Prodigality and the Land in Selected Poems of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo and Tanure Ojaide

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Abstract
There exists a strand of tension between a migrant's homeland and his land of immigration. The tension results in a migrant's re-evaluation and re-configuration of both the homeland and the diaspora simultaneously. The burden of the phenomenon which affects the psyche and humanity of the migrant who attempts to negotiate existence and find the self in two worlds has received lean critical attention, especially in poetic criticism. This paper, "Prodigality and the Land in Selected Poems of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo and Tanure Ojaide", is an attempt to uncouple vagaries of the migration and return tensions as recreated by the poets under study. Prodigality becomes both topical and an ecocritical grammar for the poets' recreation of the migrant's search for a greener pasture which finally has a slender body that shrinks over time. Hinging on the principles of Postcolonial Ecocriticism and Psychoanalysis, the paper postulates that migration is a site of struggle and the migrant a split-personality, who migrates for the purpose of finding a healing from his indigenous homeland which at the present time seemingly lacks the ingredients of home; but in the new settlement sets in a new longing for the original homeland, in a prodigal fashion. Such longing for home keeps a migrant on constant journeys as an antidote for the migrant's homesickness and an attempt to re-establish connection with one's homeland. While the phenomena leave a question mark on the abode of greener pastures, the paper is an attempt at further illuminating the postcoloniality of prodigality as a dominant literary (poetic) strategy in the problematization of migration and return tensions. "Lost in Limbo," "Homeland Call," "Far from Home," and "A Stranger in a Foreign Land" are taken from Adimora-Ezeigbo's collections while "The Immigrant Voice," "Drinking and Thirsting," "A Long Journey" and "Another Journey" are taken from Ojaide's collections.
Key words: migration, postcolonial ecocriticism, psychoanalysis, prodigality.

Introduction

From Christopher Okigbo's "The Passage" (1975) to Elizabeth Bishop's "A Prodigal" (1979), allusion to the 'prodigal,' found in a Biblical account, has served thematic and stylistic functions, especially in poetic literature. Thematically, the 'prodigal' sees a need to gather the wealth that belongs to him from his homeland for emigration to a foreign land of imagined better opportunities. Over time, the 'prodigal' becomes disillusioned with the new place; new life, and the new self that result from the migration phenomenon. The present reality compels the 'prodigal' to look back homewards and to weigh the two worlds, life and living in the balance. The migration phenomenon thus becomes a site of struggle and of ambivalence for the 'prodigal' who, finally, favours the homeland. Prodigality as style, therefore, becomes the process of utilizing the sense of the 'prodigal' to chart a course, as it were, in "Migration Literature" (Frank, 2008, p. 2), especially in representing its inherent tensions and contradictions. The tensions in the migration and return phenomena, according to Feldner, are "fundamental" (2019, p. 2). The paper therefore is a further problematisation of the fundamental tensions that exist first between realities in the homeland of the intended migrant and imagined possibilities in the intended host land; between the homeland and the foreign land, and finally between the homeland and the immigrant.

Realities of the homeland are the socio-cultural (taste and fashion), economic, religious, ecological and political phenomena which are familiar to the intended migrant and which form or shape the personality of the migrant. On the other hand, realities of the foreign land are the socio-cultural (taste and fashion), economic, religious, ecological and political phenomena which are strange to an immigrant and thus run counter to the ingredients of the migrant's personality. In time, the migrant comes face-to-face with realities of the foreign land. The theoretical framework of Postcolonial Ecocriticism helps the paper to situate the intended migrant, recreated in the works of the selected poets, as he weighs in the balance (while in the homeland) his/her perception of realities of the homeland and the configurations of the presumed possibilities of the diaspora. Also, the theory helps in the interrogation of what becomes of the immigrant as he comes face-to-face with realities of the land of immigration. The paper thus unearths the tension that exists between the migrant's homeland and his hostland. Postcolonial ecocriticism also helps in guiding the paper's interrogation of the communion and communication between the immigrant and the homeland. Such interaction, the paper maintains, is at the root of the return phenomenon in "migration literature" (Frank, 2008, p. 2), even as migrants "travel back and forth often" (Castles, 2014, p. 5). Such constant journey, which at first is psychological and sometimes physical contributes to the split-personality of the migrant.

