

Negotiating Home in the Long Poem: Amatoritsero Ede's Transpatiality

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Abstract

In this paper, I argue that Amatoritsero Ede uses the long poem to negotiate the idea of home in an African diasporic context. As a form that carries the implications of length, time, and space, the long poem has been used by poets to interrogate the way we structure the world and to deconstruct grand narratives. The figure of the Black immigrant is one that destabilizes grand narratives of nationalism. This makes the form important in its capacity to ask important questions about nation and tradition even as it transgresses them. As a writer from the Niger Delta, a marginal location in Nigeria, and one who has travelled widely and called many places home, Ede writes poetry that speaks to his inhabitation of multiple spaces and produces a sort of 'transpatiality'. This paper argues that in Ede's *Globetrotter & Hitler's Children* (2009) and *Teardrops on the Weser* (2021), the long poem form and its ability to negotiate belonging, home, identity, and the complex edge habitats that some diasporic subjects inhabit allows us to better understand and conceptualize Ede's 'transpatial poetics' and the way diasporic writers make and negotiate home. I begin by exploring critical responses to Ede's poetry to foreground the importance of form and then proceed to unpack the concept of home in the context of the new African diaspora and Afropolitanism. Ultimately, I read Ede's long poems formally and thematically in terms of the way they represent and meditate on the complex concept of home.

Keywords: home, transpatiality, transpatial poetics, African diaspora, Afropolitan

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Introduction

Amatoritsero Ede is a Nigerian-Canadian poet who has called many places home over the years. He belongs to the group of diasporic writers whom Chielezona Eze (2014) describes as “earlier generations of African and African diaspora thinkers who had to fight their overwhelmingly racist world. Thus, their recourse to nativist, relativist, and autochthonous arguments were employed as a means to fight erasure” (236). This perspective on Ede is evidenced in an interview with Uche Umezurike in which Ede describes his transnational subjectivity thus: “I have lived and studied in Africa, Europe, and North America; have worked in Asia and the Caribbean, and now live and work in Canada” (2021a). In another interview with Rob McLennan, Ede (2005) comments that

I am Nigerian from the Niger-Delta area of Nigeria, that rich and accursed patch of earth where Shell and other multi-national oil corporations spoil and despoil, polluting air and water. I grew up to the hot orange glow of gas flaring on the horizon (...) I had to go to Germany (I studied German) for an immersion in the culture and the language. I ended up staying there for eight bitter-sweet years. There is still too much racism in Germany... the political structure allows some individuals and groups to propagate xenophobia and murder, murder in a literal sense... I was not sure returning to Nigeria was wise, even though the government seemed to have changed, my political anti-Nigerian government activities in Germany could still be in a cold-case file! So I came to Canada for the PhD, which I dropped because

the department was too poisoned for any serious academic work.

I have reproduced this lengthy excerpt from the interview in order to foreground Ede's state of socio-political or racial marginality regardless of where he found himself in the world. This condition has been theorized as constitutive of the Afropolitan experience (Ede 2016), a concept first used by Taiye Selasi (2005) to describe a generation of diasporic Black/African writers who define themselves through their transnational lived experiences. Whether in Nigeria or elsewhere, Ede has had to contend with various forms of sociopolitical violence. These realities are well-represented in his poetry collections *Globetrotter & Hitler's Children* (2009) and *Teardrops on the Weser* (2021b). In both collections, Ede's speaker is an urban flaneur who navigates place and time from the perspective of a racialized Afropolitan figure in Canada and Germany.

At the heart of Ede's exploration of identity, place, belonging, and home in the world is the question of form. This essay takes Ede's poetry as exemplary of how the long poem grounds complex negotiations of home and facilitates questions of place, belonging, and identity for African diasporic subjects. I argue that Ede manifests what I term 'transpatiality' in how his poetry negotiates and represents the complex and multiple time-spaces new African diasporic writers like himself inhabit. Furthermore, I ground this transpatiality in the long poem form and position both as conceptual and formal ways through which we can think about Ede's poetry, Afropolitan writing, and new African diasporic writing. This positioning goes beyond exploring the ideas of home, place, and belonging that are central to current theorizations of diasporic subjectivity and deepens our understanding of the long poem form, especially in the context of the poetics of an important Nigerian-Canadian poet like Ede. When we read the long poem in terms of its transpatial dimensions, we can

better understand the poetics and politics of Ede in the context of the Niger Delta and Black diaspora.

Amatoritsero Ede's Poetry in Nigerian and Diasporic Contexts

Despite Ede's long writing career, which spans between the last decade of the 20th century and the present, his poetry has attracted a relatively small amount of scholarly attention. This is despite his significant presence in the African and African diasporic literary scene, including his editorship of important literary magazines like *The Maple Tree Literary Supplement*. Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton (2005), two of the few scholars who have explored his poetry, classify Ede as a member of Nigeria's third generation writers (8) and locate his writing at the nexus of "poets whose presence and works had been so crucial to the emergence of third generation poetry ... [even when they] eventually relocated to Euro-America" (9). What this signals is that Ede is an important figure in the way we might theorize 20th century Nigerian writing, including the transnational skeins that are evident in this tradition.

