

**MAGICAL REALISM AS A NARRATIVE STRATEGY IN BEN OKRI'S
*THE FAMISHED ROAD AND INFINITE RICHES***

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been submitted for the award of a degree in any other University or any other award.

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DEDICATION

To my Dearest parents,

When I shed my tears, you dried them.

You kept me side by side.

You taught me

To distinguish right from wrong

Though I did not know

Punishment hurt you twice as much

You schooled me

To bring out the best in me

You wanted me to see the good

And give me a shelter from the rest.

Older I am now

And when I look back on time

My success I owe you

Because you kept me in line

Given a chance to change my life

No single thing I would altar

Since the best parents belong to me.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| DECLARATION | ii |
| DEDICATION | iii |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | iv |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS | v |
| OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS | ix |
| ABSTRACT | x |
| CHAPTER ONE | 1 |
| 1.0 INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 1.1 Introduction | 1 |
| 1.2 The Author’s Profile | 5 |
| 1.3 Statement of the Problem | 7 |
| 1.4 Objectives of the study..... | 8 |
| 1.5 Research questions | 8 |
| 1.6 Research Assumptions | 9 |
| 1.7 Justification of the study | 9 |
| 1.8 Scope and Limitation | 12 |
| 1.9 Literature Review..... | 13 |
| 1.9.1 Introduction..... | 13 |
| 1.9.2 Review of literature on Ben Okri’s works | 13 |
| 1.9.3 Magical Realism as a Concept in Literature | 17 |
| 1.10 Theoretical Framework | 22 |

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1.11 Research Methodology | 28 |
| 1.11.1 Introduction | 28 |
| 1.11.2 Research Design..... | 28 |
| 1.11.3 Population Sampling..... | 29 |
| 1.11.4 Data Collection | 30 |
| 1.11.4.1 Primary Data | 30 |
| 1.11.4.2 Secondary Data | 30 |
| 1.11.5 Data Analysis | 31 |
| 1.11.6 Ethical Consideration..... | 32 |
| CHAPTER TWO | 33 |
| 2.0 THE USE OF MAGICAL REALISM TO REPRESENT SOCIO- POLITICAL AND MORAL ILLS IN <i>THE FAMISHED ROAD</i> AND <i>INFINITE RICHES</i> | 33 |
| 2.1 Introduction..... | 33 |
| 2.2 The Abiku as a Narrative Center..... | 34 |
| 2.3 Magical Realism as Social Critique | 44 |
| 2.4 Magical Realism and Nationhood..... | 59 |
| 2.5 The Concept of Time and Foresight | 64 |
| 2.6 Conclusion | 68 |
| CHAPTER THREE | 70 |
| 3.0 THE NEXUS BETWEEN MAGICAL REALISM AND THE POSTCOLONIAL DISCOURSE | 70 |

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| 3.1 Introduction..... | 70 |
| 3.2 Deconstructing Postcolonial Discourse | 71 |
| 3.3 Magical Realism and the Language of Postcoloniality..... | 74 |
| 3.4 The Voyage of a Postcolonial Nation through Symbolism..... | 76 |
| 3.5 The Milieu of the Spirit-Beings in Highlighting Social issues in Postcolonial Africa | 82 |
| 3.5.1 Defiance for the Colonial Norms through Exegesis of the Carnavalesque Mood..... | 89 |
| 3.5.2 Opposition to the Colonial Convention through Fuselage Depiction | 92 |
| 3.6 Death as the Interlude between Life and Nihilism..... | 98 |
| 3.7 Conclusion | 101 |
| CHAPTER FOUR..... | 102 |
| 4.0 BEN OKRI'S VISION OF POSTCOLONIALITY THROUGH THE LENS OF MAGICAL REALISM..... | 102 |
| 4.1 Introduction..... | 102 |
| 4.2 The Crucialness of the Postcolonial state | 105 |
| 4.3 The State of Denial in the Postcolonial Nation..... | 111 |
| 4.4 The Trauma of Selfish Leadership..... | 115 |
| 4.5 Greed, the Harbinger of Socio-economic Disparities | 126 |
| 4.6 Flicker of Hope Ignited by the Universality of Love..... | 130 |
| 4.7 Conclusion | 133 |
| CHAPTER FIVE..... | 135 |

5.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND

RECOMMENDATIONS..... 135

5.1 Introduction..... 135

5.2 Summary of Findings..... 136

5.3 Conclusion 139

5.3.1 Recommendations for Future Research 141

5.3.2 Recommendations Based on Findings. (Practical Implications) 142

WORKS CITED..... 143

APPENDICES 149

Appendix I: Authorization Letter..... 149

Appendix II: NACOSTI Research Permit 150

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

Carnavalesque: A Bakhtinian concept of inversion and subversion of power. In Okri's work, it symbolises moments of resistance and communal renewal amid social disorder.

Foresight: The prophetic insight characters possess to discern moral truth and envision transformation within decaying postcolonial systems.

Fuselage: A recurring symbol of confinement and transition. It reflects the postcolonial subject's suspension between oppression and liberation.

