

AN ANALYSIS OF TEXTUAL STYLES IN KEN SARO-WIWA'S PITA DUMBROK'S PRISON

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Abstract

This paper examines the textual styles employed by Ken Saro-Wiwa in his novel, Pita Dumbrok's Prison. The study asserts that textual style involves the collection of words and phrases in a work of art. Also, this article examines the stylishness of the novel in terms of its word order, sentence structure, language rules and grammar. Thus, this study is concerned with the organisational analysis of Saro-Wiwa's Pita Dumbrok's Prison. The novel is a story about Jeb's Prison. Jeb's is an island prison set up by the Organisation of African States and some Western nations as a correctional facility for the continent's political prisoners. Also, there appears to be a concerted determination by Saro-Wiwa to use contemporary English language as a means of communication that conveys the story easily to the reader. He purposefully uses lexical and grammatical structures present in the novel to uncover the role of Western nations in the socio-political and economic development in Africa. Thus, this study will among other things look at lexical and grammatical features, code-switching, uses the epistle technique, journey motif, and aporas of textual presentation present in the novel.

The style of any literary work embroils the writer's selection of words and phrases, and how the he unifies these words and phrases in sentences and paragraphs. Textual style "is the manner of linguistic expression in prose... The characteristic style of a work of a writer may be analysed in terms of its diction... its sentence structure and syntax..." (Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* 190 – 191). The stylishness of any novel must be fitting to the novelist, the circumstance and the poise of text. Correspondingly, a novel's style encompasses "lexical categories, figures of speech, and cohesion and context" (Leech and Short, *Style in Fiction* 75).

Therefore, this paper is set to study the textual styles employed by Ken Saro-Wiwa (1941-1995) in his presentation of *Pita Dumbrok's Prison* (1991).

Pita Dumbrok's Prison is the story of Jebes Prison. The Jebes Prison is "an elite prison set up by the Organisation of African States off Bar Beach, Lagos" (17). The building and financing of the prison is done by the Western nations. However, the Americans and the Europeans employ the services of the "goddess Imf" (50) to destabilise the Nigerian economy because of the refusal of the Nigerian government to handover the affairs of the prison to them. On her arrival in Nigeria, the goddess Imf "delivered herself of a billion eggs and soon, her children, Sap, filled the land. Without waste of time, the goddess Imf split them into seven Brigades" (70). They are: "Hunger, Disease, Brain Drain, Theft, Stagflation, Riot and Chaos" (70). Consequently, the novel reveals the conflictual position that exists between the Western nations and Nigeria. Also, there seems to be a concentrated effort by Saro-Wiwa to use modern English language as a means of expression that conveys the story easily to the reader. He deliberately uses lexical and grammatical features to expose the role of the Western powers in Africa in the novel. Thus, the language used in *Pita Dumbrok's Prison* is very modern. The passage below is an illustration of this point:

The Honourable Jane Billows noted the determination of the goddess and wished her godspeed. She told Imf that the lesson she was most anxious to teach the Nigerians was that government was a matter of economics simpliciter. They also had to know of her utter opposition to any government which presumed to run state enterprises. All such enterprises, she said, had to be privatised so that profit would be their guiding operational motive. She said she would be content if the goddess Imf was able to bring that message home to all Nigerians (69).

Lexically, the passage contains a large number of abstract nouns referring to political and economic systems. Examples of such abstract nouns are: "determination", "goddess", "lesson", "government", "matter", "economics", "opposition", "enterprises", "profit", "motive", "content" and "message". These abstract nouns are frequent in the passage than all other nouns. Also, the narrative is formal and intellectualised through the presence of these abstract nouns. Other nouns in the passage are common nouns ("state" and "home") indicating location, and proper nouns ("Jane Billows" and "Nigerians") referring to the entities which exist on political and economic levels. The proper nouns also indicate differences and otherness in the passage.