Postcolonial ecocriticism is a broad theory that fuses some tenets of postcolonialism and ecocriticism due to their discursive relatedness (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010). In sum, postcolonial ecocriticism studies place and place-consciousness (Dreese, 2002, p. 115), entitlement and belongingness, including the cultural politics of representing formerly colonized people and their environment (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010, pp. 78, 119). To this end, Dreese maintains that "a sense of place [place-consciousness] invariably involves differentiating that place from others and knowing [becoming familiar with] its particularities" (2002, p. 115). The paper, through this principle, interrogates the re-creation of the personae's place-consciousness by the poets under study and how such consciousness affects their place in the migration and return tensions. Huggan and Tiffin assert that entitlement and belongingness carry the sense of an inalienable bond between a person or people and a particular land (2010, p. 82, 119). The theory thus accounts for the response of the homeland and the immigrant to such inseparable union between them and the place of such a union in the migration and return

conflicts. This work advances that "the desire for physical … gratification," as David Willbern would say (*Literary Theory,* 158), and the coming to terms with the 'reality principle' are behind migrants' dreams or psychological journeys and responses to the pull and counter-pull forces of the migration and return phenomena. The paper thus accounts for the restlessness of the poet persona in the face of reconciling the self in two worlds as recreated by the poets under study.

The imperative of migration as a norm, no longer as an anomaly in the globalized world consolidates the need for a re-thinking and a re-interrogation of associated issues such as home, identity and belongingness (Frank, 2008, p. 1). Migration is triggered by a wide range of issues which have been grouped as push-and-pull factors of migration (Cooper, 2008; Castles, Haas & Miller, 2014; Emenyonu, 2016, & Feldner, 2019). Factors in the homeland of a person that combine to make one to intend emigration and factors (conditions) imagined and believed to be available in another land, which believe triggers emigration are the push and pull factors of migration, respectively. However, the paper identifies a third factor, the counter-pull force of homeland-call. This factor accounts for "the travel back and forth" of migrants (Castles, Haas & Miller, 2014, p. 5) in the migration and return ladder. The counter-pull force of the homeland is similar to Feldner's assertion that the migrants, as recreated, "are torn between trying to build an existence in the new country and still feeling the gravitational pull of their homeland" (2019, p. 203). Feldner's position above is on the subject matter of migration and return tensions. By "torn between…" (p. 203) Feldner pitches on the encumbrances the self is subjected to as it manages to fit into two worlds. By "gravitational pull of their homeland" Feldner privileges the unstoppable success of the homeland in influencing the return of the migrant to itself, and leaving the migrant with no choice but a physical return to the homeland. There lies the difference with Feldner's "gravitational pull of their homeland" (p.203) and the counter-pull force of the homeland-call that this paper projects. As will be exemplified shortly from the selected poems, the subterraneous voice of the homeland gradually counteracts the propensity of the hostland in further keeping the migrant and in infusing the migrant with the ability to weigh in the balance (once more) the realities of the diaspora and the homeland.

The construct of home is both general and specific depending on context. To the internal migrant, the home is one's specific traditional locale or cultural environment. But the international migrant may construe one's continent as home. So, a Nigerian immigrant in Asia or Europe could speak of Africa as home. However, Atilade (2021) who engages the idea of home on the scale of globalization argues against the permanence of a home in a particular geographical and cultural space (p. 45). He further argues that given family and group migrations, local customs survive in the diaspora making for the possibility of home for the immigrants in it (p. 64). This paper argues that local cultures survive or live in the minds and hearts of not only family or group migrants but all migrants since none lives apart of one's culture. But it is not realistic for any local culture to be rooted in the diaspora. It is the reality of the rootlessness of one's culture in the diaspora that pricks the psyche of migrants so they begin to consider a return home – the root of their personality (Olaoluwa, 2009, p. 181; Akingbe, 2014, p. 33).