Hybridity: The fusion of indigenous and colonial forms of expression. In this study, it captures Okri's blending of oral tradition and Western realism to forge a language of resistance.

Interlude: A liminal space between life and death, used by Okri to suggest renewal and reflection within the postcolonial experience.

Magical Realism: A narrative mode blending the real and the supernatural to expose social and moral truths. In this study, it refers to Okri's use of myth and dream to critique postcolonial realities in *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*.

Postcoloniality: The historical and cultural condition following colonialism, marked by identity struggles and renewal. Here, it denotes the moral and political challenges of African societies depicted in Okri's fiction.

ABSTRACT

Magical realism fuses the real and the marvelous to expose the complexities of postcolonial life. The study investigates magical realism as a narrative strategy in representing postcolonial realities in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*. This research is driven by the need to understand how postcolonial writers employ the magical to question the contradictions and disillusionment of independence. Drawing on Homi Bhabha's notions of ambivalence and hybridity, Gayatri Spivak's insights on subalternity and silenced voices and Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, the study examines how Okri's narrative forms challenge colonial authority and reticulate African subjectivity. Chapter Two, The Use of Magical Realism to represent the socio-political ills in *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*, finds that Okri exposes corruption, greed and moral decay, contributing to scholarship by demonstrating magical realism's role in socio-political critique. Chapter Three, The Nexus Between Magical Realism and Postcolonial Discourse, reveals how Okri negotiates Western realism and African cosmologies to express hybridity and cultural resistance, highlighting the link between narrative technique and postcolonial identity. Chapter Four, Ben Okri's vision of the postcoloniality, shows that his fiction fosters hope, spiritual resilience and imaginative renewal, providing insight into reconstructing African futures. Chapter Five synthesises these findings, arguing that Okri's magical realism functions as both artistic and ideological tool that critiques power, affirms African subjectivity, and envisions liberated nationhood. Overall, the study contributes to scholarship by positioning magical realism as a critical instrument in postcolonial literature.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Magical realism has emerged as one of the most dynamic and inclusive narrative modes in modern literature, bridging the gap between the material and mystical, the historical and imaginary. Originating in Latin American fiction and later adapted by postcolonial writers across the world, it provides a unique aesthetic framework for expressing the complex realities of societies marked by cultural hybridity, disillusionment, and spiritual endurance. Through the fusion of the myth and history, magical realism resists the boundaries of rationalism and questions the authority of Western rationalism to represent non-western realities. In the African context, this narrative mode becomes an act of cultural recovery, enabling writers to reinterpret indigenous cosmologies and the spiritual world vies within the structures of the modern novel.

Ben Okri, a leading contemporary African writer, exemplifies the strategic use of magical realism in his fiction. In works such as *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*, Okri seamlessly merges ordinary life with mystical and spiritual elements, creating narratives that reflect both the struggles and aspirations of post-independence African societies. His fiction foregrounds the intersections of the material and spiritual worlds, enabling readers to engage with societal realities through a lens that accommodates ambiguity, complexity, and the coexistence of

multiple truths. In Okri's narratives, magical realism is not merely a stylish flourish; it functions as a tool for interrogating cultural identity, political corruption, and historical consciousness, while simultaneously offering imaginative pathways for hope and renewal.

Scholars such as Ato Quayson, Brenda Cooper and Peter Childs have extensively discussed Okri's use of myth, symbolism and spirituality, often focusing on his representation of the spirit world, the idea of transition, and the philosophical nature of existence. Other critics, including Derek Wright and Abdulrazak Gurnah, have examined Okri's political and allegorical dimensions, interpreting his novels as reflections of Nigeria's socio-political instability. Other studies have centered on the thematic dimensions of Okri's fiction, particularly his exploration of postcolonial concerns such as cultural hybridity, the tension between tradition and modernity, political critique, and the moral and the spiritual dimensions of human experience. These works have enriched critical appreciation of Okri's contributions to African literature, situating him as a pivotal figure in the articulation of postcolonial identity and the negotiation of African epistemologies.

Despite these important contributions, existing scholarship presents certain limitations that the study seeks to address. Much of the literature either examines narrative style in isolation or explores thematic concerns without directly linking them to the function of magical realism as a deliberate narrative strategy.

Specifically, there is limited research that interrogates how magical realism simultaneously operates as an aesthetic device, a means of socio-political critique, and a vehicle for articulating postcolonial consciousness. Furthermore, while scholars acknowledge that Okri engages with postcolonial themes, the specific ways in which magical realism mediates between Western realist conventions and African cosmologies – expressing hybridity, resistance and identity – remain unexplored. Equally, the potential of magical realism to construct alternative social and political imageries and to offer imaginative visions of postcolonial renewal has not been systematically examined. These gaps underscore the need for a study that situates magical realism at the center of analytical attention, rather than treating it a secondary stylistic concern.

