

Liminality in Buchi Emecheta's *the New Tribe* and Isidore Okpewho's *Call Me by My Rightful Name*

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Abstract : Any great work of art is a sight of encounter with meanings. It is on this premise that Emecheta's *The New Tribe* and Okpewho's *Call me by my Rightful Name* have generated scholarly articles from various conceptual perspectives. Some critics see the narratives as a perception of the quest motif, mythic ideation, postcolonial narrative, and Yoruba cosmogony, among others. Most of these studies have not considered a comparative study of the texts in the light of liminality. The research is, therefore, focused on evaluating the configuration of liminality as a presupposition of border negotiations in different forms. It explores the in-between situation of the liminal figures and the rites of transition from one state to another. It examines how transitional rituals and nostalgia/homecoming constitute distinct shades of threshold which the liminal subjects are bound to cross in their search for belongingness. This study adopts border poetics because of its aptness to the current research. The deployment of this theory demonstrates that border is fluid and manifests in different aspects of individual experiences.

Keywords: Border, Diasporic Experience, Homecoming, Liminality, Racism, Nostalgia,

Introduction

Literature, despite its subsistence in the realm of fiction, has continued to implicate and invoke the material cause of its origination. The argument about whether it is a reflection of human experiences or language existing for its own sake has polarized the enterprise of literary criticism over the years, and will continue to be insofar as it continues to engage critical thoughts. The point is that "a writer inhabits two places at the same time: the land of facts and that of fiction" (Ngugi 175). However, whether it is coincidentally an act of verisimilitude as "the kinds of things that might occur and are possible in terms of probability or necessity" (Aristotle 9), or socio-historically effective as a "criticism of life" according to Mathew Arnold (qtd. in Akwanya 16), the critic's perception of a given text

remains sacrosanct. For as long as Northrop Frye insists that "the artist is not heard but overheard" (5); discursive criticism, therefore, remains the enduring interface between the critic and the literary text. This is apparently why Emecheta's *The New Tribe* and Okpewho's *Call me by my Rightful Name* have continued to attract various critical attentions. Accordingly, the current research is focused on the exploration of the aforementioned narratives in the light of liminality.

Significantly, liminality is perceived as a state of in-betweenness. It presupposes the crossing of a threshold. It is a moment of transition from one state or space to another. As a process, it has undergone various interpretations from ritual ceremony to accommodate other areas like culture, nationality and identity, among others. According to Arup Ratan Chakraborty "... it marks the place, line or border at which a passage can be made from one space to another. Such a spatial structure has an essential influence on social interactions: relationships, and social status are negotiated at the threshold; one is either rejected from or welcomed to the other side" (145). Gennep's postulations on liminality focuses on ritual process. He notes that "so great is the incompatibility between the profane and the sacred worlds that a man cannot pass from one to the other without going through an intermediate stage" (1). Building upon Gennep's foundation, Turner admits that "the attributes of liminality or of liminal personae ... are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space" (95). Turner's opinion is an attempt to demystify the fixity of liminality as a significantly prolix concept. His contributions shed more light on the understanding of the workings of liminality.

Substantially, this study is geared toward exploring the liminal configurations of Emecheta's *The New Tribe* and Okpewho's *Call me by my Rightful Name* to justify the circumstances surrounding the characters of Chester and Otis as immersed in "a proliferation of liminal symbols" (Turner 96). The study, therefore, becomes apposite following Johan Schimanski's recognition that "literature to a large extent deals with precisely the crossing or the transgression of such symbolic borders" (55). This study, therefore, adopts border poetics as its analytical tool because of its relevance to the purpose of the study. Border theory is rooted in crossing/passage dynamism of liminal conceptions in terms of space and culture. The vision of liminal phases is within the matrix of literary criticism encompassing such aspects of individual experiences as significant as the metaphysical and the question of nostalgia/homecoming.