Closely related to the issue of home in the migration phenomenon is identity formation. Sadek (2013) aligns Olaoluwa (2009) and Nwagbara (2010) to assert that the migrant, as recreated, is plagued by identity crisis, "a sense of loss and longing for home" (2013, p. 90). What seems to be a middle ground in the migration and identity tension is Odueme's categorization of "true identity" and "new identity" (2017, p. 5). Odueme concludes that the unique identity of the African migrant, as recreated, is "anchored on African cultural and

traditional systems" (p.10). Therefore, the migrant's awareness that the cure of his identity crisis is found in his homeland propels his return to the homeland.

Cousins and Dodgson-Katiyo maintain that the language of the tensions in migration and return fills with "distress and disgust" (2016, p. 2) which are smacks of prodigality in both thematic and stylistic uses. It is the language of distress which signals a sense of loss, disappointment, and a coming to terms with what one's present stifling conditions are and the language of disgust of one's decision to emigrate, and of one's present circumstances and of the self that this paper engages in the selected poems.

Prodigality in the Poems under Study

Adimora-Ezeigbo and Ojaide – poets who straddle Nigeria and the diaspora – utilize the sense of the prodigal to chart a thematic and stylistic course of the inherent tensions in the migration and return ladder in their selected migration poems. Prodigality is used here in the migration and return experience to refer to a coming to sudden awareness of the encumbrances with the life and living of a migrant including the realities of aberrations in the foreign land in comparison with life and living in the migrant's homeland and a strong desire to return to the homeland. Prodigality takes a strong hold in the Biblical account of 'the prodigal son' (Luke 15:11-32, New World Translation, 2013) who, after a wasteful life and living in an exile land, came to his senses of the abundance in his fatherland and returned to reunite with his kith and kin. A sense of the prodigal as an eco-poetic thematic and literary device is traceable in the selected works of the poets under study.

Prodigality finds expression, thematically and stylistically, as Adimora-Ezeigbo paints a portraiture of the discordant personality of the persona abroad and her search for wholeness that only comes from a return to and reunion with the homeland. In "Lost in Limbo" (2010. P. 69-61), a poem that topicalizes the acknowledgement of the persona's predicament in a foreign land from its title, Adimora-Ezeigbo employs the prodigal motif to accentuate the psychological trauma that becomes imminent in the migration and return phenomena. The predicament comes alive in the rhetorical question "When shall I see you again? / To walk the pathways of my motherland" (p. 60). In addition to her quest to renew her alliance with her homeland, the desire to feed from the natural abundance at home pulls the persona homewards, in a prodigal fashion. She queries: "When again view your hallowed visage / Suck succulent sun-ripened fruit / Oozing like lactating breasts / I, prodigal, clutching leftovers- / Like a castaway – / From the master's table (p. 60). The beauty of the prodigal literary device is its propensity to achieve a one hundred percent turn-around from an earlier positive and/ or negative configuration of the both the foreign and homeland, respectively. Therefore, Adimora-Ezeigbo artistically delineates the homeland, despite its dispossessions, as the abode of greener pastures which search propels migration. The produce of the homeland "Oozing like lactating breasts" (p. 60) signifies the uniqueness of the homeland in nurturing humanity.

A similar strand runs through in "Homeland Call" (2010, pp. 71-4), where Adimora-Ezeigbo's persona urges other migrants to let go of 'passivity,' 'indecision' and their "enduring moments" in the diaspora for a return to the homeland (p.74). Adimora-Ezeigbo uses the device to emphasize the reciprocal nostalgia that exists between the migrant and the homeland over their severity. Therefore, "homeland call" becomes the subterraneous voice of the migrant's indigenous land, which "rings a note," urging her to return for a reunion with the homeland. It accentuates the inseparable bond between a people and their land. Therefore, reciprocal nostalgia becomes the response of both the land and the migrant against the

severance of their alliance by migration. Furthermore, Ezeigbo's "Far from Home" (2022, p. 47) which appears under the section *Migration Songs* recounts the experience of a persona in East Linton, Scotland, as she confronts a strange weather condition which fills her with "insane thoughts / And unrelenting morbid musings" (p. 47). The unexpected extreme cold of the morning culminates to a "gloomy" morning in the worldview of the immigrant. The unexpected discomforts of the diaspora compel her to weigh her homeland and East Linton on the balance, as it were, in a prodigal fashion. The title "Far from Home" portends an acknowledgement of a drift from the homeland and a looking back at the homeland with some sense of nostalgia.