Verbs are also frequent in the passage. Some of the verbs are dynamic, referring to the action of the Honourable Jane Billows to enforce capitalism in Nigeria through the goddess Imf. Examples of such verbs are: "was", "know", "run", "teach" and "utter". Modal auxiliaries ("to" and "would") do occur in the passage to express the need for the practice of capitalism in Nigeria. Auditory verbs ("told" and "would") are used for creating emphasis. Other verbs are transitive verbs expressing action without the help of a direct object. Examples of such transitive verbs are: "presumed" and "privatised".

The passage also contains some number of adjectives. Examples of such adjectives are: "the", "Honourable", "noted", "most", "anxious", "which", "All", "such", "that", "operation" and "able". The function of the adjectives is to modify the nouns in the passage. In addition to

complement the verbs, the adjectives draw the reader's attention to the Honourable Jane Billows' position on capitalism: "All such enterprises, she said, had to be privatised..." (69).

Furthermore, there are some grammatical features in the passage. The passage consists of five sentences and the progression of sentence lengths in words is: 14-23-18-18-20. The first sentence has a compound sentence structure. This is because the sentence has two independent clauses and they share the same subject ("The Honourable Jane Billows"), and is joined by a coordinating conjunction ("and"). The text uses this sentence structure to avoid unwanted repetition. The second sentence has a simple sentence structure with a relative or adjectival clause ("that the lesson she was most anxious to teach the Nigerians was that government was a matter of economics simpliciter"). The function of this sentence structure is to modify the noun ("Imf"). Instead of ending the sentence with: "She told Imf", the author employs a relative clause to make it a long sentence.

The third sentence has a simple sentence structure, because of the presence of a relative clause ("which presumed to run state enterprises") in it. The function of the relative clause in the third sentence is to modify the noun ("government"). The fourth sentence has a complex sentence structure. This is because the sentence structure starts with an independent clause ("All such enterprises"), and is followed by a subordinate clause ("she said, had to be privatised so that profit would be their guiding operational motive") which is an adverbial clause of reason. The subordinate clause is modifying "had". Also the fourth sentence is a reported statement, because of the clause, "She said", which is referring to the "Honourable Jane Billows". The fifth sentence has a complex sentence structure, starting with an independent clause ("She said she would be content"), followed by subordinate clause ("if the goddess Imf was able to bring that message home to all Nigerians"). The subordinate clause in the fifth sentence modifies the verb, "would be content".

Therefore, the implication of analysing these lexical and grammatical features in the passage is that they present facts about the West in the text to the reader without alluring the reader's emotions directly. Also, Saro-Wiwa uses these stylistic features to create public reform. This is because *Pita Dumbrok's Prison* is a political novel. Like political novels, *Pita Dumbrok's Prison* "leans rather to ideas" than to "emotion" and the main purpose of presenting such novels is to create "public reform, or exposition of the lives of the personages who maintain government or of the forces which constitute government" (Spere, *The Political Novel* ix).

Pita Dumbrok's Prison also uses code-switching as a textual style. Code-switching is a term in dialectology that draws two or more grammatical methods in discussion. Code-switching means the simultaneous use of more than one language in discussion. It is a tactic in writing that reflects culture, identity and promotes solidarity (see, Greene and Walter, "Recommendations to Public Speaking Instructors for Negotiation of Code-switching Practices among Black English-Speaking African American Students" 435). Code-switching is a way of connecting cultural uniqueness in writing. For instance, there is an interspersion of the

Standard English and the Nigerian Pidgin English in the text when Chief Popa, an African inmate in Jeb's Prison says:

'God no gree bad thing!...

'I have no option but to protect the young Republic as much against Pita Dumbrok and against the Nigerian nation'.

Of course. Who can blame you, my Director, I mean, my Excellency?'

'So I am going to give him exactly what he planned for you and me and our young Republic.'

'Yes now? Who born dog after all?' (244).

The passage is a single language with different stylistic variations. Here, the text acquires an admixture of the Standard English and the Nigerian Pidgin English to bring down and clarify the medium of expression to a basic state. The implication of this is that the interspersion in the passage creates a restricted language system for the average Nigerian reader to understand that Chief Popa is praying to God for the protection of Jeb's Prison from "Pita Dumbrok" and "the Nigerian nation". Also, the passage reveals that Chief Popa is an inmate who is protecting the Director's interest in the prison.

