

## Journeys to the Hinterland: Early Twentieth-century Nigerian Domestic Travel Writing and Local Heterogeneity<sup>1</sup>

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In colonial Lagos (in south-western Nigeria) in the 1910s and 1920s, a handful of Yoruba-speaking intellectuals published travelogues in the local Yoruba- and English-language newspapers. The writers described their travels in the new colonial nation of Nigeria, a region that had been amalgamated in 1914 by the British colonisers, bringing together a vast number of different ethnic groups and languages. The travel narratives discuss the writers' adventures on steamers, on lorries and in cars, and their attempts to communicate with fellow Yoruba-speakers in the Yoruba hinterland, with Itsekiri- and Igbo-speakers along the south-eastern coast of Nigeria, and with migrant networks of colleagues, friends and relatives on the way. The writers of these serialised travel narratives (written mostly in Yoruba but also occasionally in English) were in some cases newspaper editors travelling on newspaper business, as well as other newspaper writers and intellectuals. Some were important figures in the Yoruba and English print culture of Lagos in the early twentieth century, including I. B. Thomas: proprietor and editor of *Akede Eko*, a bilingual Yoruba-English newspaper, and author of the first Yoruba novel.<sup>2</sup>

Some of these newspaper travel writers sought to convince their readers of the localness of the Yoruba-speaking hinterland, of its intellectual, social and political significance to Lagosian readers. Others sought to make sense of their relationship with places farther afield in Nigeria, where they encountered "civilisation" in the form of Yoruba-speaking, Christian Lagosian migrants, but also strangeness in the form of local people who spoke different languages and with whom they felt they had little in common. However, though they travelled within its boundaries, the newspaper travel writers engaged very little with the idea of Nigeria as a nation, instead focusing intently on the local, translocal and regional networks they depicted and fostered. Underlying this article is a concern with how post-colonial travel writing criticism might theorise local heterogeneity and the adventures in their own Nigerian or Yoruba "hinterland" that these Lagos newspaper travel writers describe. I suggest that reading these Lagos newspaper travel narratives of the early twentieth century, particularly their focus on translocal and regional networks within the colonial nation, offers a way to re-imagine the centres and peripheries produced and replicated by travel writing, distinct from the colonial metropole-

periphery relationship often imagined to characterise the genre in its colonial heyday.

This article focuses on three travel narratives in order to illustrate how Lagos travel writers represented the heterogeneity of Nigeria. Drawing on both Yoruba- and English-language travelogues in recognition of the significant overlap (although not interchangeability) between the two print spheres in Lagos in the 1910s and 20s (Barber, “Translation”; Jones, “Writing Domestic Travel” 17-20), I begin with the Yoruba writer I. B. Thomas’s travel series called “Ero L’Ọna” (“The Traveller”), published in the Yoruba newspapers *Eletì-Ọfẹ* and *Akede Eko* in the 1920s, followed by the anonymous “Tour to the Hinterland” published in English in the *Lagos Weekly Record* in 1912, and finally fellow Lagosian E. A. Akintan’s “Irin Ajo Lati Eko Lọ Si Ilesà” (“Journey from Lagos to Ilesà”), published in *Eletì-Ọfẹ* in 1926-7. While I. B. Thomas travelled to relatively far-away northern and south-eastern Nigeria, as well as the Yoruba-speaking hinterland, both E. A. Akintan and the anonymous writer of the *Lagos Weekly Record* piece travelled to nearby Yoruba-speaking towns.

## Travel Writing, the Post-colonial and the Local

The newspaper travel narratives I discuss in this article are just one of the many forms of travel writing by Nigerians about Nigeria that have been published over the twentieth century. Nigeria is certainly heterogeneous enough—drawing together more than 450 languages and peoples—to have provided fertile ground for the imaginations of travel writers. Moreover, it has never lacked for travellers: traders, migrants, scholars, soldiers, religious leaders, slaves, craftsmen, herbalists, diviners, artists and others have ranged across the Yoruba-speaking region and beyond for centuries, trading ideas, languages and material objects (Barnes 261; Ojo 17). With the growth of a writing and print culture in both Yoruba and English in southwestern Nigeria from the nineteenth century, writers have written about their travels across numerous genres and forms, from missionary travel accounts to personal diaries, autobiographies, historical and ethnographic writing, fiction, journalism, blogs, life histories, as well as oral narratives (Jones, “Writing Domestic Travel”). Today, travel writers such as Pẹlu Awofesọ and Fọlarin Kọlawọle use travel writing to document Nigeria to itself as well as to overseas visitors, writing online and in newspapers (Jones, “Nigeria is my Playground”).<sup>3</sup> And yet, with the notable exception of scholarship on narratives by missionaries and former slaves from the Yoruba- and Igbo-speaking regions (see, for instance, McKenzie; Gualtieri on Samuel Ajayi Crowther), travel writing criticism tends to give the impression that Nigerians, like other Africans, have been the “travellees” rather than the travellers. Criticism of travel writing about the region that would become Nigeria has largely focused on European colonial travel writers such as Mary Slessor, Mungo Park, Anna Hinderer and Mary Kingsley (Mills; Pratt 67-83; Blunt; McEwan).