Another critic who has engaged with Ede's work, Tanure Ojaide (2015), is of the view that Ede is one of the younger African poets who "focus(es) on experience/content" (168). His contention is that although younger African poets focus on form and style at the expense of an authentic African experience due to their "globalization and deracination" (168), Ede is one of the few who have somehow managed to continue focusing on the African experience, specifically through writing about "travel, love, or happenings in the homeland and outside that they want to impress on their readers' minds" (168). Ojaide's point here is that Ede, like other poets in his generation, prioritizes the burden of experience over form. While it is true that Ede's work encodes the complexity of the African experience, and especially of the migrant experience,

a form-oriented reading of Ede's poetry can open up new ways of thinking about Nigerian and African diasporic writing.

Tosin Gbogi explores the works of Ede and other Nigerian writers as representations of "migrants' experiences and their location within a broader history of the abjection of black bodies" (2022, 1). Deviating from the "post-racial" theorizations of Afropolitanism and cosmopolitanism as the dominant framework of the contemporary migrant experience, Gbogi contends that the place of race and racialized bodies in the conception of the migrant African experience cannot be eliminated in favour of a "post-racial, post-national order in which 'colour' matters less and less" (3). This is a claim that Ede himself has made in the context of Afropolitan discourse (2016, 2020). From Ede's perspective, race is deeply imbricated in the Afropolitan figure, especially if we consider the fact that the original Afropolitan is "the enslaved or formerly enslaved Black New World Writer, intellectual, artist, citizen and – by dint of her or his erudition and cosmopolitan 'worldliness' – renaissance woman or man" (2020, 106) and if we understand the "metropolitan hierarchies [including race]" that are constitutive of the Afropolitan experience (2016, 89).

Gbogi argues that Ede and his contemporaries represent Black migrants who "cross into a racial imaginary in which the social and discursive formations of slavery and colonialism are wittingly and unwittingly applied to them" (2022, 4–5). This view places Ede's writings within a complex discourse of race and migration that accentuates how "black African immigrants are inserted into the long discursive history of their racialized bodies" (13). Focusing on "formal complexity and experimentation", Gbogi reads the visual shape of Ede's poetry and submits that

there is a striking homology between the structure of this poem and the subject matter that it

addresses. Shaped like a “penumbra”, lineated uniformly like “dis-membered” fragments of an object, widely spreading out from left to right, and lengthening with distance and progression like waves, the lines provide a visual account of the diffusion of race-motivated history of violence and death from the United States to Europe. (14)

Gbogi's claim is that Ede's formal choices are motivated by the complex history of anti-Black racism that mediates the way Black migrant subjectivities are formed. This sort of formal reading of Ede's poetry provides a relevant framework through which to interrogate the way form works in diasporic writing. However, below, I take Gbogi's logic a step further to interrogate how poetic form – here, the long poem – is deployed by Ede in his definition of home from a transpatial perspective. I am interested in how bodies are grounded in and out of place and how this is versified in Ede's long poems.

Theorizing Home: From Old African Diaspora to New African Diaspora

The concept of home is central to theorizations of the new African diaspora and its transformation from the old African diaspora. Isidore Okpewho (2009) hinges his differentiation of the old and new African diaspora on conceptions of home. To him, old African diasporic subjects who were forcefully removed from Africa by means of the trans-Atlantic slave trade have a singular sense of home in their new locations, while new African diasporic subjects who voluntarily leave Africa to escape postcolonial realities and state failure possess a dual conception of home. In further unpacking his ideas about new African diasporic subjects, he comments that “However much they yearn to reconnect with the homeland, an extended removal from the familiar environment

inevitably weakens their bonds with it and, conversely, increases their commitment to the land that now offers some nourishment to the body if not the spirit” (10). Here, Okpewho acknowledges the rootedness of those in the category of the new African diaspora in their adopted homelands, even as they remain semi-rooted in an originary home that they sometimes feel disconnected from. However, the key consciousness of “going home again” (14) never leaves the mind of those who constitute the new African diaspora. In Okpewho's argument, home is positioned as a place where one forms an “emotional attachment” (15). Jayne Ifekwunigwe (2003), however, gives us a split sense of home. Commenting on her multiple diasporic subjectivities, she submits that “I was not mindful of the extent to which my split consciousness of ‘home’ – as both multi-sited imagined but not imaginary and territorialized as well as de-territorialized and thus portable – was a shared sentiment” (56). Her submission references the actual lived experiences of those who straddle this multi-spatial sense of home.