Related Literature Review

It is in its capacity to generate endless interpretations that Buchi Emecheta's *The New Tribe* and Isidore Okpewho's *Call me by my Rightful Name* have been successfully undertaken from various conceptual /theoretical perspectives. *The New Tribe* has been read in the light of psychological fragmentation, identity crisis, quest motif, and feminist

discourse, among others. Babacar Diakhate notes that the text "... displays how Emecheta has shifted from gender preoccupation by castigating the irresponsible and incompetent fathers of family who do not take care of their wives and children to universality" (278). The studies mostly reveal a diasporic exploration of the novel as a representation of black experiences through the protagonist, Chester. Okpewho's *Call me by my Rightful Name*, has also attracted critical attention from distinctive theoretical dimensions. Investigations show that the novel has been read from the dimension of myth, Yoruba cosmogony, new historicism and magical realism, to mention but a few. According to Isidore Diala, Okpewho's "insight into naming [derives] from a complex metaphysical worldview rooted in an African idea of birth and rebirth and a colonial scheme of negative attribution" (79). Such diverse studies project the narratives as great works of literature capable of sustaining critical thoughts. The inability of previous interpretations of the texts to account for a comparative examination of the works from the lens of liminality has left a scholarly vacuum in understanding the dynamic interplay of language and literary criticism as the crux of the texts' formation. The gap informs the fundamental vision of this research on the basis of liminality.

Research Methodology

The study focuses on Buchi Emecheta's *The New Tribe* and Isidore Okpewho's *Call Me By My Rightful Name* in the light of liminality. The interpretation of the primary texts is based on the tenets of border discourse. The choice of the theory is in accordance with David Newman's submission that "demarcation is not only about the lines on the map which are then transformed into physical fences and walls on the ground. It is as much about the way that the societal managers determine the nature of inclusion and exclusion from various social categories and groups" (35).

Sources of data for analysis, in addition to the two primary texts, include the library and the internet. The method of analysis of the texts is patterned toward a comparative exploration of the liminal configuration of both works, in relation to ritual/metaphysical landscape. The study also investigates the dynamics of nostalgia in the lives of Otis and Chester and the accompanying return to their roots/homes.

Borders and Transitional/Liminal Rituals in *Call me by my Rightful Name* and *The New Tribe*

Originally, Arnold Van Gennep's conception of liminality is anchored on ritual processes celebrating either the coming of age of a young man and his transitional rites into manhood, or initiation of the liminal character into a cult depending on the culture of a particular society. Such passage presupposes crossing of a border or a threshold. According to Gennep, such rites ensure that the figure "pass[es] from a liminal stage ... to the stage of permanent incorporation into the community" (168). The rites of passages are parts of the border configurations encountered in two texts under study in different

forms and representations. The texts take one into series of ritual worlds that encapsulate, as well as illuminate the fatal journeys of Otis and Chester through the history of their ancestry.

Otis and Chester pass through different stages of transformations in their quest for meaning, self and roots. The various spheres of liminal aesthetics surrounding the tortuous experiences they have in the course of trying to grasp their fate, ranging from Taiwo and Kehinde's ritualistic visions, Otis's spasmodic trances and the rites of his initiation into manhood, and Chester's dreamland fantasies, along with his aborted rites of integration in his supposed kingdom, constitute borderlands.

In Okpe who's *Call me by my Rightful Name*, the twin matriarchs of Ijoko-Odo, and the only survivors of the Hamptons' ancestry in Nigeria, are portrayed as exhibiting visionary traits that prefigures the occurrence of future events. Kehinde's unusual trance calls for a serious insight into the unknown and the long-awaited fulfillment of the restoration of their lost family history. Her sudden cheerful disposition is a prefiguration of desirable events. It is so because the twins express the same feeling at the arrival and discovery of Otis's identity as the incarnate of their abducted brother transported to the white man's land a long time ago. Additionally, Ifa has in a dream, revealed to Otis about his mission for the redemption of his lineage and the role he is predestined to play. The simultaneity of the two incidents underscores the shared racial memory between the twins and Otis.

Similarly, the genesis of Chester's quest for his African heritage is predicated upon his dream of an African village kingdom he fantasises as his lost royal throne. His "dream voyage to the other world" (Gennep 108) is a transitional borderline characterising his mental assimilation of Ginny's children's storybook she has made for little Chester to connect him with his past. Ginny has been skeptical that Chester may not stay with them forever. Therefore, she decides to "... keep alive for Chester the memory of where he came from. ... Slowly and painstakingly, she made Chester a storybook based on African folktale she had read" (8). The storybook has strong emotional and racial effect on Chester so that his future becomes dependent upon how he reacts to the (un)reality of the reflexive dreams.