The study addresses these gaps by conducting a focused examination of magical realism in *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*, analysing how it functions as both an aesthetic and ideological strategy. Chapter Two explores magical realism as a mirror of socio-political ills, demonstrating how Okri exposes corruption, moral decay, and the cyclical nature of post-independence suffering. By foregrounding these social critiques, the study contributes to scholarship by highlighting the capacity of magical realism to engage critically with contemporary African realities, showing its significance beyond mere narrative ornamentation. Chapter Three interrogates the nexus between magical realism and the postcolonial discourse, revealing how Okri's narrative mediates between Western realism and

African cosmologies to express hybridity, ambivalence and cultural resistance. This analysis contributes to theory by linking narrative technique with the articulation of postcolonial identity, illustrating how literary forms can reflect and negotiate social and cultural tensions.

Chapter Four examines Ben Okri's vision of the postcoloniality, showing how his fiction affirms hope, spirituality, and resilience amid political and existential crises. This chapter contributes a nuanced understanding of how imaginative reconstruction of African futures can be achieved through literary form. Finally, Chapter Five synthesises these findings, demonstrating that Okri's magical realism operates both as an artistic and ideological tool, critiquing power, restoring African subjectivity, and envisioning transformative futures.

The necessity of this study is rooted in its potential to deepen critical engagements with African literature and postcolonial theory. By foregrounding magical realism as a deliberate strategy, it expands existing scholarship, showing how narrative form can simultaneously interrogate socio-political realities, articulate cultural identity, and offer visionary possibilities. The research contributes to literary studies by providing a comprehensive framework for understanding Okri's fiction, demonstrating the transformative capacity of magical realism as both a narrative and a postcolonial tool. In doing so, the study not only enriches appreciation of

Okri's works but also advances broader discussions on the role of literary strategy in representing, critiquing, and reshaping postcolonial African realities.

1.2 The Author's Profile

Due to the nature of his literature, Ben Okri can be referred to as a novelist, poet and an essayist. He enjoys both the Igbo and the Urhobo upbringings courtesy of his parents. In her article, *Ben Okri (1959-)* Daria Tunia asserts that; "Through his childhood, Okri assiduously read the books from his father's library and thus became acquainted with literature ranging from treatise of Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, to English classics by Charles Dickens and Jane Austin" (3). Ben Okri's eclectic reading experience influenced him in quite a significant way in his own writings. Dickens ideas on socio economic disparities can be seen in most of Ben Okri's works.

He started writing in 1976 as he was waiting to be granted a place to pursue a course in Science at the university. When his application was accepted, he moved to London in 1978. While there he published his first novel that he had written while he was in Nigeria. The novel entitled, *Flowers and Shadows* was published by Longman and is a narrative on a young man disillusioned with corruption in the postcolonial Nigeria society. Okri was later granted a scholarship to study at the University of Essex and while there he wrote his second novel, *The Landscape Within* which is purely a story on the daily life and artistic aspirations of young

painters living in Lagos. In this book, Okri offers a glimpse into his own aesthetic practice and on the role of artists in the society. His novels, *The Famished Road* published in 1991 and *Infinite Riches* are part of a trilogy that have an *Abiku*, a spirit-child in Yoruba mythology as the protagonist.

The Famished Road won him the Prestigious Booker Prize for fiction. Among some of the awards he has won in recognition of his literary prowess include: The World Economic Forum's Crystal Award (1995), An honorary doctorate from the University of Westminster (1997) and the University of Essex (2002), An O.B.E (2001), Appointment to the board of the Royal National Theatre in London (1999) and Vice President of the English Center of International PEN (1997) His concern with the role of the artist has taken several forms in the subsequent years. As a writer he emphasises on imagination as critical in understanding and reshaping of the world. Other literary works by Ben Okri include *The Landscape* written in 1981, *Incidents at the Shrine* written in 1984 and *Incidents of the Shrine and Stars of the New Curfew* written in 1988.

A writer does not write in a vacuum but rather after observing the manifestations in their societies, their experiences and upbringing. Literature thus cannot be separated from the society. According to Anita Seth in her article, "Ben Okri: Novelist as Dream Weaver," Okri was also influenced by the oral tradition of his people, and particularly his mother's storytelling. "If my mother wanted to make a

point, she would not correct me, she'd tell me a story. What my mother was doing was playing on my natural curiosity to find things out. I learnt the art of telling a story that is difficult to figure out" (7). Arguably, Ben Okri's background and his mother's way of telling stories served to influence his way of writing and also explains his fascination with the supernatural which birthed the magical element evident in most of his writings.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Although Ben Okri is widely recognised among contemporary African writers for engaging with contentious social and political issues, the critical scholarship on his work has not fully examined the narrative function of magical realism within postcolonial framework. While magical realism has been thoroughly theorised in Latin American contexts, its deployment in African fiction, particularly in Okri's novels remains underexplored. Existing studies often discuss thematic concerns in his work but give little attention to how magical realism operates as a deliberate postcolonial strategy that interrogates political, cultural and spiritual contradictions in Nigerian society. This study therefore addresses the gap in scholarship by investigating how Okri uses magical realism not merely as a stylistic choice but as a functional narrative mode for representing the complexities of the postcolonial condition.