Takyiwaa Manuh (2003) explores the dual “placement” of Ghanaian immigrants in Toronto who, though physically in Toronto, continue “several transnational practices” like “the struggle for the recognition of dual citizenship in Ghana; the establishment of national and hometown associations abroad; the sending home of remittances; and the importation of Ghanaian institutions such as chieftaincy and celebrations of births and deaths as practised in Ghana” (141). These transnational skeins of the Ghanaian diaspora in Toronto point to how I conceive of home as an embodied practice (that is, the home as self), a location (or sense of place), and a counter-discourse (spatializing difference). As an embodied practice, home is carried within the individual in such a way that the self becomes an index in identifying place/space and a means through which one is grounded within place/space (Teather 2005, 6–8). As a location,

home is defined by James Tyner (2012) as a site in which “broader structures influence and are influenced by the social relations that circulate in and out” (26). Here, the idea is that home is located firmly within space, a sort of “tamed space”, to draw on the terminology of Regan Koch and Alan Latham (2013, 10), and that it is mapped by the nature of influences and social relations that operate within it. As a form of counter-discourse, home works to transgress narratives of erasure or to inscribe specific identities and resistive practices on a landscape. This understanding of home as a counter-discourse has, as its purpose, what Katherine McKittrick calls the “spatialization of difference” (2002, 28), or “the ways multiple identities occupy, or do not occupy, space” (28). The “spatialization of difference” enables people to ground themselves within specific places/spaces in order to respond to the racialization, genderization, or sexualization of difference.

One way that this sense of home within the new African diaspora might be complicated has to do with how it might be imagined from a position of marginality. While McKittrick’s “spatialization of difference” helps us understand responses to this sense of marginality, for African diasporic subjects, home is a marginal place. This idea informs Basia Sliwinska’s (2015) concept of transnational “edge habitats” (291), in which home transcends national borders even as it acknowledges “fluidity and a re-configuration and reconstruction of identities and marginalised otherness” (291). Although Sliwinska grounds this idea of edge habitats in gender and conceives of home as an embodied artistic practice that upsets citizenship as a dominant narrative of diasporic subjectivity, the following reading of Ede’s poetry opens this concept up to interrogate how occupying edge habitats, the “here and there and in-between” (Sliwinska 2015, 309), might illuminate how a Nigerian writer like Ede negotiates home in the context of Nigeria, Canada, Germany, and elsewhere in the world. Ede’s transpatial

subjectivity spatializes difference on a transnational scale, and his negotiation of home is inflected by racial subjectivity and the marginal place of Blackness in the world.

The Long Poem and Transpatiality

To demonstrate the transpatial poetics of the long poem in Ede’s poetry, the form has to be defined. The long poem is not an easy form to define. As Patrick Gill and Miguel Juan Gronow Smith (2022) suggest, length alone is an unproductive way of thinking about the long poem, since it does not tell us about specific generic features (166). As a form, it is closely related to the epic, a genre that has also been used to theorize home and diasporic consciousness in the context of Western classics like Homer’s *The Odyssey*, Virgil’s *The Aeneid*, or in narratives of place, identity, belonging, and communal histories and experiences in African and Black examples like the *Epic of Sundiata*, *Ozidi Saga*, *Mwindo Epic*, and Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*, among others. However, the long poem is formally and functionally distinct from the epic. While the epic is interested in home and homecoming (Biggs and Blum 2019, 3) and in grand narratives about the world or its fictive universe (Shorrock 2001, 20), the long poem typically lacks a cohesive grand narrative; as Gill and Smith (2022) opine, it favours “more fragmentary strategies bringing together aspects of its contemporary culture” (166) and the speaker, far from being a sole authority, acts more like “witnesses of their respective culture” (167). This idea that the long poem responds to its cultural moment in terms of presenting a kaleidoscopic image of time, place, and subjectivity(/ies) is a key point of departure in how we might theorize the form.

While the long poem could be a loose descriptor for various other forms of poetry (i.e., ballads, narrative poems, etc.) as well as a way of describing certain modern 20th-century poems, including the works of T.S. Eliot,

Ezra Pound, Robert Kroetsch, and BpNichol, it might be more productive to think of it in terms of its functions and key features instead of conceptualizing it as an umbrella term for other forms. In this regard, the transpatial factor must be taken into account. In her study of the Romantic long poem, Lilach Lachman (2001) thinks of the long poem in terms of space and time. She suggests that "space in the long poem is the mode of organization that is most dependent on its deployment in time" (94). This perception comes from her reading of Keats' long poems as "progressive confrontation with the remnants of the cultural past" (89). This study foregrounds the importance of the long poem in the way poets spatially and temporally represent and reorganize the world around them and it speaks to the possibility of the long poem's engagement with a persona's multiple spatio-temporalities and its ability to fix subjectivity in both place and time.

