

**Dhaulagiri Journal of Contemporary Issues**

ISSN: 2990-7993

**Publisher:** RMC, Dhawalagiri Multiple Campus, Baglung**Greene's Quest for Seediness in *Journey Without Maps***Toya Nath Upadhyay , PhD

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**Abstract**

This paper examines Graham Greene's travel text, *Journey Without Maps* (1936/2010), so as to discover why Greene makes a quest for seediness, especially a primitive one. The study is drawn by Greene's paradoxical fascination to the seediness, which literally suggests the squalor or ugliness. But why does he like it? This is the major concern of the study. Using the concept, primitivism, that was frequently used by the Western travel writers to depict the non-Western peoples and their societies during the colonial era, the study analyzes and interprets the text, and claims that Greene's journey to the interior of Liberia is the journey of his escape from the contemporary seediness of civilization that he experiences in Britain into the seediness of primitivism that he supposes to find in Liberia where the civilization has comparatively a weaker grip upon human being. After the textual analysis, the study expects to add a new perspective to the critical reading of the Western texts written about the non-Western societies representing them as the primitive and uncivilized others.

**Keywords:** civilization, primitivism, seediness, West and non-West

**Introduction**

In 1935, Graham Greene receives financial support from the publisher, Heinemann, and sets out from London for an arduous trip through the remote part of Africa along with his cousin, Barbara Greene, four servants and twenty-six bearers. Beginning from the London pier, he visits Sierra Leone, the interior of Liberia and the capital city of Monrovia. However, the main destination of his interest is Liberia where he wants to experience primordial seediness which he expects to be different from the seediness of civilization that he has experienced at home in London. Greene encapsulates vivid details of his varied experiences and observations including the seediness that he received during his three-month-long journey across these West African destinations in *Journey Without Maps* which he publishes in 1936.

Greene's quest for seediness in the interior of Liberia is of prime interest here in this study. Why is Greene interested in seediness, which has which has literally a negative connotation? Why does he compare the seediness of civilization with that of primitivism? This study attempts to find the solution to these questions. For the analytic purpose, the study uses the trope of primitivism which is the antithesis of civilization. This is the term that is

frequently used by Western travellers to depict non-Western peoples and societies as their binaries. The study argues that Greene, being tormented by the negative consequences of civilization, which he takes as seediness of civilization, such as violence, alienation and fragmentation, wishes to retreat to the primordial seediness such as naivety, placidity and naturalness, which he believes less severe and existing in the indigenous societies of the Liberian interior.

**Critical Responses**

Greene's *Journey Without Maps* has received various responses from various scholars. Most of them revolve around his parallel journey: physical and psychological, which Greene himself has stated in the book as: "It is not the fully conscious mind which chooses West Africa in preference to Switzerland" (p. 8). Greene is going to Africa, not for geographical exploration or sightseeing rather for a mental exploration. Tim Butcher in his foreword to the 2010 edition of *Journey Without Maps* depicts Greene's two journeys as:

In essence, it is a book of two journeys. The first is the genuinely arduous trek Greene made through remote Africa. . . . The second . . . a metaphysical trip searching inside himself for private

**Article information****Manuscript received:** 5 June, 2023**Accepted:** 24 June, 2023

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ideas and memories of quintessential importance (pp. viii-ix).

Obviously, Greene makes a double journey simultaneously which has drawn the attention of most of critics.

Youngs (2019) points out that *Journey Without Maps* consists of double journey: psychological to the unconscious and physical to the West African interior. He writes, "Greene's *Journey Without Maps* (1936), overtly influenced by Freudianism, constructs a parallel journey between the unconscious and the West African interior" (p. 129). Travel writers' works like this, for Youngs, have stretched travel writing to the modernist style of writing. Similar to the idea of Youngs, Blanton (1997), quoting Samuel Hynes's term "a dual plane work," conforms Greene's double journey that the book incorporates. Besides physical journey into nature, Blanton sees Greene's journey into his self. She writes, "For Greene, however, this trip provides an opportunity for another, more personal journey in which the journey itself is transformed into a metaphor for psychological introspection" (p. 60). Blanton also contends the very psychological dimension of the book helped modern travel writing achieve the status as a literary genre.