1.4 Objectives of the study

This study aims to:

- a) Interrogate the use of magical realism to represent socio-political and moral ills in *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*.
- b) Explore the nexus between magical realism and postcolonial discourse in *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*.
- c) Investigate how Ben Okri, as an author employs magical realism to aid his vision of postcoloniality in both *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*.

1.5 Research questions

This study is informed by the following research questions:

- a) How does Okri's use of magical realism expose and critique socio-political corruption, moral decay, and leadership failures in *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*?
- b) In what ways does magical realism operate as a mediating narrative strategy between Western realist conventions and African postcolonial experiences, and how does this mediation reflect broader postcolonial concerns?
- c) How does Okri's integration of the supernatural and the real advance his vision of postcoloniality, particularly in articulating hope, resilience, and cultural renewal in post-independence Africa?

1.6 Research Assumptions

The study makes the following assumptions:

- a) Magical realism in *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches* functions as a deliberate narrative strategy that critiques socio-political corruption, moral decay, and leadership failures in postcolonial African societies.
- b) Magical realism mediates between western realist conventions and African postcolonial experiences, serving as a literary mechanism to express hybridity, cultural negotiation, and resistance.
- c) Okri employs magical realism to advance his vision of postcoloniality by articulating hope, spiritual resilience, and reconstruction of African identity, demonstrating the transformative potential of narrative form in postcolonial literature.

1.7 Justification of the study

This research contributes to the greater field of the postcolonial literature by showing how Ben Okri, an African writer, adopts global literary techniques to articulate local issues that maraud the continent of Africa. Magical realism blends the ordinary and with the extraordinary in a unique way. Through this blending, magical realism captures the complex aspects of human existence which realism is not able to capture. Though employed in Latin America by writers such as Gabriel Marquez, it was not a very common mode of writing in African literature. However, African writers such as Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka have since started

employing magical realism in their writings. In his article *Magical Realism and World Literature*, Roman de la Campa posits that; “magical realism obtains more prominence in the late twentieth century than any other literary mode” (2). Magical realism as a mode of writing has been embraced by writers from Africa, Europe and even Asia.

The two texts under study, *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*, fall under this category since both have the magical element. Whereas Ben Okri is not new to the literary scene, he introduces a myriad of debates through the magical realism mode of writing. These debates have sparked interest in the African literary scene. Additionally, the use of magical realism in crafting his postcolonial texts has sparked interest among literature scholars. In the two texts, magical realism operates as a postcolonial narrative strategy which not only destabilises western realist traditions but also asserts the place of mythical and indigenous world perspectives. Detailed studies on Ben Okri works are not rare especially after the turn of the century and in addition, there are several studies done on his writings mostly critical essays and few full length studies.

The data collected by the researcher revealed that this area (the relationship between magical realism and the postcolonial vision) has not been given attention yet it is such a phenomenal area in African literature. It is phenomenal in the sense that magical realism used to be a preserve of a few Latin American authors such as

Gabriel Marquez and there was not much of African literature on this area. This therefore creates a wide lacuna to explore. There is need to widen the scope of knowledge on magical realism as a narrative strategy in order to give audience to established writers such as Ben Okri. Though Comprehensive studies of Ben Okri's two texts, *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches* are available, they are not elaborate.

In her article, *Ben Okri, the Aesthetic, and the problem with theory*, Sarah Fliford alludes to the fact that Okri's publication of his novel, *The Famished Road* in 1991 hails the creation of a new aesthetic that goes beyond the traditional nationalist postcolonial agenda of his Nigerian predecessors, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka. Therefore, it can be deduced that Okri's works add a tinge of literary flavor to the already existing element of magical realism in West Africa.

This study therefore, is interested in studying Ben Okri's work that squarely focuses on the magical element and the postcolonial vision and not studied by Sarah Fliford and others. By focusing on postcolonial vision in his magical element texts, the study creates continuity and widens the scope by which his literature can be read and interpreted. This study also aims to interrogate what postcolonial writers such as Ben Okri envision of in a postcolonial era.

1.8 Scope and Limitation

This study focuses on examining how magical realism is employed as a narrative strategy in representing postcolonial realities in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*. The analysis is guided by postcolonial theoretical perspectives, particularly those advanced by Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak and Mikhail Bakhtin. It explores how Okri magical realism to articulate his vision of postcoloniality, to interrogate the socio-political contradictions of the postcolonial state and to reconstruct African identity through the fusion of myth, history and spirituality.

This study is delimited to the two novels, *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches* because the two texts fall in the same trilogy that includes *Songs of Enchantment*. *The Famished Road* introduces Okri's use of the spirit world to reflect the struggles of post-independence society, while *Infinite Riches* extends this vision by exploring the collapse of moral and political ideals. Their selection is therefore justified by their thematic continuity and the depth with which they embody Okri's use of magical realism to interrogate power, identity and renewal. The two texts are a representation of two sides of Ben Okri's vision: mythic and spiritual foundation and socio-political culmination. Limiting the study to these two texts allows for an in-depth analysis on how magical realism cuts across.

In summary, the main limitation lies in its dependence on textual interpretation, which may not fully account for the wider socio-historical contexts or diverse

reader response to Okri's works. This study confines itself to a critical literary examination of how Ben Okri employs magical realism to represent and critique postcolonial experiences in *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*.