Another textual technique in *Pita Dumbrok's Prison* is the use of satire. Satire is a work which pours scorn, stupidity or ridicule vices in humans. The technique of satire in a literary work is intended to expose and attack human wickedness and follies, and its institutions. According to M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, satire can be "described as the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn or indignation... a corrective of human vices and folly" (*A Glossary of Literary Terms* 320). Therefore, *Pita Dumbrok's Prison* is a political satire because it attacks the idea of neo-colonialism and military rule in Nigeria. Also, the text advocates freedom from all kinds of Western influences in Africa, especially the International Monetary Fund or its fictional representation as "the goddess Imf". The passage below illustrates this point:

The goddess Imf would get into Nigeria unless Jeb's Prison was produced quickly by the government...The news was bad all the way. The Minister of Finance got on the phone to Lagos and spoke to the President. He was ordered to inform the members of the Paris and London clubs, and particularly the British Government, that Nigeria had run out of paper and so no visa could be issued Imf to facilitate her visit to the country...

'She is being forced down our throat', complained the Honourable Minister. 'She will arrive, whether she has a visa or not'.

'Have you reminded them that the military are in power over here? We will not only defend our territorial integrity, we will crush all aggressors' (66).

This passage shows how the text attacks the goddess Imf, because she represents the idea of neo-colonialism. The technique of satire is used in the passage to show how the

International Monetary Fund (IMF) does not carry out its purpose, which is to promote international monetary assistance to ease the expansion on international trade. Also, the novel strongly shows its disapproval of the operations of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in post-colonial Africa through the Nigerian President's refusal to issue visa to the organisation to facilitate its visit to Nigeria. Thus, the text satirises the organisation as "goddess Imf". This helps the African reader to deconstruct role of the goddess Imf in the text.

Saro-Wiwa also attacks the Nigerian military for their intervention in Nigerian politics in the novel. At this point, satire is used to reveal irony in the text. For example, the belief that military intervention in politics will move the country forward because they are steadfast and discipline in their duties. Thus, they assume political power with the usual promise of stabilising the socio-political and economic structures of the country. Also, they see themselves as redeemers of the country. However, the "redeemers of the nation soon acquired a reputation for corruption and for wrong-footing their adversaries... Remaining in power had become an obsession for them" (77). The text therefore attacks the wrong motives of the military by revealing an objective evaluation of their inability to fulfil their political promises to the nation. The implication of this is that it helps the Nigerian reader to imaginatively reconstruct the political structure in Nigeria, after observing the weakness of the Nigerian military in the act or state of governing the nation.

Also, the novelist uses the epistle technique in describing the role of the West in the historical development of Africa. The epistolary technique is another form of first-person point of view. An example of epistle technique in the text is Pita Dumbrok's pamphlet which he titles: "Letter to my Compatriots". The pamphlet is Pita Dumbrok's story about the role of the West in the historical development of Africa. The letter has full quote marks of direct discourse. Pita Dumbrok starts the letter by addressing his readers as "Compatriots" (103). He goes further to write:

'Let us, for a start, ignore the act and consider that new society which, I believe, we all yearn for. Time future. Which cannot be without time present and time past? I read and thought a great deal of the latter during my incarceration in the dejected Prison. And I can hardly tell you the painful knowledge of the history of our race has been...' (104).

The passage is part of the introduction in the letter. The letter gives an overview of the history of colonialism in Africa. Here, Pita Dumbrok wants the reader to realise that reference to African history is very vital in the fight against colonialism and neo-colonialism. The epistle further reveals that the study of African history will help in the development of a new and prosperous Africa. Similarly, in *The African Imagination* (2001), F. Abiola Irele argues that "the historical experience in all its ramification thus serves as a constant reference for the African imagination" (ix). Therefore, the epistle technique in the text offers absolute reference in favour of Pita Dumbrok's role in the text. The implication of this is that it helps other characters within the text and the reader outside the text to make judgment for in favour of, or against the supposition in the letter. For example, Andizi and Biney decides to embark on a journey in search of Jeb's Prison after reading the pamphlet.