Korte (2000) also finds Greene's double journey in the book: "Greene's text makes this parallel between outward journey and inner journey into the subconscious" (p. 141). This double journey, according to Korte, is the expression of the alternative way to or escape from the lifelessness and constriction at home. Like the critics just mentioned above, Kennedy (2015) depicts Greene's parallel journey between the physical and the psychological. She writes, "Much of *Journey Without Maps* explores Liberia and Greene's psyche creating parallel between Africa, the narrator's childhood, and the childhood of the human race" (p. 48). But unlike them, Kennedy argues that the book conforms the masculinist tradition of travel writing. Another scholar, Cooke (2016) explains Greene's exterior journey to Liberia to be motivated by inner desires. He notes, "Greene twins an exterior journey—a four-week visit to Liberia—with a psychoanalytically probing inner journey" (p. 20). According to Cooke, Greene's exterior journey is a metaphor for the journey into himself, his memory and his childhood. Similarly, Blake (1991) also has the same comment on Greene's double journey. She notes, "*Journey Without Maps* has become the modern paradigm of the journey into Africa as a journey into the self" (p. 191). After all, all the critics mentioned here conform to the underlying double journey of Greene in his text, *Journey Without Maps*.

As discussed above, different scholars have given their views on Greene's *Journey Without Maps*

relating his physical journey to the psychological one. They have pointed out that while making an external journey to Africa, Greene simultaneously makes an internal journey into himself, his childhood memories and the past of England. But Greene's quest motive for the primitive seediness has remained still under-researched. Hence, this study concentrates on this issue.

### Conceptual Base

In travel writing, the term, primitivism, has been a useful trope for Western travel writers to represent non-Western peoples and their societies in their written or visual works. It has a long history but it has been widely used since the sixteenth century along with the beginning of the European colonization in the New World. Loingsigh (2019) delineates about this as:

Primitivism has a long history. Its beginnings as a distinctive discourse, however, are more widely associated with early-modern encounters between European explorers and the New World... . [and] primitivist figures began to feature heavily in textual and visual representations of the non-European Other. (p. 202)

The early colonizers employed the term primitivism in their textual or visual works to show the non-Western peoples and societies discursively as their other. Contrasting their own evolutionary state with that of the non-Westerners, they believed theirs to be civilized whereas that of the non-Westerners to be primitive.

Primitivism broadly suggests the state of human being, which is supposed to be "wild," 'savage,' 'unrefined' or 'natural'" as Loingsigh indicates (p. 202). But it has also been a subject of malaise for them since it does not only represent the non-West as the primitive other but it also mirrors their anxieties about their "own pasts and futures" (Loingsigh, p. 204). It is so because primitivism has been associated with two opposite connotations: negative and positive. Primitivism with a negative connotation is associated with those non-Western peoples who are misconceived as cannibalistic, barbaric and morally depraved savages. The Westerners, fearing such kinds of savages, thought of taming them. So, they attempted to control them through colonization. Positive connotation of primitivism shows the non-Western people in a state of purity, authenticity and innocence. These peoples are eulogized as noble savages, whose simple and unrestricted lifestyles heavily attract the Westerners who have already lost such lifestyles due to civilizational progress and so they wish to have the same. Regarding this, Loingsigh remarks, "This enduring association of primitivism with simple lifestyles indicates how the concept becomes a

repository for Europeans seeking to salvage uncorrupted qualities that have been lost in the name of progress and modernity” (p. 203). The simple lifestyle of the primitive peoples unencumbered by civilization instigates the Westerners to think of their own past and future lives. They wish to retreat to the simple, placid, happy and uncorrupted lifestyle of the primitive peoples.