The impossibility of the persona to belong to the land of immigration comes when the persona sees indigenous people of East Linton "Horse-riding/jumping, girted in gray and long coats" (p. 47) when she freezes in cold. This is because the ecological condition of East Linton has become part and parcel of the humanity of the indigenous dwellers. Spurred on by experience and by the memory of the homeland, she explodes:

> Gracious God, were I to make a wish
> In this hour of clashing/conflicting expectations
> I would you let me walk backwards
> Straight into my lover's arms.
> Would he ever love me again? (p. 47).

The poet persona seeks for immediate return to her homeland to regain her humanity. The persona's language fills with self-pity and ambivalence as she is caught up in the web of "Clashing/conflicting expectations" (p. 47). By this recreation Adimora-Ezeigbo indexes the inseparability of one's humanity/personality from one's cultural place.

Adimora-Ezeigbo (2022) also deploys the plotting strategy of prodigality in "A Stranger in a Foreign Land" (p. 49-50). The persona tells of her dreaded experience of "cold raging winds" in a foreign land (p. 49). The persona enters a battle for survival with the weather. She asserts: "I brace up, dreading the cold raging winds, / Ready to defend myself, to protect my chest. / The air is brittle like a twig in the harmattan. / Then the rain comes down in sheets, as sharp as razor, / I am badly dressed, wearing the wrong clothes". (p. 49). She is vulnerable in the circumstance for she is on the "wrong clothes" (p. 49). The tone of lamentation and helplessness is emblematic of prodigality. She misses home where the ecological reality defines her humanity – "At home, neither thunderstorm nor harmattan kills" (p. 49). The binary opposition is a privileging of the persona's homeland. The persona decries the dispossession of her homeland as the factor that triggers her migration and its resultant endangerment. She spells out the dilemma of reconciling the self in two worlds when she laments: "I want to go back, yet I want to stay - / Big dilemma: up is not reachable, down is unstable" (pp. 49-50). The migrant, thus bears restlessness as a trade mark in the migration and return experience. An inner voice of reason – the subterraneous voice of homeland-call – pulls the migrant persona "with sumptuous delight," as Ezeigbo would say in another poem (2013, p. 37), and a visage of the abundance at home of what has become none-existent, or at best scarce, for him in the diaspora. Consequently, the migrant persona fills with discomfiture in the manner of the prodigal. As the migrant's Utopia of the diaspora gradually fades away with experience, he confirms the humanity of the homeland as against the inhumanity of the diaspora. He submits: "True, home is freer than the land of the free that enslaves" ((2018, p. 87). Accordingly, true freedom is a preserve of the homeland.

The topicality of prodigality resonates in Ojaide's Pidgin poem, "The Immigrant Voice" (1998, p.105-6). The one-stanza narrative poem bears the personal experience of a migrant

who laments, in Pidgin, the difference between the host land and his homeland. The persona laments: "Back home to here na long long way. / The picture of here from home is so different / from the wilderness I dey see day and night / This na America with homeless for every corner" (p. 105). The persona who driven by Sigmund Freud's 'pleasure principle' (Willbern, 1989, p. 162) leaves his homeland following its discomfitures, changes from an earlier positive conjecture of his diasporic life and living to a grim conjecture of the diasporic life and land, as he comes face-to-face with the 'reality principle' of the diaspora (p. 162). The lines above show that at this point the poet persona (migrant) begins to make a psychological journey to and from his homeland. Experience teaches the migrant that he is 'homeless' in the 'wilderness' he lives 'day and night' (p. 105).