Post-colonial criticism has itself been critiqued for privileging transnational and émigré texts and those that “write back” to the West at the expense of “internal heteroglossia” within Africa and between African texts (Mwangi 1-4). Despite this critique, the study of travel writing, especially in its earliest days, has tended to configure itself as the study of Western writers representing the “other” or the periphery to the centre, or producing “the rest of the world” as an object of Western knowledge in the “contact zone” of the colonial encounter (Pratt; see also Kaplan; Urry; Brisson and Schweizer). Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan’s *Tourists with Typewriters* thus argues that travel writing can be read (although admittedly not exclusively) as “an imperialist discourse through which dominant cultures (white, male, Euro-American, middle-class) seek to ingratiate themselves, often at others’ expense” (xiii), reinscribing Steve Clark’s argument that “travel writing is inevitably one-way traffic, because the Europeans mapped the world rather than the world mapping them” (3). Tabish Khair *et al* accordingly note that the word “travel” in Anglophone contexts often “represents not sight but blindness. The travels of entire peoples...have been erased...[Non-European] travellers often *appear* to have left nothing or little in writing. Hence, the feeling grew—and it persists in the present—that until recently non-Europeans did not travel or hardly travelled” (5-6).

One of the first moves to counter this “blindness” was to recognise the non-European travellers in the margins of European colonial texts, or alternatively those who “wrote back” to such texts (see Pratt 169-194; 224-243), in some cases as “*counter*travel writing” that pits itself “against the dominant Eurocentric model” (Holland and Huggan 21). Aedín Ní Loingsigh’s ground-breaking work on Francophone African travel literature (both fiction and non-fiction) develops this line of scholarship further, in a sustained attempt to understand “the important contribution of Africans themselves to the development of the [travel writing] genre” (2). Ní Loingsigh explores inter-continental travel literature by Francophone Africans travelling to Europe and the USA, as students, tourists, “citizens of the world” and migrants. She conceives of such travel as initially a continuation of the “*voyage à l’envers*” [inverted voyage] of Africans to colonial metropolises, especially Paris (13), although she also shows how recent travel literature inverts and subverts these centres and peripheries. While much other research on African travel writing has either focused similarly on Africans travelling beyond Africa, or on the mobility of slaves (see, for instance, Adeeko; Curtin), studies, anthologies and bibliographies of African travel writers within Africa are emerging, ranging from the colonial Gold Coast and Swahili coast to contemporary South Africa and Rwanda (see, for instance, Kirk-Greene and Newman; Geider; Fadoyebo; Frank-Wilson; Khair *et al*, Newell, “J. G. Mullen”; Newell, “Newspapers, New Spaces”; Moffat; Hitchcott; Coetzee).

It is also necessary to recognise that not all non-Western travel writing writes back “against the dominant Eurocentric model” (Holland and Huggan 21). As Aedín Ní Loingsigh remarks, recent

work on non-Western travel writing has importantly recognised “the agency of non-Western subjects” as travellers (2). However, it has nonetheless tended to focus on how these subjects “participate in, and reconfigure, eurocentric modes of travelling, seeing and narrating” (*ibid.* 2). Such study of travel writing is thus often a study of “autoethnography” in Pratt’s sense,<sup>4</sup> that is, of the way that travel writers “write back” to, subvert and assert agency within established post/colonial metropolitan discourses. Khair *et al* similarly note the “interventionist” nature of their own work on African and Asian travel writing, which is “sometimes informed by European discourses even as it sets out to map their limits” (13-14).

Karin Barber argues that twentieth-century Yoruba-language novels display a “superabundant confidence in the value of their local subject matter and in the capacities of the Yoruba language and Yoruba verbal art” (“African-Language Literature” 15-16). Though their writers also read literature in English, they above all generated “new Yoruba literary traditions which seemed, even at the height of colonial rule, intensely preoccupied with specific internal agendas defined and expressed in local terms” (*ibid.* 16). Similarly, it is “internal agendas” and “local terms” that I explore in the Lagos newspaper travel writing discussed in this article. However, at the same time, I also want to interrogate the notion of “the local” by examining the way people and places were produced as both “local” and heterogeneous by these travel writers. Michael Cronin, using the metaphor of a “fractal notion of travel”, contends that “[w]hether travel is examined across galaxies...continents, countries or regions, the complexity of the translation encounter remains constant” (17). This article takes up the challenge of exploring the complexity of travelling encounters at home in Nigeria.

### The Lagos Newspapers, the Expanding “Local” and Cultures of Travel in the Early Twentieth Century

Early twentieth century colonial Lagos was the home of a dynamic print and intellectual culture focused on Lagos and smaller towns in the nearby Yoruba-speaking region. The Lagos newspapers were read by a small group of elite Lagosians, alongside other readers scattered across southwest and eastern Nigeria, particularly in towns with a Christian or Saro influence.<sup>5</sup> They published political news and reports on day-to-day life in Lagos, as well as numerous lengthy opinion pieces and long-running debates. They were small operations, with their editors often also writing some of their content alongside a team of writers and contributions from readers.<sup>6</sup>

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the worldview of the Lagos newspapers was insular; they were “[q]uite unabashedly... specifically concerned with Lagos affairs. Lagos was their point of ultimate reference” (Echeruo 6). In 1914, the *Lagos Weekly Record*, a major English-language newspaper, had a circulation of just 700 (Iliffe 224).<sup>7</sup> However, by the 1920s-30s, the scope, orientation and

audiences of the Lagos newspapers were broadening. As Rita Nnodim has demonstrated, in the 1920s, Yoruba poets and novelists imagined audiences centred on particular towns or regions; they used sub-group dialects of Yoruba, and references to local settings and concerns. From the 1930s onwards, they “not only began to reach out to more encompassing audiences, but also to inscribe their texts with imaginings of larger social formations, such as publics, ethnic communities or nations” (157). The newspapers, too, frequently discussed changing relations across these new spheres. Newspaper writers were often anxious about the extent and pace of change in the colonial era, and they sometimes expressed this anxiety through editorials and news reports reflecting on the dangers and difficulties of new travel infrastructure such as railways, trams and cars.