If civilization is the human stage of cultural and social progress through scientific and technological advancement, primitivism is its antithesis; it is the state of undevelopment. Primitivism is closely connected to seediness which literally means squalid, unorganized and unfavorable condition. But if the booms of civilization fail to bring expected outcomes to the benefit of human beings, the so-called civilized human society turns back to the seediness featured by violence, destruction, terror, alienation, depression and so on. Especially, after the horrible consequences of the First World War, Western society has experienced such seediness. To escape the seediness at home, many writers travelled to primitive societies for “primitivism, vitality, freedom, paganism and ancient wisdom” (Whitfield, 2011, p. 254). Whitfield calls this movement in travel writing a “new primitivism” characterized by “physical harshness, alien landscape, dissolved identities . . . paralleling the psychological void” (p. 251). Graham Greene is one of the writers of new primitivism. He escape his civilized society in order to search for the primitive seediness in the wild interior of Africa. Travelling through the unspoiled villages and jungles of Liberia, Greene wishes to observe the primitive seediness that is associated to his psychological state. He wants to contemplate upon the pasts of himself, of his society and of the whole human race.

### **Searching for the Uncorrupted Past in the Interior of Liberia**

Graham Greene wishes to experience the primitive seediness to counteract the fragmentation and alienation brought about by the seediness of the so-called civilized modern world. He wants to make a psychological journey to his childhood memories, alternatively to his own heart of darkness, and to the past of his nation when it was not corrupted by the negative aspects of modernity and civilization. He wants to feel the seediness that reminds him of the past or “the sense of nostalgia for something lost. It seems to represent a stage further back” (p. 9). For this, he makes an arduous journey in the hinterlands of Liberia, still uncolonized and unmapped by the Westerners.

Liberia is a country founded on land purchase by the American Colonization Society in 1821 for the purpose of settling the freed slaves from the United

States. It received independence in 1847, promulgated its constitution in the style of the American constitution and began the blacks’ self-government. The liberated Americo-Liberians settled along the coast of the capital city of Monrovia, whereas the native blacks lived in the interior outside the direct government rule. The liberated Americo-Liberians had been influenced by civilization whereas the natives not. Greene talks of the absence of civilization as: “Civilization stopped within fifty miles of the coast” (p. 48). Unfortunately, this liberated Westernized Liberians gradually began to gaze at the native blacks in the fashion of the white colonialists. They encroached on the land of native people, waged wars against them, imposed high taxes, raped females, and even enslaved many of them. These mimic-men of white colonialists, according to Greene, “have been touched by civilization, have learnt to steal and lie and kill” (p. 212). Along with the progress of civilization, they also brought seediness in the societies of the peaceful native blacks. Fussell (1980) also criticizes them for their seedy behaviors: “self-conscious primping sexuality, rapacity, aggression, bad faith” (p. 65). One of the motives of Greene to go to Liberia is to observe this seediness brought about by civilization and colonization which Greene vehemently criticizes.

Despite intermittent encroachments of the liberated Westernized Liberians and Christian missionaries, the interior of Liberia has remained unencumbered by the deleterious impacts of Western civilization. Although the villages are seedy in its literal sense of squalor, they are exempt from the seediness of civilization. Only the exterior parts of it are impacted: “Everything ugly is Freetown is European” (p. 26). In the interior villages, Greene detects no sign of industrial achievements or civilizational progress. There is not even a watch to measure and record time. Time passes naturally. Greene mentions:

I was vexed by the delay at Kailahun. I had not yet got accustomed to the idea that time, as a measured and recorded period, had been left behind on the coast. In the interior, there was no such thing as time. (p. 53)

There is still a simple and unrestrained lifestyle. The natives are enjoying their cultures perfectly in their own style, which Greene appreciates. For example, in Zigita, he observes the Bull Devil’s performance. The Bull Devils, who are also priests, perform religious functions wearing skirts and masks. They perform the scarification function for boys and girls who are about to complete their school level. Greene writes:

In Zigita it is quite easy to believe there are men in Buzie country who can make lightning. The use of lightning is little more than a

postgraduate course to be taken when the ordinary initiation of the bush school is over (p. 123).