Incidentally, Otis's spasms start on his 21st birthday, which happens to be the same age Akimbowale was taken without fulfilling his destiny as a potential *babalawo* – diviner of Ifa oracle. Otis's chants are more metaphysical and ritualistic than ordinary. He slips out of the physical world into a border zone that defies the understanding of others. Usually, the agitation is triggered by the sound emanating from a mysterious African drum. Unlike Chester, Otis is bound by a burden of duty he is yet to fathom. Chester is only fighting detachment of maternal rupture being an adopted child to a white family. Nonetheless, he, too, must cross necessary borders to reunite with his ancestry. That

Otis's chants are beyond anyone's perception is a pointer to his extraordinary personality as a liminal figure. His inability to take control of the situation corroborates Nich Beech's opinion that "typically the liminal process is ritualistic, starting with a 'triggering of event'" (287). But what triggers Otis's present state remains a mystery to him and his family.

In his metaphysical drift, Chester is fraught with recurring dreams. Just like Otis in a trance, "there is nothing [Chester] could do to dispel it. It came to him in fragments at first, but after a while, it acquired concrete images and a definite theme" (Emecheta 16). Both protagonists are controlled by powers greater than their human nature. However, Chester's slippage is not unconnected with his inward desires borne out of the psychological need for something dear to him. It depicts Turner's observation that "Freud has found in the fantasies of neurotics, in the ambiguities of *dream imagery*, ... clues to the structure of normal psyche" (3). Chester's exit from reality is largely influenced by his obsession with the news of his adoption and its implications.

To find a lasting solution to Otis's turbulent condition, a link must be established between the past and the present. It is in the people's belief that every Yoruba blood has a guardian angel/spirit called *ori*, thus reaffirming the interference of the metaphysical in man's daily activities. Otis is subconsciously addressed thus:

If you are wise, your ori has made it so. If you are not wise, your ori must have made you more stupid than a tuber of yam. We chose our heads from the same place, but our destinies are not the same. No god blesses a man without the consent of his Ori. Make sacrifice to your Ori, that you may realize the blessings of the choice it made on your behalf! (47)

Otis has an *Ori*, but must make the sacrifices to enable him actualise the purpose of his birth. He is prepared to submit himself to the will of his personal god, wherefore, as Asad puts it "... sift what exists beyond the physical practices ...," (qtd. in Chukwumezie 106). Correspondingly, Chester is believed to have a personal god or *chi* that guides his paths to see that his desires materialise. But while Otis is directly spoken to by invisible forces, Chester's prophetic messages sometimes manifest through a human agent. As he presses on for Chester to follow his dreams, Jimoh tells him that "Na your spirit wey dey tell you something. Igbo people dey call am your *chi*. And Yoruba people say na your *ori* dey strong" (109). The coincidental juxtaposition of the fate of Otis and Chester evolving from a course foreordained even before their births cannot be ascribed to be an accident for texts that are set at separate periods and regions by different authors. It is as well driven by the spirit of the age as "the process of expressing the tensions set up in our modern awareness by the varied and often contradictory elements of the collective experience" (Irele 212).

Back to Otis, Kehinde and Taiwo's vision is further sealed by Ella Pearl's foray into the spiritual realm. The highly religious Ella on his arrival at the Hampton family affirms that Otis's incantatory drift is prayer answered. In her words, "*that* is our people talking. Don't tell me you don't hear it, Otie Jay. *That* is our people talking through your boy. The lord finally brought it home to us" (90). Like the twins, Chester has had visions of his journey to Africa where he would recover his inheritance. Moreover, his dream has become a route to escape from the agonizing realities in the midst of racist whites. It is written that:

As always when confronted with something he didn't like or couldn't understand, the vision of his city took over. Chester did not resist. In the vision, he was at home in his kingdom, the prince everybody wanted. He had grown up somewhere else, but his was there, waiting for him to take possession. The vision that had been haunting him since he was a child of seven took shape before his eyes. (41)

Possessed by the spirit of his ancestors at the ritual scene, Otis drives his entourage into the bush – between the hill and the river. His identification of the point of ritual sacrifice concurs with the belief that his *ori* is with him. He must be commissioned through a series of rites of initiation into the cult of manhood. Taiwo and Kehinde prepares him to take up from where Akimbowale stopped. Their lost brother had not finished the ritual ceremony surrounding their father's funeral before he was captured. That is the task now before Otis as Akimbowale's reincarnate. When Dr Fishbein reminds them that even though Otis seems to be at peace with himself clutching some grasses at the spot his alter ego was captured, he still vibrates when the sound of the drum comes on. Taiwo admits that "yes, there is a reason for it, ... Have they not seen that, when they played that thing, the song was not completed? ... The song was not finished, because the people beat our brother on the head, and he could no longer speak. Then they carried him away. Now he is back, he should finish the song" (152). What happens to Otis is here confirmed as beyond physical borders. The only way to restore *sanity* to Otis's life is for him to undergo the initiation rites. This will equip him with the cultural status to perform the ritual ceremony that enables him sing the full song with Taiwo and Kehinde. He is to stay with the matriarchs, learn the Yoruba language and proceed with the tradition. This marks part of the ritual processes for Otis's entrant into a higher numinous echelon befitting of his kind as a line of spiritual head of his people. As a liminal subject, Otis must accept the twins' pronouncement as a precondition for his admission into the unfulfilled traditional authority of his great-grandfather. His purification is meant to endow him with the powers of *babalawo*, so he administers to the people taking inspiration from "Ifa, the god of divination" (185).