1.9 Literature Review

1.9.1 Introduction

This sub-section is subdivided into the following sections; reviews of literature on Ben Okri's works, review of literature on magical realism as a literary concept and finally a review of literature on the two texts while assessing their relevance for our study.

1.9.2 Review of literature on Ben Okri's works

This review of critical works on Ben Okri's literary texts focuses on contextualising the study in terms of the literary mode, thematic concerns that help foreground magical realism and theoretical framework. It also contextualizes the objectives of this study by revealing the gaps that exist in the critical corpus on Okri as well as offering insights on how writers in general and Okri in particular deploy their literary writings as a means of exploring their vision on postcoloniality as well as interrogating how magical realism aids the rendition of the postcolonial discourse. This review focuses on books, articles and journals on Ben Okri's works related to the three objectives of the study.

The review focuses on works of Ben Okri's literature from the most recent to the latest. Paul Klee's statement that, "art does not reproduce the visible – it makes visible," can certainly be applied to Okri's writings. Art is not needed to help one see the world because it can be seen at first sight but rather art is needed to help us see the entire universe, the truths and other beauties. Sarah Fulford in, *Ben Okri, The Aesthetic and the Problem with Theory*, quotes Ben Okri during an interview with Jane Wilkison as saying:

There has been too much attribution of power to the effect of colonialism on our consciousness (. . .). We have looked too much in that direction and have forgotten our own aesthetic frames. Even though that was there and took place and invaded our social structure, it's quite possible that it did not invade our spiritual, aesthetic and mythical internal structures, the way in which we perceive the world because if one were going to be investigative, one would probably say that a true invasion takes place not when a society has been taken over by another society in terms of its infrastructure, but in terms of its mind and its dreams, and its myths and its perceptions of reality. (33)

Okri challenges the idea that colonialism has had a profound impact on the colonised cultures. To Okri, the effect of colonialism on the African's consciousness has been given too much attention. However, at the same time Okri does not deny that colonialism greatly influenced the different cultures that it came into contact with but he argues that too much focus should not be given to this influence. As such the blame does not rest squarely on colonialism but rather different communities should strive to take responsibility for their destiny. The colonialists may have imprisoned the African's body but definitely not his spirit as such there is need among the Africans to rediscover themselves. The message in

Ben Okri's texts therefore is that Africans should be realistic, take charge of their own destinies and cease blaming their former colonial masters.

The *Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches* address the challenges of a newly independent postcolonial nation. Douglas McCabe observes that, "The vast majority of the critical commentary on Ben Okri's, *The Famished Road*, views the text as both postmodern and postcolonial" (1). The novel not only depicts a post-colonial nation's chaotic state orchestrated by its passage from colonialism to independence but also captures the unwillingness of the spirit children to exist in the world of the living. This unwillingness symbolises the reluctance among newly-independent nations to accept responsibility for their own destiny.

Azaro, who indexes a newly independent nation that is willing to accept responsibility for its own independence, is resolute on staying in the land of the living. In an early review of the book, Kwame Anthony Appiah emphasizes, *The Famished Road's* spiritual terms of reference from the more postmodern and postcolonial "magical realism" of Latin-American authors. Kwame posits, "My own sense is that there is a difference writer's draw on the supernatural and the way that Okri does; for Okri, in a curious way the world of spirits is not metaphorical or imaginary; rather, it is more real than the world of everyday (. . .) Okri's own spiritual views are often too transparently communicated, modulating the novel's

exuberant spiritual realism” (. . .) into an irritatingly pseudo mystical New Age mode of discourse. (147)

Appiah’s observations help point out how different writers perceive both the natural and the supernatural and bring it out in their writings. He argues that for Okri, the supernatural is not imaginary but rather is the real norm of life. Olatubosun Ogunsanwo seems to affirm Appiah’s assertions. He argues that; “What makes *The Famished Road* postcolonial and multicultural both in form and content is precisely what makes it post-modernist, that is its response to the need to clear oneself a space (42). By means of mythic narration, Okri clears a space for the quintessential texture and structure of African folkloric narrative.

The two texts under study are postcolonial texts. They address issues that bedevil a newly independent nation, namely; poverty, greed for power, illiteracy, discrimination and social class struggles. According to Chinweizu et al., it is the creative artists that determine the significance and effect of the raw material of his or her works. *The Famished Road* deals primarily with a subject matter (the Abiku myth) that has deep communal socio-cultural implications, yet the novel’s main narrative action comes to us through Azaro’s mediating perception, his “private emotions and motivations and experiences” as the protagonist narrator, though all the events are not shown from one limited point of view.

In the wider African literary landscape, Okri's use of magical realism aligns with the mythic imagination seen in writers like Amos Tutuola, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Wole Soyinka. While Tutuola's *The palmwine Drinkard* employs myth to satirise modernity, and Ngugi's *Matigari* uses allegory to expose political betrayal, Okri's approach is more metaphysical- he transforms myth into a philosophical vision that reconciles suffering with spiritual transcendence. This comparative lens highlights Okri's originality: his magical realism does not merely reassert myth but uses it to critique and reimagine postcolonial existence. Furthermore, while scholars acknowledge Okri's engagement with African cosmology, the link between his magical realism and the broader postcolonial theory- particularly concepts such as hybridity, ambivalence, and resistance reticulated by Homi Bhabha and Frantz Fanon- has not been fully explored.