Such language of shock and of self-blame are smacks of prodigality. It shows a rejection of the unexpected realities of the foreign land and a preference for conditions in the homeland. The migration phenomenon thus becomes an ambivalent site and the migrant a discordant or split-personality - caught in the web of a seeming success story of emigration and the looming impediments of actual immigration. In a bid to justify his emigration as resulting from his dispossessed homeland prior to his escape, he intones solemnly: "If say big thief no boku for home / and they no give man chance to live softly / America no be place to live for one whole day" (p. 105). The social menace of theft which becomes a given in the persona's homeland makes a quiet living impossible for the persona. The menace atrophies his humanity, giving him a reason to emigrate for a better living. It therefore suffices to say that while the dispossessed homeland triggers migration, the migrant becomes a sort of mobile-personality in search of fulfillment.

To escape the wilderness and its ensuing challenges, the persona resolves: "make me de prepare to go sweet home" (p. 106). The overbearing importance of the prodigal motif as a plotting strategy is its ability to rekindle a positive perception and hope in the homeland. In the recreation the tone of inner calm that accompanies the return proposal accentuates the homeland as the abode of greener pastures. Furthermore, Ojaide's use of prodigality, in the of migration and return tensions, as a navigating device as well as a thematic orientation, is in "A Long Absence" (2018, p. 87). First, the title, "A Long Absence," carries with it an expression of the persona's acknowledgement of one's prolonged detachment from one's place, in the manner of the prodigal. The proceeding couplet stanzas show Ojaide's skillful use of the prodigal motif to index people's inalienable bond with the homeland:

> I left the country when already wearing a beard;
> every road and border opened to my destination.
>
> I come back to my homeland, enthused by nostalgia
> for the adventurous days and sweet tastes of youth
>
> that had kept taunting me daily with what I had missed
> by living in a rich land that gives no peace to the soul.
>
> True home is freer than the land of the free that enslaves. (p. 87)

What is obvious from the above is an atmosphere of a return to the homeland from a particular migration. However, Ojaide employs the prodigal motif to account for what propels the return. First, one finds the depth of joy that marks the emigration success in the second line above: "every road and border opened to my destination" (p. 87). As the migrant begins to miss what had combined to make his personality prior to emigration, he begins to undertake a psychological journey to the homeland – becomes nostalgic - as a result of

"living in a rich land that gives no peace to the soul" (p. 87). Like the Biblical prodigal, the poet-persona becomes the judge of himself and his expedition, as he appraises migration and the self.

However, on coming home Ojaide's persona, as a result of his double-consciousness or split-personality, finds it difficult to fit in completely. Economically and structurally, the homeland drifts to the lowest ebb. He becomes traumatized, again. He laments: "still there are torments to suffer after a long absence / Now the country is poorer with leakages plugged" (p. 87). He thus would take some time to reconcile the self with the homeland.

Conclusion

The paper highlights the centrality of the homeland in the resolution of migration and return tensions. Prodigality becomes a thematic and plotting strategy that Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo and Tanure Ojaide deploy in the recreation of the tensions in the migration and return ladder. The poet personae in the interrogated poems express mutual depression over the rape of their homeland which becomes catalysts for their migration to the West, predominantly. Thus, as much as the poet personae desire and pursue a better life in the diaspora their psyches are traumatized by the loss of humanity, which is tied to a physical environment that has defined life. In responding to the mental harassment that comes with dis/placements, the migrant personae live in the torment of nostalgia and compensate by making a physical or psychological journey home. These journeys, as compensatory as they may be, are fraught by some sense of ambivalence as the personae are equally weighed by doubts, guilt or the ironic impulse of returning abroad.

Hence in some sense the migrant personae are caught up in some restlessness that make them not find home abroad or in their nativity. Therefore, the migration and return phenomenon inbuilds the migrant with a discordant or split personality: s/he cannot make home in the diaspora; yearns for and may eventually return to the homeland; yet laments the dispossession of the homeland and in time prepares for another return to the diaspora. The ritual becomes a continuum. However, because of his inalienable affective ties with the homeland, he naturally privileges it over the diaspora.

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