The consultation from Ifa guarantees the success of Otis's initiation into the cult of strong men. Otis is led into a thick forest where the ritual takes place. The influence of

the greenish substance given to Otis to drink transports him to the realm of unconsciousness, so that Adegboye has to act some of his roles for him. Otis is betwixt the position assigned to him by supernatural forces. The frenzy that distinguishes the liminal characters is only appropriate for the task Otis is set to accomplish. To seal the covenant with the numina, Otis must sever the head of the sacrificial dog with one stroke of the machete in a ritual reunion with his ancestors.

Otis's post-liminal status leaves much significance to grasp about his existence. He has assumed a strange identity. Thereupon, his new form underpins Turner's view that "liminal entities are neither here nor there, they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (95). Otis confesses that he cannot even figure out what happened after he is let into the sanctorum. Similarly, Chester may have his own sojourn into the transcendental, but it is a dream given him by Ginny. His illusion clears when Esther unveils his storybook. "Something stirred in Chester at the sight of it, and the familiar sensation of something eluding his grasp came over him. ... The thing that had eluded him came and settled in his heart" (153). The line between Otis's vision and Chester's illusion is that while the former materialises to reality, the latter turns out a phantasmic crystallisation of his obsessive desires.

Call me by my Rightful Name and *The New Tribe* may represent different interpretations to different critics. But exploration of transitional rituals and patterns of dream imagery implicates the subjection of both works in the light of liminality as a symbolic aspect of border renegotiation. Whether they are looked at from topographical or symbolic planes of borders, a close reading of the narratives indicates that the characters of Otis and Chester are driven by "... an internalization of the desire to cross a border hoping that something is on the other side" (Houtum and Wolfe 142). It shows that there is a collective consciousness in the lives of diasporic figures.

Nostalgia and Homecoming in *The New Tribe* and *Call me by my Rightful Name*

Homesickness and strong desire to return to one's roots are common experiences among exilic characters who are desirous of reunion with home. Such figures are either compelled by hostilities resulting from racial discrimination, displacement, or a sense of longing for reintegration in their desire for home.

In the two texts under study, there is an encounter with characters who are in constant quest for home. What is perceived in the narratives is, in McLaren's terms, "... a complex rendering of the 'return motif'" (424). Chester and Otis, as well as some other black characters like Ella Pearl, Norma and Mr Barrett, are in search of their ancestral past. These figures have a relatively collective experiences as blacks, but the peculiarities in their individual experiences tell more about the heterogeneity of Africa both at home and in diasporas. Even though they are united by the western worldview of a dark and

savage continent as represented in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, stories about different African countries may be unique depending on mode of colonial contact.

The homogeneity of Otis and Chester's Nigerian ancestry is given preeminent attention. That notwithstanding, it can be inferred that Chester and Otis are confronted with distinct psychological needs to visit home. While Chester is obsessed with the longing to find out who his biological mother is, having discovered that he is an adopted child to the Arlingtons, Otis's is battling with his possession by an ancestral spirit. All in all, they must journey to Africa in search of their family heritage.

In *The New Tribe*, Chester's nostalgic feeling is first expressed when he discovers that Arthur and Ginny are not his biological parents. Obsessed with the thought of where he really comes from, Chester begins to feel homesick through a dream that shows him a typical African royal household supposedly belonging to him. According to the narrator, "Chester started identifying this compound as his very own" (Emecheta 17). From this moment, Chester's quest to reunite with his historical past heightens as the days go by, especially with the harsh realities of racial injustice. For Otis, he is called to go home as a way to fulfill the destiny of his forebear whose mission as the diviner of his kindred was cut short by white slave hunters. A strange voice would always seize him both in the physical world and sometimes in dreams. "*He was told it was because he had ignored the ancestral rites that his life was in disarray. He was told to visit his ancestral shrine and pay his respects. Once he did that, life would be good for him again*" (Okpewho 3). Otis's life becomes troubled as the strange voice transforms him uncontrollably into a state of spasm. The family's involvement in finding a way out of Otis's seizures opens a chilling revelation about the problem Otis suffers which its solution lies in the journey to Africa for restitution. It is in the course of Jeremiah Hampton's introspection that attempt made by Ella Pearl to return home during the exodus of the Negroes from America was aborted by her own mother.