This study therefore builds on existing research by offering a sustained analysis of *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*, investigating how magical realism operates as an intentional narrative strategy that critiques social and political decay, mediates postcolonial discourse, and articulates Okri's vision of renewal and transformation in postcolonial Africa.

1.9.3 Magical Realism as a Concept in Literature

The origin of magical realism is often traced to Franz Roh, a German scholar, who came with the term *magischer Realismus*. He first used this term while referring to

a painting that retained its original style while at the same time portraying unnatural features. He used the realistic style while depicting strange unnatural elements: “with the word magical as opposed to mystical I wish to indicate that the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it” (17). Roh’s definition of magical realism thus serves to show the binary opposition between the two terms; the natural and the supernatural being depicted as one.

The term was introduced to Literature by Alejo Carpentier in 1940. According to Carpentier the term magical realism was not imported into Latin American Literature but was already part of its reality: “The marvelous real is not a matter of literary tricks but of an unexpected alteration of reality, an unaccustomed insight that is singularly rich” (104). To alter what is considered as conventional reality thus is what results in magical realism. Reality is not done away with but rather it exists harmoniously with the supernatural.

There is a distinction between magical realism and the fantastic. Amaryll Chanady argues that, “Whereas the fantastic generates hesitation between rational and supernatural explanations, magical realism accepts both realms without privileging one over the other” (21). A common perception of magical realism among these scholars is the aspect of “magic” and the “coexistence of different realms”. Magical realism therefore cannot be reduced to decorative exotism. On the contrary, it is a

narrative strategy that challenges the notion of realism and validates the idea of multiple worldviews.

One of the reasons why magical realism is often viewed as a postcolonial strategy is due to the fact that it disrupts colonial epistemologies. In *A Third Space*, Homi K. Bhabha's theory of Hybridity, champions for the collaboration of new signs of identity, and contestations (56). Magical realism resides in such spaces by representing hybrid realities where ancient spirituality coexist with the contemporary Western forms of narration. The old world order coexists harmoniously with the perceived new order.

Gayatri Spivak famous question on, "Can the subaltern speak?" (271), shows the challenge that the marginalised subjects within the colonial and postcolonial frameworks face. Magical realism therefore can be said to respond to this challenge by creating narrative voices that give voice to silenced world views. These marginal voices are given a platform to be heard without subsuming them into the dominant and the rational voices.

Simon Gikandi argues that magical realism, "disrupts the universalizing claims of modernity by foregrounding the coexistence of heterogeneous cultural systems" (640). Gikandi's argument thus not only connects magical realism to globalisation but also to postcoloniality. Postcolonial writers such as Ben Okri are able to retell

histories of their nations in both epistemological and mythical forms. This mode of representation enables them to critique the society while at the same time ensuring there is cultural continuity.

Magical realism also constructs liminal spaces where the ordinary and the extraordinary coexist. This dynamism is best captured through Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque. Here, the carnival, "suspends all the hierarchical ranks, privileges, norms and prohibitions" (10). In magical realist texts, such spaces destabilize fixed social hierarchies and allow the suppressed voices to emerge. Brenda Cooper further notes that, "The power of magical realism lies in its ability to present spaces where the excluded may enter and participate in the narrative" (67). The marginalised voice is not subdued by the dominant voices. Issues that bedevil the less privileged are brought to the core.

Magical realism functions as a political allegory. Boehmer argues that postcolonial writers often use it, "to critique the failures of the state by situating them in mythic and supernatural contexts" (156). In this sense therefore, magical realism becomes a narrative tool for exploring poor leadership, corruption, cultural hybridity and social ills.

John C. Hawley has catalogued scholarship on African magical realism while Ato Quayson emphasises its structural and allegorical functions in African writings.

However, both critics agree that most studies priorities thematic readings often overlooking narrative strategies (88). Together, these studies show that while African magical realism is recognised as important, its narrative strategies remain comparatively underexplored.

From the reviewed literature, magical realism is portrayed as both a global literary mode and a postcolonial strategy of resistance. Further, three major gaps emerge. First, African texts in magical realism scholarship is comparatively marginalised. Most attention is given to Latin American texts. Secondly, Studies on African magical realism often focus on the political or spiritual themes. These studies neglect the narrative strategies. Finally, few scholars analyse how magical realism works formally through temporality, narrative voice, space and allegory. This study therefore, fills a crucial gap by analysing how magical realism functions as a narrative strategy, with a focus on structural features such as temporality, narrative voice, character, space, and allegory.

1.10 Theoretical Framework

This study employs the postcolonial theory pioneered by scholars such as Homi K. Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Mikhail Bakhtin. Postcolonial criticism provides the theoretical underpinning and interpretive grid for this study. Postcolonial literary theory examines how literature responds to and critiques the historical, political and cultural consequences of colonialism. This theoretical framework has four interrelated perspectives-power, representation, identity and resistance- which together provide a comprehensive lens for understanding postcolonial experience.