However, Lagos newspaper writers were also excited by the new opportunities offered by increasing connectivity across the coast and into the Nigerian hinterland. While travel was sometimes a locus of racial and social inequality—the newspapers reported, for instance, on a case in which Lagosians were forced into lower class train carriages to make way for Europeans (*LS* 11.08.1909: 6)<sup>8</sup>—travel also enabled Lagosians to build alternative or parallel networks, circumventing colonial spheres of influence. New opportunities for fast and comfortable travel helped develop existing connections across the West African coast, so that coastal towns in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nigeria and the Gold Coast were often tied politically and intellectually more closely to each other than to their respective hinterlands (Newell, *West African Literatures* 18). Newspaper editors and writers from across the West African coast met, circulated each other’s newspapers, reprinted and quoted one another and reported each other’s travels: “The travelling Editor of the ‘African World’ Mr Raphael arrived in Lagos upon the steamer Zungeru on Saturday last. We welcome him”, wrote the *Lagos Standard* in 1909 (*LS* 27.10.1909: 6). The Lagos newspapers printed news from local correspondents across the West African coast, and the presence of a large Saro community in Lagos—including many of the editors, writers and readers of the newspapers—ensured a flow of news between Sierra Leone, Lagos and the Yoruba town of Abeokuta, where some Saros had settled. But furthermore, with the birth of Nigeria as a colonial nation in 1914, new connections *within* Nigeria also became increasingly economically and politically important to Lagos. A writer in the *Nigerian Times* describes a new sense of a “family of nations” emerging through travel in 1911, shortly before the amalgamation of Nigeria:

The railway has annihilated distance, has brought into closer contact peoples once separated from each other by weeks of travel, has introduced and established intimate commercial relations among them and in this way they have come to understand each other better and to recognise themselves as belonging to one family of nations (*NT* 25.04.1911: 5).

It was within this context of interest in the new opportunities for connections spreading out from Lagos that many of the Lagos travel writers published their travel narratives.<sup>9</sup>

### I. B. Thomas's "Ero L'Ọna" ("The Traveller")

While a small number of English-language travel narratives were published in Lagos newspapers in the earliest decades of the twentieth century, in the case of Yoruba-language narratives, it was in the 1920s that the genre flourished, in part under the influence of the ever-innovative and pioneering newspaper journalist and editor Isaac Babalọla Thomas. I. B. Thomas, a highly educated Christian Lagosian, had previously been a schoolteacher but he turned to journalism in the 1920s; he began his career as a writer for the Yoruba-language newspaper *Eleti-Ofẹ*, and then became proprietor and editor of the Yoruba-language newspaper *Akede Eko*, which he founded in 1928 (Barber, *Print Culture* 36). Thomas was interested, like many of his newspaper contemporaries, in Yoruba and Nigerian history; he published a biography of Nigerian nationalist Herbert Macaulay along with newspaper columns on other Nigerian political figures. But he is best known for *Ìtàn Ìgbésí Ayé Èmi Sègìlọlá Èlẹ́yinjú Egé Èlẹ́gbèrùn Ọkọ L'áiyé*,<sup>10</sup> generally recognised as the first Yoruba novel, which he published to great popular acclaim as a serial in *Akede Eko* in 1929-30 (Barber, *Print Culture* 34-65).

But while *Ìtàn Ìgbésí Ayé Èmi Sègìlọlá* is relatively well-known, it was not the only product of Thomas's literary innovation. In 1926, Thomas published his first travel series, called "Ero L'Ọna" or "The Traveller," for *Eleti-Ofẹ*. The series describes his three-month long journey on newspaper business from Lagos to Sapele, in present-day Delta State. Thomas continued to publish 'Ero L'Ọna' travel narratives in his new newspaper, *Akede Eko*, with three further series appearing between 1929 and 1931, describing journeys to the nearby Yoruba-speaking region (in which Thomas claimed ancestry) and farther-afield northern Nigeria, as well as return journeys to south-eastern Nigeria. Each individual text in these narratives was usually one to two pages long, presented as a first-person journal entry or letter addressed to the newspaper readers. They feature Thomas's journeys by boat and by car, his arrival in each town (where he often describes joyous welcomes from his hosts), his encounters with his numerous friends and other local people, and exuberant descriptions of the towns he visits.