Another crucial aspect of the long poem is the connections it foregrounds between its "multiple, interrupted, or discontinuous narrative elements" (DuPlessis 2023, 2) and the "strange mixes of time and space" (6). As a form that is entangled with place and time, the different parts of the long poem produce a complex frame that is important in relation to diasporic subjectivity. If we follow the premise of home as an embodied practice, then it becomes imperative to understand how this sense of home coincides with home as location and as counter-discourse in the long poem. In fact, I suggest that the long poem encodes and negotiates these possibilities of home through the poetic voice, whose sense of time and space slides between the here, the there, and the in-between. More precisely, as I will show through my reading of Ede's poetry, the poetic voice embodies Sliwiska's notion of those whose "identities and belonging (...) cannot be simply defined by their citizenship or cultural origin" (2015, 292–293). Ede's speaker emerges from various national edge habitats and poses what Susan Stanford Friedman

(1990), in defining the long poem, describes as "very big questions in a very long way" (10). While scholars of African diasporic literature understand this kind of negotiation, they do not always affix them to poetic form. I define the long poem as any lengthy poem that is either a standalone work or a work of book length that is normally non-sequential, lacks plot-based narrative continuity, and poses complex questions about self, time, place, or the relationship between self, time, and place. This form allows for a transpatial exploration of subjectivity vis-à-vis represented reality(/ies). It therefore opens itself up as an important conduit through which diasporic writers like Ede can inscribe their visions of the world.

Writing Home in Canada: Amatoritsero Ede's "Globetrotter"

Ede's *Globetrotter & Hitler's Children* (2009) is divided into two sections. These sections are basically distinct long poems that are written in highly fragmentized and complex styles. The first long poem, "Globetrotter", focuses on Canada, and the second one, "Hitler's Children," focuses on Germany. Each long poem follows a lettered sequence from A to Z, with each letter working as the title of the specific section or canto of the poem. Embodying home and positioning it as both a location and a counter-discourse, Ede's speaker, an Afropolitan figure, positions Toronto as a cosmopolitan space where "where all colours meet / a rainbow democracy" (23). This persona maps and reconstructs the city for us through immigrant eyes, a move described by Benzi Zhang (2004) in the context of Asian diasporic writing in Canada as "a constant re-homing process in which various elements of foreignness and otherness are reconfigured and repositioned in relation to new cultural dwellings and indwellings" (108–109). This recreation of Toronto from the position of Black immigrant subjectivity speaks to what Andrea Davis (2007, 33–34) describes as

“spatial” or “literary transgression”, conceived as a way through which Black and minority writers in Canada contest the putative white narrative of the nation.

In writing of his home within Canada, the poet's persona in “Globetrotter” introduces and describes Toronto to the reader using vivid visual images:

toronto
 city of rainbow and covenants
 under the shade of the maple leaf

fork-tongued
 full of babble
 coherent

as babel is not

cubist dream
 city within city within
 where

to take root
 germinate
 and flower (30)

Encoding Toronto into the “rainbow” metaphor is the speaker's way of positioning the city as a place where diversity thrives. This idea of diversity is further grounded in the image of coherent “babble”, alluding to Canada and Toronto's multicultural state that emerges from the multiplicity of peoples and cultures. The coherence of the “babble” then inscribes the melding of difference into a unique space where coherence emerges. As the paean to the city unfolds, the speaker starts describing how Black migrant bodies can define home in the cityscape through images of taking “root” and germinating. Here, the speaker grounds the

Black migrant body within the city and defines it as a home, thus “taming” the space.

There are other ways through which home is made and mapped for the reader in the collection. One involves the naming and representation of spaces and sites within Canada. In the canto lettered “D”, Ede's speaker evinces interest in the project of naming and representing spaces from the perspective of the Black immigrant through the depiction of Toronto's Dundas Avenue and “eaton center”, which are rendered through a strong conceit that likens the openness of “north American sky” to “those sex-workers / in amsterdam's love quarters” (20). This conceit demonstrates the homology that emerges from immigrant subjectivity, but it is also a way in which Ede navigates diasporic subjectivity from an Afropolitan perspective. The places mentioned are sites of cross-cultural interaction in the cosmopolitan city, and their presence in the poem evokes the city even while referencing the politics of multiculturalism and pluralism. The poem's speaker uses the “i” in a transpatial way to signal how the city, as a subject in the poem, provides the semiotic basis for the production of a Black migrant subjectivity that interacts with other places and spaces. The briefly encountered “i” in the foregrounded statement “i am wide open” refers to “those sex-workers / in amsterdam's love quarters” who are homologized with the “endless / north American sky.” This homology demonstrates the poem's negotiation of home and its implication of a speaker who is taming space through parallels and subjectivity.