Power concerns the structures of domination and subjugation that persist after formal colonial rule, shaping both political realities and cultural narratives. Representation addresses how language and storytelling either produce or challenge colonial images of the colonised subjects, as discussed by thinkers such as Edward Said. Identity explores the hybrid, fragmented self that emerges in the aftermath of colonial encounters, a concern articulated by Homi Bhabha through concepts such as ambivalence and mimicry. Resistance, on the other hand, marks the creative and political strategies through which postcolonial writers reclaim voice, agency and cultural autonomy.

This theory is employed in a way that searches the two novels for allusion to colonisation or to present and previously colonised people. Tenets from the above

theorists provide conceptual tools for interrogating the interconnectedness that exists between Literature, colonialism and self-discovery. Their tenets are applied in analysing magical realism as a narrative strategy that negotiates silence, hybridity and resistance in postcolonial setups.

Gayatri Spivak's essay *Can the Subaltern Speak* addresses issues of marginalisation especially on women in colonial and postcolonial contexts and how their voices can be heard within a dominant system. Spivak argues that marginalised voices are often appropriated rather than authentically heard. They are also often ignored in a dominant society. Spivak's tenet of the subaltern is applied in this study to explore how the marginalised characters are portrayed in the selected texts. This tenet becomes pertinent in interpreting how Okri's spirit beings, children, and ordinary citizens' articulate truths excluded from dominant political and historical discourse. Magical realism therefore is brought out as a mode of narration that gives voice to the oppressed thereby challenging the oppressive structures that contend with them.

Homi K. Bhabha one of the key proponents of postcolonial literary theory agrees that this literary theory has experienced a lot of dynamism in the recent past. To him, the postcolonial literary theory helps in highlighting the oppression in the world in view of the modern times. In *The Postcolonial and the Postmodern: The Question of Agency*: Bhabha argues that "Postcolonial Criticism bears witness to

the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order” (17). Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of minorities within the geopolitical divisions of the West, East, North and South. They intervene in these ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a homogenic “normality” to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities and peoples. They formulate their critical revisions around issues of cultural difference, cultural authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments with the “rationalizations” of modernity.

Daniel Elam echoes Homi K. Bhabha’s assertions in his book *Post-Colonial Theory*. Whereas he acknowledges the fact that postcolonial theory assumes different positions, he also argues that the common denominator is the fact we cannot fully comprehend our world except in connection to culture and history. Elam posits, ‘Postcolonial theory takes many different shapes and interventions, but all share a fundamental claim: that the world we inhabit is impossible to understand except in relation to the history and the imperialism of colonial rule (1). This means that it is impossible to conceive of European philosophy and literature except in relation to the presence of Europe’s colonial encounters and oppression. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha introduces the concepts of hybridity, mimicry and the “third space” to show how colonial encounters bring instability to cultural

and epistemic boundaries. He shows how cultures interact and produce new and subversive identities that content colonial binaries. The subjects ape aspects of the coloniser's culture therefore depicting how colonial authority is unsettled through mockery. Through the third space, he provides a lens for understanding magical realism. He portrays magical realism as a narrative through which Western rationalism indigenous myths and spiritualism intersect. This intersection gives a space for an alternative meaning. This conceptual lens is particularly relevant to Azaro's liminal existence in *The Famished Road*, which symbolises both resistance and renewal. The Third space allows the study to interpret Okri's narrative form as a symbolic negotiation between traditional African spirituality and modern postcolonial experience.

Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* portrays how colonialism has destructive effects on both the morale and the social fabric of the colonised people. He highlights the scars of oppression that stay after colonial rule. Identities are fractured under the colonial rule. Fanon argues that decolonisation is both a psychological and a material process. In this study, magical realism is read through Fanon's lens as a symbolic act of decolonisation that represents the resistance of the colonised and their desire to be emotionally and materially full. Fanon's emphasis on revolutionary change gives a framework that enables an understanding of how the texts depict resistance not only as a means of survival but also of transformation. Through Fanon's lens, the persistent corruption, despair, and moral

decay in *Infinite Riches* are viewed as residues of colonial trauma and the failure of national reawakening. Further, Fanon's insistence that true liberation must involve a decolonisation of consciousness resonates with Okri's visionary use of myth and spirit worlds to confront material and mental enslavement.

Mikhail Bakhtin contributes important insights into the narrative strategies that work together with the postcolonial expression. Bakhtin's notion on the multiplicity of voices is used to reinforce Spivak's subaltern argument and Bhabha hybridity. In this study, Bakhtin's tenet of polyphony is used to critique how the two texts disrupt the monologic colonial narratives by incorporating multiple cultural voices and worldviews. The blending of the ordinary and the supernatural serves to reinforce Bakhtin's idea that meanings arise through interaction among various voices. In particular, this perspective is useful in examining how the texts resist singular colonial authority by allowing for dialogue between the native traditions and the Western modernity. Through the depiction of the fuselage and the portrayal of the carnivalesque mood, that which is colonial is opposed while that which is unnatural is rooted for.