In Thomas's descriptions of the family, friends and colleagues he encounters on his travels, it is a Lagosian and "civilised" social world that he depicts spreading over the hinterland and beyond, not a "Nigerian" landscape. Although his travels took him away from the more familiar Yoruba-speaking region to the Igbo and Itsekiri regions, such as the south-eastern Nigerian towns of Port Harcourt, Aba, Sapele, Warri and Forcados, Thomas's self-contained networks of Christians and Lagosian migrants he encounters on the way do not

usually encompass named non-Yoruba Nigerians (although he does occasionally name British colonial officials and traders and a small number of Gold Coasters and Sierra Leoneans). Nonetheless, although he does not name Igbo- or Itsekiri-speakers or describe social interactions with them as he does with Lagosians and Yoruba-speakers, he does narrate some of his encounters with local people, sometimes in terms of exoticism and disgust or using the circulating missionary and colonial discourse of “civilisation”. Thus he recounts the foods available in a market in Burutu:

Mo şakiyesi kokoro yiyan kan ti a sin wõn sinu igi ti o dabi idin nla ni wiwo, ti awõn Jẹkiri npe ni ‘Ogongo,’ a sọ fun mi pe ohun ti nwõn fi nje koko-gari niyẹn, wiwo lasan ti mo wo kini na nrin mi laiya ambọtori jije (*EO* 12.05.1926: 7).

I noticed a roasted insect which they thread on skewers, and which looked like a huge maggot, which the Itsekiri call ‘Ogongo’. I was told that they eat them with cocoyam, just looking at it made me feel sick, even more so the thought of eating it.

Upon seeing local people walking naked while he is travelling from Port Harcourt to Onitsha, Thomas asks “awõn enia ha ni wõnyi tabi ẹranko igbe?” (“are these people or wild animals?”) and comments that he hopes missionaries will visit them soon to “kọ awõn onihoho wõnyi” (“teach these naked people”) to wear clothes (*AE* 23.05.1929: 8). Moreover, he reports that when he previously came across the “Dewo”<sup>11</sup> people in 1913 on visiting the new town of Port Harcourt with his father, “ọju nwõn ran’ko bi ẹranko inu igbe” (“they were ferocious, like animals in the bush”) and, he alleges, “enia-jije ni ogo ati iyin wõn nigbana...papa nwõn fẹran ẹran-ara awõn Yoruba” (“eating people was their pride and joy at that time ... they especially liked Yoruba flesh”). Today, he claims, although the English have exerted some authority on the town, danger remains:

... bi enia ba lọ je alejo ni ilu na, ti oluware ẹ ba lọ rin irin-kurin lati lọ bọ s’owo awõn enia na; bi idan ni nwõn yio fi oluware p’ata sinu iṣasun wõn (*AE* 02.05.1929: 4).

... if anyone goes to visit the town, and that person falls into these people’s hands in the course of his wanderings, just like magic they [the local people] will devour the person in their soup-pots.

As Robin Law describes, ritual cannibalism *is* thought to have existed in earlier years among the Ijaw of the Niger Delta area and the leopard societies of West Africa. Moreover the trope of Nigerian cannibalism was circulating in Lagos in the early twentieth century; the *Lagos Standard* newspaper, for instance, reported cannibalism and human sacrifice amongst the “degenerate tribes of the south” in 1909 (*LS* 05.05.1909: 5). Thomas’s supposed fear, exoticism and disgust, and his appeal to missionary enlightenment, surely owe something to imperial rhetoric of debasement (Spurr 76-91).<sup>12</sup> But his invocation of cannibalism also seems designed to tease his audience, heighten the drama and enhance Thomas’s self-presentation as an adventurer, particularly in the “Dewo” people’s preference for Yoruba flesh—the

only demographic likely to be reading this Yoruba-language narrative. However, Thomas also emphasises the performative rather than essentialised or race-based nature of “civilisation”. For Thomas—the epitome here of the Lagos “cultural brokers” for whom “[e]very aspect of their lived culture became an arena of contestation of identities” (Moraes Farias and Barber 1)—otherness is structured by the contrast between Lagosian and missionary norms and these people who are Nigerian subjects, and yet, to his eyes, not like him: they are not Christian, they do not speak English, and their bodies are not presented in the “civilised” fashion. But Thomas also suggests that this otherness could be transformed into familiarity if the people just had access to these accoutrements of civilisation.<sup>13</sup>

However, in the market in Burutu where he is repulsed by maggots, Thomas also gives the Yoruba names for several varieties of fish available, as if to stress the similarities between Lagos and this market in south-eastern Nigeria. Moreover, he depicts himself enjoying interactions with some local people, and he learns a few phrases of Itsekiri and Igbo which he prints with explanations:

Bi mo ti duro l’enu ona ile mi, beni mo ngbo:- *Ndo, ado! Ndo, ado!! Ndo, ado!!!*  
 eyi ni ede ti awon Şekiri fi nki enia; ko si ede miran fun nwon mo lati fi ki enia  
 bikoşe awon ede yi nikan; bi nwon ma ki o ku owuro tabi ku asan ati ku ale, tabi  
 bi nwon yio ba o kedun fun ohunkohun laiyeyi, ko si ede miran fun nwon mo  
 bikoşe:- *Ndo, ado! Ndo, ado!! Ndo, ado!!!* (EO 26.05.1926: 8).