Another technique present in the text is the use of journey motif. *Pita Dumbrok's Prison* involves the journey to discover the location of Jeb's Prison. Thus, the structure of the plot is built around the journey motif. The journey structure in the text helps to transport the characters and the reader outside the text gradually into an imaginative world. The characters are put in motion, allowing their thoughts and actions to show what kind of people they are in respect to their quest for the prison island. The search for the location of Jeb's Prison becomes difficult because of the motives of the characters in the text. For the West, the quest for the prison means the rediscovery of a neo-colonial territory in Africa. While, the African characters believe that the rediscovery of Jeb's Prison signifies liberation from colonialism.

The journey motif technique also helps the reader to observe the use of contrast between Pita Dumbrok, and Andizi and Biney at the end of their quest for Jeb's Prison, along the Atlantic Ocean. In the course of his quest for the prison island, Pita Dumbrok discovers the location of the prison and published editorials about his findings about Jeb's Prison in the *Daily Messenger*. The text reveals that Pita Dumbrok becomes famous, because of his revelation about Jeb's Prison. On the other hand, the Atlantic Ocean "waves washed ashore and left stranded...Andizi's corps which was removed to the mortuary in a state of decomposition" (279). Also, the Nigerian authorities do not see Biney's body. Thus, Andizi and Biney die before realising their quest for the prison.

Saro-Wiwa also deploys the technique of Free Indirect Discourse, which involves both character's speech and the author's presentation. Free Indirect Discourse is a literary technique of third-person narration which uses the qualities of first-person direct speech. It involves a shift "from the narrator's voice to that of a character by means of direct citation, either of thoughts or openly expressed" (Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* 70). Thus, there is an absence of reporting clause ("He thought" or "He said") in the narration. Similarly, Michael J. Toolan argues that in Free Indirect Discourse, "it seems to be really the character, who speaks, but the speech appears embedded in the narrator's framing speech" (*Narrative* 125). An example of Free Indirect Discourse in the text is when Captain Ita introduces himself to the reader. Also, he describes the environment he finds himself as a prison to the reader:

I am Ita. Call me Captain Ita if you like. I don't care. I am in prison custody. I look around this cell and see the cobwebs, the darkness, the emptiness. But I don't care. I look into tomorrow and see nothing. No future... So I don't care. I am used to it (87).

The passage is a first-person narration by Captain Ita. The passage does not have the direct quote marks feature of direct speech. Here, we have the real author directly speaking to the real reader, under the facade of direct speech. This is because the passage opens the narrative part of Chapter 11, and yet it is preceded by an omniscient-narrative comment which presages Captain Ita's speech. The narration is interpreted relatively to two contexts: the utterance context which refers to the character's speech, and an embedded context which refers to the author's speech. Also, the "I" figure in the passage is the real author in the medium which is Saro-Wiwa speaking on behalf of Captain Ita.

The implication of Free Indirect Discourse in the passage is that the text uses the first-person narration to create a particular atmosphere and effect which accommodates the

characters viewpoints about themselves and their environment. This is because the author wants the reader to gain access into each character's motivation and manner of thinking in the text. Also, the technique of Free Indirect Discourse in the text helps the reader to relate the character's thought to the author's ideology or aesthetics, because both author and character are different entities. However, the passage reveals a contradiction between author and the text, because it disagrees with Saro-Wiwa's liberal authorial ideology, when the speaker says: "I look into tomorrow and see nothing. No future... So I don't care. I am used to it" (87).

The author also shows the use of aporias of textual presentation in the novel. The concept of aporia is derived "from the Greek word 'unpassable' path, a sense that lives up to its later paradoxical development" (Norris, *Deconstruction* 49). The French philosopher, Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), applies the concept of aporia in the study of literary texts to show what features of those texts which run counter to their structural unity or authorial intention. For Derrida, to accept a textual rendition without deconstructing its meanings is "to risk being interested in the figure itself to the detriment of the play going on within it metaphorically" (*Writing and Difference* 16). Thus, aporias reveal textual doubts, complexities and impassability of contradictory meanings. This is because each text deconstructs itself, by destroying its own theoretical basis into fragmented meanings.