The speaker's understanding of home in a counter-discursive sense is hinged on the edge habitat described (Blackness) and on the way race operates in the poem. In one instance, the speaker consciously locates Blackness in his definition of Canadianness:

to the street...

is the equation
of man or maiden
you meet

yellow-white-black simple
grey unabashed-brown
or simply canadian? (28)

In another instance, the speaker locates Blackness firmly in the streets of Toronto:

justled together
on mosaic streets
thick thin
full dimpled cheeks
paper-pale or ruddy-brown

black
not from bruising not
from not-christ-like palm (31)

These two instances suggest an extensive redefinition of Canadianness, one in which Blackness is central to the vision of rootedness in a multiracial space where edge habitats can thrive. Through the juxtaposition of colours in the compounded word “yellow-white-black”, Ede’s speaker locates Blackness in the medley of races that co-exist in the city. The rhetorical question that follows the speaker’s politics of inscribing Black place also suggests how one of the elements of the long poem – posing questions – allows for a counter-discourse of exclusionary notions of place. In this specific instance, Ede’s speaker condenses the colour-coded racial diversity of Toronto to “simply canadian?” and this rhetorical manoeuvre makes a strong claim for home within Canada by questioning the nation-state and its narrative capacity to include and exclude. In the second passage, the speaker acknowledges the facticity of Black subjectivity by unpacking the “mosaic streets” of the city. Through colour codes like “paper-pale,” “ruddy-brown”

and “black”, race is invoked in terms of its transgressive position within the city and the nation-state. It is in this “rainbow” space that Ede’s transpatiality finds voice. Acknowledging the diasporic skeins of the city, the speaker says: “a yielding of earth / leaves soft patch / for migrant foot // plucked // from far-flung places / much like slugs” (24). The image of “migrant foot” coming from “far-flung places” calibrates the transpatial dynamics of the place the speaker defines as home. This awareness of a home “here” and another “there” permeates the poem through the speaker’s tone as well as through the various spatializing images that transgress Canada in the form of the migrant bodies of those that constitute the new African diaspora.

There is a glaring absence of the poetic “I” in this long poem. We might read this absence in terms of Patricia Bernadette Cogswell’s submission that the long poem “denies the legitimacy of an ‘I’ that is wholly self-sufficient. It inscribes continuity with the lyric past, while subverting the solipsistic focus of the Romantic lyric voice, and re-tells received story in a manner that locates the vitalizing effects of the storytelling activity, not in the truths contained within the story itself, but in the total act of enunciation between writer and reader” (Cogswell 1988, 12). However, I contend that this missing “I” in Ede’s long poem might be more complex. Rather than deny the legitimacy of an “I”, Ede transforms this putative lyrical voice into fragments of the Afropolitan experience. As a fragmented voice speaking from edge habitats, the voice becomes less individuated and more collective, speaking to Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd’s thesis that “minority individuals are always treated and forced to experience themselves generically” (1990, 10). What we encounter as a lack of individuation in Ede’s long poem is a response to the idea of the cosmopolitan figure whose individuation might blind them to the discourse of race; but, as we learn from Cheryl Sterling (2015), race is

a central structure into which Black migrants are interpellated. It is in response to this interpellation that the individual voice is obscured in favour of a collective voice.

Although the poem does not have a complex subjective "I", it does have a "you", suggesting that the poem is in conversation with an imagined subject, posing questions and painting vignettes. The terms "you" and "your" are deployed throughout the poem as sliding signifiers for the position or subjectivity that the reader must occupy, even as they facilitate the voice of place, i.e., Canada/Toronto. In this sense, the poem becomes a home or place that the reader can textually occupy in order to understand the intricacies and dynamics of homemaking that the speaking voice has done. This style allows the big questions of the long poem – questions about home, identity, place, and belonging – to manifest not only rhetorically but also experientially. In the canto titled "H", the speaker says: "turn your migrant heel / twelve paces / of endless yonge ... // hydra-headed / in all direction / hissing // through town / up or down / from north york to lake's shore" (26). In this passage, the speaker invites position-taking and tasks the implied migrant subject with moving beyond the commotion of the city to intersubjectively meld with it: "and toronto's face / mirrors the face // you must daily face" (26). The poem here goes beyond representation to become a place, one that the Black migrant – experienced through the intersubjectivized "you" – must inhabit and embody in order to understand the fragmented Afropolitan subject who moves through the city with the "ghost" of the past and a sense of being "disembodied" in the complex process of homemaking.