As I stood on the doorstep of my lodgings, I heard: “*Ndo, ado! Ndo, ado!! Ndo, ado!!!*” This is the language that the Itsekiri use to greet one another. They have no other words for greetings, just these alone. If they greet you in the morning, or the afternoon, or the evening, or if they offer condolences for anything in this life, there are no other words, just “*Ndo, ado! Ndo, ado!! Ndo, ado!!!*”

There is a pleasure in these places’ strangeness for Thomas. He is not uninterested in other Nigerian social worlds and peoples, and he uses his writing to help their readers know these places better.

Nonetheless, the “cannibals” and even the Itsekiri-speakers greeting each other are in the background of Thomas’s account. They may be gazed at by the writers, and a few words of their language learnt, but the real social action of the text takes place in a Lagos migrant sociability. Thomas finds overlapping strangeness and familiarity in the places he visits, because each place has a layer of familiar “civilised” people, often migrant Lagosians—family, friends and acquaintances—Christians, or people involved in the newspaper business or education. While some of the residents of Port Harcourt and Sapele may appear to be exotic savages to Thomas, others who speak English, are educated, and who dress like Thomas are presented as individuals, mentioned in terms of their occupations (often professional) and their conversations with Thomas. In his 1926 series ‘Ero L’Ona,’ Thomas mentions meeting “ore ati ojulumo” (“friends and acquaintances”) in Forcados (EO 12.05.1926: 7), while in Warri he meets a friend, Joseph Akiwowo, whose brother knew Thomas’s father-in-law, and he is welcomed “towo tese; warawere onje ti a npe onje ranse” (“with open arms, and an abundance of food immediately



appeared”) (*EO* 19.05.1926: 8). In Sapele, friends and acquaintances host a ball for him. In Koko, he meets “Ogbeni M.T. Clarke, ojulowo omọ Eko ti o nse *Postmaster* ilu na, Ogbeni na yọ gidigidi lati ri mi nitoripe a jumọ se omode pọ ni *School Faji*, nigba odun gborọ” (“Mr M.T. Clarke, the venerable Lagosian who is a *Postmaster* in this town, and this gentleman was mighty happy to see me, because we attended *Faji School* together as children, years ago”) (*EO* 16.06.1926: 7). In Ijerimi, near Warri, he comes across “awọn omọ ilu wonyi diẹ ti mo ti kọ l’ẹkọ ni ile-iwe” (“a few of the townspeople whom I taught in school”) (*EO* 30.06.1926: 8). Thomas does also cement new connections he has made with non-Yoruba Nigerians on his journey, although again without *naming* them, thanking “awọn Ẹkiri lókunrin ati lobinrin ti nko fi igbakan mọ tẹlẹ ri” (“the Itsekiri, men and women, whom I hadn’t known previously”) (*EO* 23.06.1926: 7). Thus, though his narratives construct south-eastern Nigeria as an “uncivilised” place, Thomas also builds new written connections and reinforces social and business ties across the region by textualising his travels.

#### The *Lagos Weekly Record*’s “Tour to the Hinterland”

Travel narratives were also used in some Lagos newspapers as part of a more explicit attempt to influence readers’ ideas about the connections between Lagos and the Yoruba-speaking region. In 1912, the English-language newspaper *Lagos Weekly Record* published a short series called “A Tour to the Hinterland,” in which an anonymous writer (sometimes called ‘Special Correspondent’) describes his travels to the Yoruba-speaking towns of Ibadan, Abeokuta, Oyo, Oşogbo, Ede, Ilesha and Ife, and remarks on life in each town, particularly its political institutions and rulers, roads and industry. Special Correspondent returned in 1913 with “A trip to Northern Nigeria and Back” detailing travels far outside the Yoruba region to the northern Nigerian towns of Zaria, Kano, Katsina and beyond.

Special Correspondent’s narratives do not so much relate the traveller’s personal story (in the style of Thomas’s narratives) as sketch a picture of the region and pontificate more broadly on social and political issues. The writer comments on the changes to the cities since he last visited, the people he meets, industry, commerce and local politics, and assesses how far “civilisation” has encroached on the people and place; for instance, he admires Balogun Sowemimo (a political leader in Ibadan) as “an African who had done the unique thing of running the gauntlet of civilisation and still remained African. ... Here was indeed a lesson for the African and an example which if he had followed would have saved him from the contempt and ridicule of the European” (*LWR* 19.10.1912: 5). He discusses the development of roads and railways in each town; the “whole face” of Abeokuta has been changed by roads being “opened up in every direction,” judged to be a great improvement, while Ibadan has changed immensely since the opening of the railways in 1901: “What was called the Iddo gate or Iddo road and which was then a bare expanse is now covered with

commercial houses on both sides of the roadway which surpasses even the Marina at Lagos” (5).

But rather than simply describing the world beyond Lagos for readers, the series is explicitly couched in terms of the need for Lagosians to align themselves with the Yoruba-speaking region: “To the African who knows that his life is bound up with that of his people, a tour to the Hinterland at the present time is fraught with no little interest.” “Foreign influence,” the writer argues, makes “the African” in Lagos into “a segregated unit whose idea of national life is a nationality built up without a nation.” This account of his tour of the hinterland, then, is designed to (re)acquaint Lagosians with their “nation” (*LWR* 19.10.1912: 5). The writer does not specify a Yoruba nation, but it is implied in the scope of the series which travels to a number of Yoruba towns. Special Correspondent’s Northern Nigerian tour, by contrast, is marked by an unembarrassed exoticism, suggesting a desire to distinguish “civilised” Yorubaland from the “primitive” Northern provinces on the eve of Nigerian unification:

Scanning the plains to the right and left one sees a network of mud huts, grass-roofed, conical in shape and suggestive of Primitive men emerging from the dawn of civilization. ... Philosophically considered, they inspire you with a sublime love for the Simple Life and attune your soul to the plain melodies of mother Nature (*LWR* 02.08.1913).