These priests prepare the graduate students into adulthood by scaring them through the performance of making lightning. The students simultaneously fear and revere the devils for they recognize them to be priests despite looking like devils.

Greene observes one scarification function of the Bull Devil in Zigita. It makes him feel unwell for a while as it triggers his past memory: "I never felt quite well again until I reached the Coast. It was not that I believed in the devil's power so much as in the power of my mind" (p. 129). This event reminds him of his childhood memory when he was scared by Gagool, an evil witch character from Haggard's *King's Solomon's Mines*. Gagool remained in his unconscious since then, whom he always desired to meet her somewhere in the bush of Africa. It, as Blanton (1997) views, connects him "to a specific sense of childhood fear . . . [which] is intimately bound to pleasure" (p. 64). Now after observing the performance, he believes to have witnessed Gagool himself in the form of Bush Devil and feels both fear and pleasure. He discloses this fact in his later work, "The Lost Childhood" (1966), as:

Once I came a little nearer to Gagool and her witch-hunter, one night in Zigita on the Liberian side of the French Guinea border, when my servants sat in their shuttered hut with their hands over their eyes and someone beat a drum and a whole town stayed behind closed doors while the big bush devil moved between the huts . . . Gagool I could recognize—didn't she wait for me in dreams every night in the passage by the linen cupboard, near the nursery door? (p. 15)

In fact, Greene is reminded of his childhood fear by the performance of the Bush Devil. Further, Greene is also reminded by this event of the fears the students of public schools in London experience. Regarding this, he writes in *Journey Without Maps*: "The school and the devil who rules over it are at first a terror to the child. It lies as grimly as a public school in England between childhood and manhood" (p. 78). The condition of the British students does not differ from that of the Liberian students. After all, Greene's wish to revisit his past memories gets fulfilled through the observation of the indigenous performance.

Greene has been drawn to the seediness in Liberia by the public media and mostly by the British Government Blue Book. The British and American media reported of crimes, massacres, forced slavery and so on taking place in Liberia. Thacker (2002) clarifies this point in these words: "In the 1920s and

1930s Liberia came to the attention of the European and US media because of a series of reports by the League of Nations into allegations of slavery, forced labor and massacres of certain tribes" (p. 12). Additionally, the British Government Blue Book describes various kinds of cruelties, sufferings and agonies that the natives are experiencing. Greene quotes from it as:

The rat population. . . . The absence of any attempt by the government, not only to take effective steps to control yellow fever or plague. . . . The majority of all mosquitoes. . . . Altogether forty-one villages have been burnt. . . . As far as is known, the principal diseases in the interior include elephantiasis, leprosy, yaws, malaria, hookworm, schistosomiasis, dysentery, smallpox and nutritional conditions. In the whole country, there are only: two doctors in Monrovia. . . . The Government can kill all the people of Sasstown and all the tribes of the Kru Coast. . . . (p. 6)

This is a horrific picture that the British Government Blue Book has painted of Liberia. It has scandalized negative impression about Liberia that there is a rampant prevalence of seediness that ranges from harmful creatures like rats, and mosquitoes to burning of the villages to different kinds of diseases to the cruel execution of the native tribes by the Government. Yet, Greene anticipates primitive simplicity, honesty and naivety in the Liberian interior, and so he makes a plan to visit.

