 419–427; see also Quayson 2003: 56–75).
2. British-based Afropolitan writers have been doing multisited fiction as well; see Popoola 2017. Popoola holds a PhD in creative writing from the University of East London and publishes with Cassava Republic Press.
3. Leonard Plotnicov's *Strangers to the City* (1967) offers an anthropological portrait of ethnic diversity in Jos in the early 1960s.
4. On Ikoyi, see also Nina Darnton's view of it in chapter 9, and Chinua Achebe's and Cyprian Ekwensi's, as cited in note 3 in that chapter.
5. For another brief account of late twentieth-century Black London by a British-Nigerian (who refers to Adewale Maja-Pearce as well as Biyi Bandele—see chapter 14), see Gbadamosi 1994.
6. That house in Surulere, however, has been the topic of yet another small book (Maja-Pearce 2018), published locally in Lagos. When Maja-Pearce finally established his ownership rights to it, the process of getting its tenants to move out turned out to be complicated.

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