Chester's early childhood was more or less a lonely one. Contrary to Otis who was surrounded by blacks at every stage of his life, Chester grows up in a neighborhood dominated by whites. The only time he begins to have a touch with Africa is when he runs into Mr Enoch Ugwu and his family at the Clinton chalet. In spite of his astonishment, Chester is reassured that he has people he can identify with. Significantly, "when Chester left for home that evening, he had an unaccustomed sense of satisfaction" (34). The meeting prepares the ground for Chester's eventual communion with the Ugwus and Jimoh, which leads to his journey to Africa. In Otis's case, he has lived with fellow Africans in America, despite the racial antagonism against blacks. But he has been commissioned to go to Africa and fulfill his cultural obligation where he historically belongs. Even though the Hamptons cannot explicitly figure out what their son's problem is, recent events have shown that "it was becoming increasingly clear there was some

unresolved history lurking somewhere that needed to be dealt with” (60). The attempt to deal with the hidden truth about Otis’s predicament is what drives the inevitable journey to Nigeria where they are going to reunite with their roots. Otis’s mother “Melba Hampton has doubts about the wisdom of Fishbein’s counsel. But Otis’s last attack of spasms has rendered the prospect of his going to Africa increasingly inevitable” (73).

Essentially, Chester’s dream kingdom has left him to grapple with a sense of nostalgia for his African root, where he believes his people are waiting for his return. The narrator reveals that “as always when confronted with something he didn’t like or couldn’t understand, the vision of his city took over. ... In the vision, he was at home in his kingdom, the prince everybody wanted” (40). His obsession with the incessant dreams makes him have a strong feeling that going to Africa will connect him with home. It is in the understanding of the bond between Africans in diaspora that Otis’s case is traced to his ancestral past. The African cultural importance attached to family is invoked in Ella Pearl’s revelation that what is speaking through Otis has nothing to do with health abnormality, but a case of racial memory resurrecting to reclaim the lost history of the Hamptons’ almost destroyed long time ago by white imperialism. Ella Pearl has shown strong eagerness to return to Africa where she believes is her home.

The Hamptons are, therefore, bound to travel to Nigeria in search of solutions to Otis’s predicament. (Okpewho 97). For Chester, he depends solely on luck to manoeuvre his way through the Nigerian borders having swerved his passport with Jimoh. Chester’s fears of not having the requisite documents is allayed when Jimoh tells him that “to make things easy for you in Nigeria, I will lend you my passport” (111). Jimoh’s persuasion motivates Chester to embark on his long-desired mission.

The arrival of the duo in Nigeria presents a different picture of Africa from the white demonization of the continent. Otis is surprised to see that people do not live on trees as they were told in America. When Otis “remembers the story about Africans living on trees; he actually looks to see if he will find anything of the kind. He doesn’t. Instead, he sees people walking around, talking, laughing heartily” (105). He feels satisfied with his observations, as he begins to come to terms with the reality of Africa – his true home. In like manner, Chester is visibly impressed with the picture of things upon arrival at Lagos port. It is as if the hollowness in his being a lone black in the district of white dominated St Simon has been filled. It is stated that “arriving at Lagos Marina, therefore, Chester was already filled with a sense of homecoming” (115). He, like Otis, is struck by the excitement written on the faces of the people.

Contrastingly, fortunes take different tunes for Chester and Otis in their respective quests for family history. Chester’s *chi* appears to have forsaken him as every attempt he makes to unravel the mystery of his identity proves abortive. First, upon being taken to the Oba of Benin’s palace by Karimu, in search of his root, what is supposed to be his

homecoming almost turns out to be his rites of passage into the world beyond, leaving him disillusioned.