By contrast, in his travels in the Yoruba region, Special Correspondent casts himself as a curious outsider but also as someone with a stake in this “nation” with which he wishes to “re-acquaint” himself and his readers. While Thomas emphasises his difference from the people of south-eastern Nigeria, the writer of this column stresses his commonality with the Yoruba-speakers he meets. However, while the Yoruba towns he visits are not strange to him, they are nonetheless distinct from one another.

E. A. Akintan’s “Irin Ajo Lati Eko Lọ Si Ileṣa” (“Journey from Lagos to Ileṣa”)

If Special Correspondent’s narratives stress the importance of knowing the Yoruba region, a serialised travel narrative published in 1926 by newspaper editor E. A. Akintan emphasises the cohesiveness of the Yoruba region, but also imagines it suffused with the writer’s personal connections. E. A. Akintan’s fourteen-part travel narrative “Irin Ajo Lati Eko Lọ si Ileṣa” (1926-7), published in his own newspaper *Eletiqfe*, documents Akintan’s journey from Lagos to Ileṣa via the Yoruba towns of Ibadan, Oyo and Ile-Ife. In each town, Akintan writes of the people he meets, his impressions of the town and the changes he has noticed.

Akintan’s narrative has little of the strangeness and exoticism that Thomas claims to encounter in south-eastern Nigeria, since Akintan’s journey is through the more familiar Yoruba-speaking region. But neither does he state any explicit interest in knowing about

Yorubaland, or re-acquainting Lagosians with the hinterland, as in the case of the earlier *Lagos Weekly Record* piece. Instead, Akintan's narrative is more interested in textualising Akintan's own relationships with the educated elite of Yorubaland. More so than any other of the travelogues from this time, Akintan constantly invokes this web of connections, with every episode mentioning at least one prominent person he has visited, and often many more. Print culture and Christianity maintain many of Akintan's relationships in the Yoruba-speaking region, as he tells us of his encounters with editors, priests, writers and schoolteachers, and even "Ogbeni Alagba kan" ("an elderly gentleman") selling newspapers who knows Akintan's work:

O ni gbogbo iwe irohin Eko li on nka; mo juwe ara mi fun u pe Oniwe-irohin *Eleti-Ofe* ni mi; enu ya a inu re si dun lati ri mi; okan ninu awon oro re niyi: 'Are you the Editor? I have read of your tour in your paper, I am pleased to meet you.' (EO 09.02.1927: 4).

He said he reads all the Lagos newspapers. I explained that I was the editor of *Eleti-Ofe*. He was surprised and happy to see me. One of the things he said was this: 'Are you the Editor? I have read of your tour in your paper, I am pleased to meet you.'

The overriding impression produced by Akintan's narratives is that he is visiting different but comprehensible places within the same Yoruba cultural and social world. Indeed, although Akintan describes the geographies of the towns he visits, his narratives do not in fact particularly distinguish these towns from one another; he visits the same types of churches and schools, meets the same kind of people and receives the same hospitality everywhere he goes. Akintan uses the series to develop a sense of the region as a whole, comparing Yoruba towns to one another; he notes, for instance, that "Ona Moto lati Ilesha lo si Osoybo dara pupo ju lati Ile-Ife lo si Ilesha lo; ko si iyonu kankan, tarara ni oko nlo lori re" ("the motor road from Ilesha to Osoybo is better than the road from Ile-Ife to Ilesha; there was no trouble at all, the lorry went quickly on it") (EO 05.01.1927: 5), and discusses the commonalities between towns: "Ohun ti o woporo larin awon ara ilu oke ni pe ibikibi ti afin Oba won ba gbe wa, oja ko nshai si nibe; bayi ni mo ri i l'Oyo, Ibadan, Ile-Ife, Osoybo ati Ilesha" ("The thing that is common among the people of the hinterland is that wherever the Palace of their Oba is, there would most likely be a market located there; that is how I saw it in Oyo, Ibadan, Ile-Ife, Osoybo and Ilesha") (EO 29.12.1926: 5). For Akintan, the Yoruba-speaking region is heterogeneous, but he emphasises its shared features more than its differences.

### Reading the Local, the Translocal and the Regional in Lagosian Travel Writing

Though the scope of their writing is what we might belatedly label as national, and though nationalist ideas were at stake in the newspapers—particularly Herbert Macaulay's *Lagos Daily News*—and

in some popular discourse in the 1910s-30s (Uche 23), neither the word “Nigeria” nor explicit discussions of the Nigerian nation appear in the travel narratives.<sup>14</sup> Instead, these writers are more interested in translocal, various and shifting networks within, but not explicitly framed by, the nation.