Furthermore, Ede's long poem alludes to other spaces and temporalities. In the first canto, the speaker compares Toronto to Amsterdam, Prague, and London (17), inscribing a sort of transpatial poetics that inserts Toronto into a discourse of diasporic structuring that the Afropolitan figure must

navigate. In each canto of the poem, various fragments of this sort of navigation strike the reader. This fragmentary discourse allows the speaker to negotiate home in Toronto by painting what might be considered vignettes of the city. Ultimately, these vignettes demonstrate the difficulty associated with painting just one picture of any place. In the "G" canto of the poem, the speaker ends by painting Toronto as "soft landing" for migrant "foot," but by the next canto, the speaker contends that the migrant must not only engage with their "ghost's / blown across time-trapped landscapes" but also with the city mirroring their faces: "you must daily face – / self / disembodied" (25–27). The apparent contradiction or contrast between Toronto as a soft landing and Toronto as a landscape that evokes both transpatiality and edge habit subjectivity is based on a central question of the poem: what is home to a Black migrant who must contend with various structuring processes? Through its counter-discursive manoeuvres, its suggestion of an embodied home, and its complex, fragmented form, this long poem explores this question profoundly.

The Limits of Home in Germany: The Long Poem and Edge Habitats in Amatoritsero Ede's "Hitler's Children" and *Teardrops on the Weser*

Ede's "Hitler's Children", along with the entire long poem sequence in *Teardrops on the Weser* (2021b), dwell largely on the German dimension of the new African diaspora. True to form, Ede poses big questions about race and home in his representation of Germany. The question that comes up repetitively in "Hitler's Children" is "how did it transpire". However, far from being posed as a question that needs to be answered, it is mapped as a discourse. In posing this big question, Ede complicates what home might mean to the diasporic figure. Ede's speaker presents a sort of exilic consciousness,

to borrow James Tar Tsaioor's terminology (2011). Tsaioor comments that:

exilic consciousness can operate at two broad existential grids. These are the internal and the external. Internally, one can be an exile while rooted in one particular place in one's homeland without physical displacement. This is spiritual exile which registers itself in terms of absence through presence. Internally too, one can be within the borders of a nation-state but may be dislocated from one's immediate local milieu. Then, there is the external exile, which represents itself in physical flight from one's homeland in a particular nation-state to another outside of one's native country. These modes of exile and exilic consciousness are precipitated by the contingencies of state political

repression, economic recession, religious strife, labour migration, racial discrimination and cultural practices, among others. (99–100)

This take on exilic consciousness complicates any simplistic understanding of the migrant or Afropolitan figure. If a person is exiled from their country, they automatically inhabit a very specific edge habit that accentuates their diasporic subjectivity in such a way that home is always embodied. The idea of a here, there, and in-between takes further nuance as the "there" component becomes an object of scrutiny, as much as the "here". The transpatial subjectivity takes up a double-edged function: it critiques all possibilities of home but the self.

In the second and third cantos of the poem, this exilic discourse and its negotiation of home begin to come up through the aesthetic registers of the long poem. In the second canto, the speaker explores the failure of an originary home as location:

dam-n the sea's sobbing

you left
 exiled by ogre country
 sent off like fissures
 splintered
 cracked as glass can crack
 in the sun's nuclear reflection
 stars flame and die
 burn airplane wings
 cross the horizon
 and congeal on foreign skies
 how did it transpire! (62)

Here, the speaker describes the original homeland as an "ogre country" that has so battered the migrant figure that they are "splintered" and "cracked". This provides the rationale for exile – the desire to escape a terrible situation at home. The lines also seem to flow through white space in a way that suggests difficult movement and realities. The lineation and abruptness of the lines all work aesthetically

to demonstrate the rationale for migration and its source in state failure. In the following canto, the speaker explores this rationale further by basing it on economic reasons (63) and the failure of the state and its leaders: "and the sick southern politician / dazed by the opiate / of stolen money // and stolen power" (64). This critique of the homeland sets the tone,

however fragmentary, for the negotiation of home that follows.

Ede's speaker subsequently tells us that Black migrants must perpetually contend with violence and exclusion from the body politic of the nations that they live in. In one such instance, the speaker takes up the case of Adriano, a Mozambican-German murdered

by neo-Nazis in 2000. Described as "hitler's children", the speaker in the poem invokes race and the racial interpellation that led to Adriano's murder in Germany, while Adriano is directly addressed in the form of an apostrophe, a technique that clarifies important questions and positions:

how did it transpire

that you traversed
the "national free zone"

your ugly black face in tow
did you not know'
of the head's duty to the legs

that the one should
not lead
the other astray

what is your rage *O Adriano*
that you must trouble these spoilt kids so (71)