The implication of the use of aporia in the text is not to destroy the authenticity of the text, but to help the reader to discover logical contradictions in the text. Also, an analysis of the logical contradictions in the text helps the reader to find out hidden layers of meaning. Therefore, the presentation of *Pita Dumbrok's Prison* reveals some contradictions with itself in its genre as a fictional work when the author writes: "All the characters in this book are fictional and bear no resemblance whatsoever to anyone dead or alive, known to the author" ("Author's Note"). This is because some characters and their actions in the text have clear semblance to real people and events in the socio-political development of post-colonial Nigeria. For example, the text portrays Professor as a magician who has "certain supernatural power" (195). Also, in Nigeria, we know that there was a famous magician known as Professor Abiola Peller in the 1980s and 1990s. The text presents Professor as one who "lectured the Director and others whenever he was called upon to do so, and he kept close watch on the true interest of the Prison" (117). Similarly, in the real Nigeria outside the text, Professor Peller was "a consultant to many influential people in the country, including some of our politicians and military leaders" (Udoeyop, "The Political Fiction of Ken Saro-Wiwa" 39). Another contradiction in the presentation of the character of Professor in the text is in his role as a magician, rather than a university teacher. This is because, the name or the title "Professor" is connected to books and knowledge, but Professor in *Pita Dumbrok's Prison* is associated with magic and crystal ball.

Another character in the text that has a resemblance to a real person outside the text is Miss Smuggle Kokane. The text depicted her as "a drug pusher, a comely young woman", who "had died in Police custody. Then it was rumoured that she had not died, but had been spirited away to Europe by some drug barons" (278). Here, the text contradicts itself as a fictional work, because it presents a factual story of what happened in Nigeria in the 1980s. We are familiar with the story of one Miss Gloria Okon, who was arrested at the Aminu Kano International Airport on April 22, 1985, for carrying cocaine. However, "in police custody she supposedly died

under controversial circumstance... A few months later, the whole country was thrown into frenzy when news started circulating that Gloria was found alive in Britain" (Mbeke-Ekanem, *Beyond The Execution* 29). Therefore, the portrayal of Miss Smuggle Kokane reveals an aporia in the text, because, instead of being an invented story, it is Saro-Wiwa's account of the Miss Gloria Okon saga in Nigeria.

Another resemblance of real life event in Nigeria in the text is how Babeena Baboona sends Miss Smuggle Kokane to deliver a parcel bomb to Pita Dumbrok in the heart of Lagos, because of his criticism of neo-colonialism and bad governance in Africa. The text also reveals that the parcel bomb kills Pita Dumbrok. However, this is Saro-Wiwa's account of the General Ibrahim Babangida and Dele Giwa saga in Nigeria in 1986. Dele Giwa, an editor-in-chief of the *Newswatch Magazine*, was killed by a parcel bomb because of his criticism of General Babangida's administration, at his Lagos home, on October 19, 1986. Dele Giwa's death was also linked to the Miss Gloria Okon saga. This is because Giwa "personally travelled to Britain to... interview Gloria in London and that when news of his interview got to the drug barons... an effort was launched to persuade Giwa not to publish anything pertaining to Gloria" (Mbeke-Ekanem, *Beyond The Execution* 29). However, he turned down their requests in spite of the pressure from the military authorities.

This article has shown that an analysis of textual styles in Ken Saro-Wiwa *Pita Dumbrok's Prison* exposes the role of Western nations in the socio-political and economic development in Africa in to the reader without tempting the reader's emotions unswervingly. This study looked at lexical and grammatical futures, code-switching, uses the epistle technique, journey motif, and aporas of textual arrangement in the novel. Also, the author uses these stylistic features in the text to create public reforms and these reforms help the Nigerian reader to imaginatively reconstruct the political structure in Nigeria, after noting the weakness of the political systems represented in the text. Thus, *Pita Dumbrok's Prison* creates a restricted language system for the average African reader to connect with the cultural uniqueness in African writing.

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