For some writers, it is important to be able to make claims to connections with the Yoruba hinterland, as we saw in the *Lagos Weekly Record* narrative, in which the writer seeks to re-connect Lagosians with their Yoruba-speaking “nation”. For I. B. Thomas, south-eastern Nigeria is a palimpsest of strangeness and localness, exoticism and civilisation. Though Thomas does not write of Nigeria as a nation, he has an implicit sense of its boundaries as he travels to the Yoruba-speaking region, the south-east, and the north—though this may be predicated more upon the pragmatic nature of the reach of the Yoruba-speaking diaspora than upon any more abstract sense of the nation. Thomas is not *refusing* the notion of Nigeria, but rather is more interested in the interaction between Lagos and the Yoruba hinterland, “civilised” Lagosian migrant networks, and the interaction between individual spheres such as Lagos and the south-eastern region. For other travel writers, their interest lies more in the spread of Lagos—its migrants, values and Christianity—across the Yoruba-speaking region and beyond. A sense of exceptionalism pervades their newspaper writings, with the writers imagining themselves to have a special role to play in translating “civilisation” and the Nigerian hinterland to one another, while still revelling in their own distinct Lagosian social and intellectual world.

Thomas, Akintan and the writer in the *Lagos Weekly Record* are often concerned with locally-circulating ideas about the value of travel and writing, even as they also sometimes draw on Western travel writing, colonial discourse or outsiders’ representations of Nigeria. Dynamics of privilege, representation, exoticism and otherness found in Western travel writing also exist in some Nigerian writing about travel, such as in the Lagos newspaper travelogues’ portrayals of uncivilised and cannibalistic fellow Nigerians (and Aedín Ní Loingsigh shows how “decontextualised generalizations and problematic assessments of cultural difference” have also been a feature of Francophone African intercontinental travel writing (174)). Moreover, the travel writers may have been influenced by European models of travel writing in the colonial tradition, as well as local precedents such as the diaries of Yoruba missionaries (Jones, “Writing Domestic Travel” 56-61). But at the same time, the travel writers are also preoccupied with local and regional intellectual and social networks they map through their travel accounts, with the production of locality and local knowledge. Although they engage with the colonial context they are often not deliberately “writing back” to the western travel writing tradition. In this sense, works such as the town histories and the 1920s newspaper travelogues epitomise the “paracolonial” (Newell, “Paracolonial Networks”), existing alongside the colonial sphere and interacting with it, “as a consequence of the British presence but not as its direct product” (*ibid.* 350).

At the same time, this domestic travel writing should not be considered “authentic,” “pure” or parochial, in comparison to writing more explicitly in dialogue with colonial literature or contexts. With increasingly sophisticated theorisations of transnationalism and globalisation developing over the 1980s, the “local” has been redefined through its connections to the world, so that cultures can be understood as “travelling cultures” (Clifford 17-39), or as relational, translocal nodes in the midst of global cultural flows which produce both globality and locality (Appadurai). Brian Larkin, amongst others, has importantly shown that transnational flows are not always from “the West” to “the rest”: Larkin’s work on cultural flows between northern Nigeria, India and the Middle East disrupts “the dichotomies between West and non-West, coloniser and colonised, modernity and tradition” (407). But there is further space for work on transnationalism and locality to consider that local or translocal flows and ideas constantly remake the local as much as transnational flows do.

Stephanie Newell argues that so-called colonial mimics in West Africa could be reconceived as “local cosmopolitans” who appear to have appropriated behaviours of the colonisers, but who perform them for “specific local ends that are not necessarily intelligible to colonial authors and onlookers”; “cosmopolitan style” can thus represent a way to “interact *within* the world of the ‘local’” (“Local Cosmopolitans” 110). This article is energised by a similar emphasis on diverse ways of being “local” within the colonial context, which may involve an intense and similarly performative openness to the world, and a sense of the heterogeneity of even nearby spaces. However, as Newell further suggests, “cosmopolitanism” itself is a loaded term, not least because it is often used in a way that is “so utopian, universalist and consensual” that it neglects historical and geographical specificities (*ibid.* 104). It is therefore necessary to historicise and contextualise forms of cosmopolitanism, and to understand the varied terms in which writers have expressed exteriority and knowledge of the world and difference, as existing research on the history of Yoruba inter-metropolitan cosmopolitanism (Adeyemi) and on the privileged place of outside knowledge in Yorubaland (Peel; Barnes) has shown. I suggest that in the Lagos newspaper travel writers’ encounters with the outside world, we can trace a further manifestation of cosmopolitanism revolving around (trans)local heterogeneity. This heterogeneity is manifest not just in the difference that Akintan and the *Lagos Weekly Record* writer find in even the nearby Yoruba-speaking region, or the exoticism that Thomas perceives in south-eastern Nigeria, but also in these writers’ portrayal of the regions they travel in as varied places, where there is always something new to learn, a different history, another language to speak and different ways of life to understand.

The study of domestic travel writing in Nigeria should therefore not be understood as attaching any kind of “authenticity” or “localness” to such writing, simply because it has been written by Nigerians instead of colonial travellers. Instead, this article has sought to emphasise the heterogeneity writers find within places they simultaneously produce as “local”, through depictions of difference

within the Yoruba-speaking region, or the perceived exoticism of south-eastern or northern Nigeria. Domestic travel narratives of this nature were published in a number of other West African newspapers in the early twentieth century, ranging from the then Gold Coast to Cameroon (Newell, *The Power to Name* 8-9; 175).<sup>15</sup> An exciting way forward for the study of travel writing lies in the heterogeneity of the intra-West African centres and peripheries that these travel narratives describe and produce, and the complexity of their networks and ideas about local, translocal and regional spaces.