In asking the poem's big question about how Black migrant bodies are treated in the West, the speaker satirically deploys racist discourse ("ugly black face") to comment on the alterity of Adriano. The questions being posed through apostrophe invite an extensive reassessment of home. If Adriano, a naturalized German, had imagined Germany as his new home, then his inactions, in the context of the poem, could be because of the sense of safety he must have thought he had. If Adriano, a German, can be killed for simply being Black in Germany, then what constitutes "Germanness"? As Susan Stanford Friedman suggests (1990), one way the long poem can be used as a "self-authorizing strategy" is in its "creation of the discourse of the satiric Other" (12). The satiric Others in Ede's poem then are those who define Germanness based on race. Ede's long poem contests this notion by invoking the image of the "afro-german" (69) as a discursive possibility that terrifies the satiric Other, the

neo-Nazis. In his reading of Ede's allusion to the killing of a Black American, Emmett Till, in the following canto, Gbogi (2022) asserts that "Adriano becomes a metaphor for the larger racist treatment of blacks and African immigrants in Europe, just as Emmett Till becomes his ancestral shadow, pointing to the broader history of death that connects the past of black bodies to their present" (14). This comment helps us frame Ede's intervention here: home corresponds to a transpatial discourse that affectively reels in the past, the present, and the future, even as it inscribes how places and spaces can shape and influence subjectivity.

The poem's peculiar lineation mirrors the purpose of the long poem. Lines are arranged in very specific ways, creating the effect of a shape that cannot be fully grasped, much like the long poem's formal complexity. In one instance of this complexity, asymmetrical lineation illuminates how race inflects German society:

day and night
 fulcrum and moment
 of cosmic balance

different and equal
 black and white
 different cords
 keying the piano chant

 of corded tribe
 corded like cable
 to electrify one race

one spark
 ignites a sky of bodies
 lightens cloud-quarrel (...) (76)

Here, Ede's speaker meditates on the possibility of a society where race might not be a significant source of tension. However, this speaker is also keenly aware of the charged atmosphere and potential for violence ("one spark / ignites a sky of bodies"). Beyond this keen awareness, the poem formally registers the discordant nature of things through asymmetrical lineation and the seeming impossibility of harmony. This inscribes a sort of perpetual edge habitat status for the Black migrant who must recognize home as nothing more than the self. The long poem registers its speaker as the only stable element in its critique of home as a location. However, it recognizes the possibility of an embodied home through an awareness of the self and its body politics as the only abiding sense of identity and belonging in a world that constantly interpellates the migrant body into discourses of race, erasure, and exclusion.

Ede's transpatiality also acknowledges the edge habitat of the Niger Delta, his place of origin. As an edge habitat, the Niger Delta is a marginal location that contests Nigeria's dominant national narratives. Tanure Ojaide (2021) describes the Niger Delta region as having "geographical, bioregional, historical, cultural, and ontological implications" (13) that are rooted in a shared sense of "dispossession"

and historical and political realities (16–20), especially pertaining to minority and environmental rights. Its "edge habitat" status is crystallized in Joseph Agbo's submission that:

What we have called "the Niger-Delta Minority Question" arises, in our opinion, on the basis of the fact that Nigeria's economic survival since independence has almost entirely depended on the crude oil explored, exploited and exported from the Niger-Delta earth crust. Yet the region has remained largely and grossly underdeveloped. The question, therefore, is: how can and why should a people (or peoples) that provide the majority of what Nigeria needs for survival continue to wallow in such subjugation, environmental degradation and physical underdevelopment, just because of numerical and geographical "minor-ness"? (Agbo 2022, 34)

Agbo accentuates how reckless extractive practices, economic exploitation, and geo-political disadvantages define the Niger Delta's marginal condition. Ede comes from a place that

stages its own discourse against the nation, producing a sense of alterity and marginality.

Although *Teardrops on the Weser* is mostly a meditation on the Weser River that runs through Northwestern Germany, the Niger Delta takes central space. The poet's ability to evoke images of nature, almost akin to his Niger Delta literary predecessors like Gabriel Okara, J.P. Clark, and Tanure Ojaide, is a striking aspect of this poem. Ede's evocative language celebrates the region's changing forces of nature and inserts the reader into a discourse that begins with the "solid brown vein / snaking / through the lower saxony // only to burst apart into / twain tributaries / two grave flows" (5–6) only to be obstructed by the tumultuous waters in his place of birth: "german waters / not unlike / the niger or benue ... // not waterways / to ferry and ship black bodies / to a europe-poisoned new world // that trafficking of black souls / in rotten ships holds / across the cursed atlantic" (38–39). While the poem begins by reflecting on the beauty of the Weser, the reader is ultimately reminded of the titular teardrops that come from a meditative persona whose window becomes "picture-dull / becomes sober lens", while the "dark ghostly hulk" and "greasy oil-like flow" (34) invoke a transpatial subjectivity that speaks to the Niger Delta.