For Otis, it is obvious his *Ori* is guiding him and his party, as every step they take leads him closer to his destination. Their encounter with Akinwunmi – the chief *babalawo* of the village, significantly prepares the way for Otis’s eventual reunion with his ancestry. It is told that “on seeing the man, Otis feels a gentle flush of calm. It is as if a hidden bolt has been unlatched within him” (120). The incident heralds Otis’s immediate encounter with the reality of his quest as Akinwunmi takes them to the *Baale* of Ijoko-Odo. On their arrival at the home of the surviving twins of Otis’s lineage, Taiwo and Kehinde are able to identify Otis as the incarnate of their lost brother – Akimbowale. Having discovered a scar borne by the late Akimbowale on Otis’s shoulder (128). The actions of the twins leave everyone in great astonishment that even the traditional Yoruba drummer who has accompanied them as an oral artist “... now comes to appreciate, with renewed pride, the value of an art that can facilitate the return of a lost progeny to the land of their fathers” (129). This brings Otis and his father to the realisation of where they come from and the circumstances surrounding the checkered history of their family.

On the other hand, Chester is not as lucky as Otis. Unlike *Baale* Osunkunle who tries to usurp the destiny of Otis, the Oba of Chamala has no one to scold him for his insincerity in handling Chester’s case as does Pa Fadipe for Otis. The Oba treats Chester’s mission with much levity and contempt, with a concealed motive to attack Chester and Karimu on their way home. The psychological impacts, coupled with the unfavourable environment culminate in a serious health hazard that threatens Chester’s life. Nevertheless, Chester still maintains a sense of misconceived belonging to Africa. But Esther tells him that “Africa is no longer our home. We have stayed in the market too long, Our home is Liverpool!” (145). It is at this point that Chester admits having gone to Nigeria “full of illusions, looking for something [he] expected to find” (150). He is finally flown back to England where the truth about his biological mother is revealed to him. In Julia’s words, “your real mother turned up to claim you. She had let you go when the man she was pregnant by didn’t want you, ... Chester, it wasn’t your father who was the 'wandering Nigerian', it was your mother. She came over from Nigeria when she was a child and grew up in Northampton” (151). It is then that Esther shows him the children’s storybook he has assimilated as a child. It dawns on him that “Ginny gave [him his] dream!” (154). He accepts the reality before him and aligns to Esther’s insistence that they are now Black British. This is part of what Chester and Otis do not share in common. Unlike Chester, there is already a home waiting for Otis in Nigeria where his ancestors originated from. His journey is a predetermined attempt to fulfill his destiny as the family’s diviner, naturally commissioned by the gods of the land. In fact, Otis himself admits that he feels like a native, consequent upon his ability to bond well with the locals

in the course of his reintegration. He insists that “after a whole year of being in this village I’m proud to say is the home of my fathers, I believe I deserve the exhilaration I feel now. ...” (216). He has fully blended with his roots. His cleverness in learning the Yoruba language hastens his cultural and filial relationship with his kin.

Incidentally, Otis and Chester travel to Africa with similar motives of finding their rightful place and reuniting with their roots. Even so, the two characters have different missions in their quest. While Otis is obliged to redeem the status of his battered family history and lead his people in the direction of the gods as the anointed diviner, Chester is believed to be searching for the restoration of his lost African village kingdom. Otis executes his assignment as his great-grandfather incarnate. Chester, on his own part, discovers that his long-desired kingdom is just a fantasy of his childhood reading of Ginny’s storybook about the myth of Africa. Howbeit, the fact that both characters return to their respective diasporic places of birth – England and America, invokes the Afropolitan nature of later generation African immigrants. It is also an act of crossing borders in terms of topographical and cultural/ethnic differences.

Conclusion

It is established that Emecheta’s *The New Tribe* and Okpewho’s *Call me by my Rightful Name* are embedded in the concept of liminality. While Chester suffers disillusionment because of failed expectations and is compelled to return to England as his home, Otis gets reintegrated into the traditions of Ijoko-Odo and willingly travels to America after fulfilling his destiny, with the intention of returning to Nigeria as his root. The exploration of the two texts from this perspective underpins the narratives as great works of art capable of sustaining proliferation of thoughts despite having been read distinctively in various theoretical dimensions. The comparative study of the texts from the same point of view indicates that, traditionally, language characterises the formation of every literary production; and acts as a unifying medium for the perception of art as an imitation of the other, irrespective of time and place of birth. It further illuminates the expansion of the tentacles of border studies in various academic disciplines, away from its original conception as a mere physical boundary between two geographical entities. Furthermore, the research interrogates the shared commonalities in African diasporic literature. As Abiola Irele puts it, “this literature has served both as a direct and objective representation of our modern experience as well as a symbolization of the states of mind induced by that experience” (212) Hence, the study situates the judgement of both novels within the purview of border discourse cutting across such important areas as culture, rites of passage, and diasporic experience.

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