## Notes

1. I would like to thank Professor Karin Barber for comments on earlier versions of this article, which derived from my doctoral thesis. I also thank all the colleagues involved in the Postcolonial Perspectives workshop, whose perceptive and constructive comments contributed greatly to this article. In addition, I gratefully acknowledge an Arts and Humanities Research Council Doctoral Studentship which enabled me to carry out the research for this article, and the European Research Council-funded project “Knowing each other: everyday religious encounters, social identities and tolerance in southwest Nigeria” (grant agreement no. 283466), based at the University of Birmingham and Oşun State University, which enabled me to revise the article.

2. Throughout this article I have used standard Yoruba orthography (including tones and sub-dots) on Yoruba words, with the exception of where quoted sources themselves do not use this orthography, as was often the case in the early Yoruba newspapers I discuss in this article. All translations from the Yoruba are my own, and the original Yoruba text is given in quotations, with idiosyncrasies of spelling, orthography and grammar retained.

3. See Jones “Writing Domestic Travel” and Jones “Nigeria is my Playground” for more detail on the nature and genesis of travel writing in southwestern Nigeria, including the interplay between Yoruba and English, and the relationship between travel writing as an established Western genre and locally-specific forms of travel writing in Nigeria. While we should not take for granted a universal genre of “travel writing,” this article focuses on travelogues in a form recognisable as such to readers of the Anglophone travel writing tradition, for instance in that they relate apparently real-life journeys in the first person.

4. Pratt defines autoethnography as “instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer’s terms ... in response to or in dialogue with ... metropolitan representations” (9; original italics).

5. Saros were ex-slave Sierra Leoneans or their descendants who had settled in Lagos and the hinterland, many of whom were of Yoruba descent. In the nineteenth century they had formed Lagos’s elite, and

though by the 1920s that elite was more diverse, they still maintained a distinctive culture based around Christianity and literacy. See Zachernuk (19-46) and Barber (*Print Culture* 13-17) on social divisions in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Lagos.

6. See Jones “The Benefits of Travel,” Jones “Writing Domestic Travel,” and Barber *Print Culture* for more detail on the Lagos newspapers of the 1910s-30s.

7. In fact, this is a reasonably large readership for the time, since many newspapers had smaller readerships, but I use the figure here to illustrate the relatively small size of readerships compared to late twentieth-century mass audiences. The “educated” African population (i.e. those who had the ability to read the newspapers) in Lagos Township in 1921 was estimated to be 10,000 people, 10% of the city’s population (Zachernuk 50).

8. References to newspapers are given in parentheses using the following abbreviations: *LS* – *Lagos Standard*; *EO* – *Eletì-Ọfẹ*; *AE* – *Akede Eko*; *NT* – *Nigerian Times*; *LWR* – *Lagos Weekly Record*. Full references are given in the list of works cited.

9. For a more detailed discussion of the growth of travel writing in the Lagos press, see Jones “The Benefits of Travel” 39-45.

10. “The Life-story of Me, ‘Sẹgilọla of the fascinating eyes,’ she who had a thousand lovers in her life” in Barber’s translation (Barber *Print Culture*); for brevity I refer to it henceforth as *Ìtàn Ìgbésí Ayé Èmi Sẹgilọlá*.

11. “Dewo,” which is taken from the Igbo greeting “ndewo,” is Thomas’s name for the local people, probably corresponding to the Igbo or Ikwerre people.

12. The trope of cannibalism has a long history. Ted Motohashi locates the origins of the term “cannibalism” in Columbus’s fifteenth-century encounter with the West Indies, though he notes that “is probably as old and widespread as human history and community” as a “normative representation of the transgressive Other” (85), while Spurr demonstrates how the trope was used to recall “the fear of being consumed by the object of conquest” (148). As Law notes, until recently human sacrifice (a distinct but related practice, in European thought at least) has formed “a central element in European images of black African societies,” and it “served to define the differences between African and European societies” (1).

13. Thomas Geider describes similar references to cannibalism (as well as to concern with travellers’ bodies, especially bodily hygiene) in at least four late nineteenth-century Swahili *habari* travelogues. But one of the travelogue authors explains that he is using cannibalism as a

metaphor for the way that the people of Zanzibar will “eat” a traveller’s money “when they see that someone does not know the language of Zanzibar” (52). I. B. Thomas’s reference to cannibalism is not explicitly metaphorical, but perhaps nonetheless draws on this power of cannibalism as a metaphor for the vulnerability of the traveller.

14. Compare this to a later travelogue, “Irin Ajo Mi Lati Eko Lo Silu Oba” by Taju Thompson, published in *Eleti-Ofe* in 1952, in which Thompson refers to himself and his companions as Nigerians and compares the UK to Nigeria, mentioning the word “Nigeria” thirteen times.

15. Thanks also to Emma Hunter (personal communication, 23 March 2014) for information about travel narratives in the early twentieth-century Francophone Cameroonian press.

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