Unlike Ede's other long poems, *Teardrops on the Weser* features a poetic "I". Playing more with lyricism, we see two foregrounded "Is" in the poem. The first "i" (sic) observes quotidian scenes along the river: "i sit square / and stare / drop-jaw // at the gothic glory of medieval / st. martin's church in the sun / against the skyline" (15) while the second "I" (sic) is in a passive position: "the gulf deepens / between church / and I // as night navigates / the weser / and the crowd thin out" (31). The positional disconnect between the first "i" and the second "I" speaks to how the poem constructs and deconstructs the self in the context of the capacity

to inscribe home. On the one hand, the first "i" has creative agency to observe and paint and might be read as being in the category of Afropolitanism, which Ede (2016) says can be "regarded as short-sighted because of its individualistic political effects" (90). However, as the metaphorical "gulf" deepens between the illusory beauty of the river and the speaker, the second "I" emerges as one who has no active power. From this point in the poem, lyricism paves the way for a big question, true to the long poem form. The question is anchored on how the Black migrant body, with its interpellation into the politics of race, might negotiate home from the perspective of multiple marginality and inhabited edge habitats.

Ede makes use of water imagery to meditate on his place of birth. In an interview with Umezurike, he submits that:

Today, we know that the River Ethiope in Nigeria is polluted by Shell, Chevron, British Petroleum, and oil-prospecting European companies. Growing up in Sapele, Delta State, Nigeria, I went to bed aware of the gas flaring on the horizon. As a child, I was confused by that orange glare, and I only understood what the hellish glow on the horizon meant much later as an adult. Today, Nigerian rivers and their eco-systems are polluted, and sometimes permanently destroyed, by European capitalist activities. (2021a, n. p.)

Ede's position helps us to better understand the obstruction to the flow of the "Weser" river sequence by a meditation on the Niger Delta. Through memory, the poem's speaker returns to his troubled Niger Delta home as a location and a counter-discourse:

sluggish with memories
of dead water
on the niger river delta
in Nigeria
after shell shat
shocked oil impurities
in it

till choked full
of poisoned fish
and algae

the creek reeks
of dead things
and people

like the ogoni nine (36)

Here, the speaker seems to lose control of the beautiful lyricism that preceded this passage and meditates, through memory, on the Niger Delta, through the poem's allusion to the Ogoni who were killed by the Nigerian state for daring to demand fair treatment and justice as Nigerian minorities. The memory is also very much rooted in the contrast between the stillness and "silence on the weser" and the "muffled wailing" of the Niger (37). The mere fact that the Weser reminds the speaker of rivers in his homeland locates home transpatially. Occupying multiple spaces and temporalities at once, the Niger Delta is recalled with a tone of pain, highlighting the region's edge habitat status. The "slick alliance" (Gomba 2019) between "shell" and "abacha", emblematic of the Nigerian state, creates environmental, socio-political, and economic issues for the people. Pristine home is longed for, aided by the Weser's calm flow, but the reality of home as a marginal space ultimately informs the tone of despair we encounter.

The Weser's ability to produce alterity in the mind of the speaker is fundamentally rooted in the way it evokes memories "in their symmetries / and asymmetries" (42). This sense of alterity allows the speaker to negotiate

home with the understanding of having a marginal place in the world. This transpatial understanding of marginality weaves Blackness and the Niger Delta into a discourse that accentuates new African diasporic subjectivities. In the penultimate canto of the poem, the image of a million migrant faces "drives off hate / dams the bile" (41). Here, the speaker suggests that migrant bodies, transpatially linked to the Weser River's flow, might contest those who brandish the "swastika" (40) in the way they stake their claims for home. Ultimately, home becomes embodied in how it mediates memory, stages a counter-discourse, and even invokes dreams of a harmonious future.

Conclusion

Ede's long poems negotiate home in a way that is transpatial, and thus demonstrate that the diasporic subject's notion of home is fundamentally complex and involves multiple spaces. He inserts the long poem form into a complex discourse on the new African diaspora, one in which diasporic writers like himself think transpatially in their works. The long poem and its implication of a sustained discourse allow Ede to transgress Toronto – and Canada in general – with the Black immigrant body, critique the treatment of Black immigrants in Germany, and meditate on the disrupted flow of a tranquil river in Germany that evokes the memory of a troubled and exploited homeland. Gill and Smith's thesis that "contemporary long poems seem to be making a re-turn to narrative [and which] may mark an important change in and of itself" (2022, 173) might be true for some poets, but Ede's long poems disrupt grand, dominant narratives and present fragmentary and minoritized visions of the world. Ede makes no attempt at narrative unity. Although the poems are connected thematically and in other ways, Ede's interest lies in asking big and sometimes complex questions through the long poem form.

Ede deserves to be recognized as a major diasporic writer whose works thematically and formally contribute to how we might frame the Afropolitan figure who is interpellated into a racialized discourse that begins with the old African diaspora. In making a

claim for home, Ede asks big questions about the place of Blackness in the world and provides us with the terms of reference to theorize home and to think of the place of the long poem in diasporic African writing.

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