Greene was also fascinated to the seediness of Africa since his childhood. As a child, he read adventure sources such as "Boys Own" stories, Kipling's writings, Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and so on. These sources left an impression in him of Africa as a primitive land of simplicity, innocence and purity but dark, dangerous and fearful with creatures like the witch Gagool. The image of Africa has been imprinted in his unconscious. He explains, "Africa has always seemed an important image. . . . It has represented more than I can say" (p. 8). Africa is inexplicable for him since it is not in his conscious mind. It is mysterious. His unconscious mind chooses Africa in preference to Switzerland: "The motive of a journey deserves a little attention. It is not the fully conscious mind which chooses West Africa in preference to Switzerland" (p. 8). More interestingly, Greene asserts that a place "where the white settler has been most successful in reproducing the condition of his country, its moral and its popular arts" cannot remain in the unconscious (p. 8). A place fully reproduced by colonization and civilization has no room in his unconscious. But Liberia not being reproduced by the

whites or white settlers takes a place in his unconscious.

Many of the writers of the interwar years expressed their discontent with civilization. They wished to escape into primitive environment away from the humdrums and threats of civilization that brought disillusion about human achievements and values. The terrifying consequences of the First World War brought a sense of despair, alienation and fragmentation in civilized world. Korte (2000) sheds light on this issue as: "Following the First World War and the experience of radical discontinuity which it entailed, the urge to escape from a civilization at home whose values were increasing called into question becomes a dominant theme in British travel writing" (p. 138). Travel writers looked for a personal quest into the primitive society as well as into their own psyche. For most of them, Africa was a mythic place for this purpose. For Greene, it was Liberia that best suited to his psyche.

In the land of his unconscious, that is the Liberian interior, Greene is hopeful of recalling the historical point of time when the Western world went astray from the normal course of humanity into brutality and destruction. He writes:

. . . when one sees to what unhappiness, to what peril of extinction centuries of cerebration have brought us, one sometimes has a curiosity to discover if one can from what we have come, to recall at which point we went astray. (p. 9)

Greene is serious about the unhappiness and peril of extinction that the celebration of the Western world, alternatively enlightenment and civilization, has brought in modern times.

To his luck, later, in a village, Greene happens to actually experience the primitive seediness. He feels of being reawakened there with a hope in human nature. He believes of the worth of his journey. He mentions, ". . . the whole journey was worthwhile: it did reawaken a kind of hope in human nature. If one could get back to this bareness, simplicity, instinctive friendliness, feeling rather than thought, and start again. . ." (p. 180). Greene is quite sure that the primitive seediness has something to teach modern civilized people about living with true human nature and values.

Finally, Greene thinks that it is a high time to discover that point of derailment and correct it for the happy and peaceful existence of whole human race. For him, Liberia is a suitable place which represents the counterpoint of Western civilization. Untainted by civilization, Liberia, Greene hopes, can afford primitive energy for regenerating the corrupted, paralyzed and disturbed Western psyche. His text, as Youngs (2013) argues, "testifies to our continued

fascination in the twenty-first century with the primitive" (p. 110). The "our" in the quotation refers to the Western people. In fact, Greene's text prefers primitivism to civilization.

### Conclusion

Finally, Greene makes a physically arduous journey to the hinterland of Liberia in search of primitive seediness. He experiences this seediness in the squalid villages of Liberia, which is different from the seediness of the civilized society at home. Despite intermittent attacks from the Coastal Westernized Liberians, the native peoples are living their simple, innocent and free lifestyles in their own ways. This lifestyle contrasts with that of the Westerners who are living in a state of fear, alienation and fragmentation, especially after the horrible First World War. Greene takes this kind of state as the seediness of civilization. His external journey to Liberia parallels with his internal journey to his own psyche. While traversing through the villages and jungles in the inner part of Liberia, his childhood imaginations come true. He reaches the kind of Africa that he read in adventure books. He also encounters the devil Gagool in the form of the Bush Devil. Liberia turns out a perfect place for him to learn about patching up the tormented and unstable modern self with a more primitive and instinctive way of life. It appears to be a stage from where the modern self can commence an investigation into the loss of true human values and work for the correction.

### Declarations

#### Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

I declare that this research/review was conducted ethically.

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