This study critically examines how magical realism has been employed in the two texts as a narrative strategy against the backdrop of the postcolonial discussions with the view of bringing out Ben Okri's vision of postcoloniality. Postcolonial theory offers this study the means to understand how Ben Okri employs magical

realism to articulate his postcolonial vision and at the same time explore the effectiveness of magical realism as a narrative strategy. Taken together, the perspectives of Spivak, Bhabha, Fanon and Bakhtin offers a theoretical framework that is multidimensional for this study. Whereas Spivak foregrounds questions of voice and silencing, Bhabha roots for hybridity and cultural negotiation, Fanon shows the violence of colonialism and the urgency of liberation while Bakhtin highlights the dialogic nature of narrative.

The theories discussed are applied in the analysis as follows: Chapter Two uses Frantz Fanon's ideas on colonial trauma and alienation to interpret how Okri portrays moral decay, poverty and political corruption as consequences of the colonial past. Gayatri Spivak's notion of the subaltern voice helps to show how marginalised characters and spirit figures express resistance through symbolic and mystical language. Chapter Three applies Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity and ambivalence together with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism. These frameworks guide the exploration of how magical realism blends African spirituality and modern realities to create a hybrid narrative space where different worldviews interact and challenge dominant colonial logic. Chapter Four synthesises insights from Fanon, Bhabha, Spivak, and Bakhtin to examine how Okri's vision of postcoloniality moves towards healing and renewal.

These tenets guide the interpretation of magical realism as a postcolonial strategy that critiques colonial domination and also reimagines alternative spaces of identity, culture and resistance. Taken together, these perspectives best illuminate Okri's magical realist vision because his works intertwine spiritual and material worlds to expose postcolonial power imbalances, reimagine African identity beyond colonial representation, and enact narrative resistance through myth and the fantastic. Okri's magical realism becomes both a mode of critique and reconstruction-challenging dominant courses while envisioning alternative realities of freedom and renewal.

1.11 Research Methodology

1.11.1 Introduction

This section deals with the following areas: research design, population sampling, data collection, analytical procedure which details how close reading and theoretical interpretations were applied, while also mapping how each chapter contributes to the study's central argument, and finally ethical considerations section.

1.11.2 Research Design

This study employs the qualitative research approach. A close reading and analysis of the primary data and secondary data sources was done to examine how magical

realism as a narrative strategy advances the post-colonial discourse and also to scrutinise the effect that magical realism as a narrative strategy has on the texts under study. The qualitative research approach is informed by the nature of the study topic. The study being content-based warrants a method that allows for an in-depth analysis so as to realise its objectives.

The study is organised thematically and analytically to achieve its objectives. Chapter two reviews how magical realism is used to mirror the social ills. Chapter three examines the nexus between magical realism and the postcolonial discourse. Chapter four explores Okri's postcolonial vision as expressed through themes of leadership and corruption. Chapter five synthesises the major findings, drawing conclusions and offering recommendations based on the study's outcome.

1.11.3 Population Sampling.

The choice of the texts for the study was done through purposive sampling. The leading principle is the presence of common features in the selected texts which are in line with the set objectives. This study sampled, Ben Okri's entire trilogy (*The Famished Road*, *Songs of Enchantment* and *Infinite Riches*) as well as the broader African and also the magical realist texts.

From this population, the study selects the two novels *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*. The two are chosen because whereas *The Famished Road* introduces Azaro, the Abiku and also introduces the conflict between the spiritual

and the material worlds, *Infinite Riches* expands this conflict into a broader political allegory. *Songs of Enchantment* is deliberately excluded so as to allow for an in-depth analysis within the time and scope limitation of this study. The study focuses on *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches* because these two novels exemplify Okri's sustained use of magical realism to articulate his vision of postcolonial Africa, making them representative texts for analysing the intersection between form and discourse.

1.11.4 Data Collection

The study uses both primary and secondary data collection methods because they complement each other.

1.11.4.1 Primary Data

The primary data for this study was informed by a close textual reading of Ben Okri's two texts; *Infinite Riches* and *The Famished Road*. The two selected novels were read simultaneously and also analysed to help bring into understanding the effectiveness of magical realism as a narrative strategy. The two texts not only exemplify magical realism but also represent postcolonial contexts. They also align with the research objectives.

1.11.4.2 Secondary Data

Secondary data was formed by library research which was used to gather enough secondary material to complement information gathered from primary data.

Kenyatta University Postmodern Library was visited for journals and critical works on magical realism and narrative strategies. University of Nairobi Library was also visited for books and thesis on African literature and postcolonial studies. Lastly, the Kenya National library was also visited with the view of providing further and enriching information for this study. Published scholarly articles, journals, essays, biographies, internet materials, periodicals, dissertations, projects and texts on magical realism were also consulted to give additional information. Guided by the premise of the postcolonial literary theory, the study examines how magical realism impacts on the postcolonial vision in the selected texts.

1.11.5 Data Analysis

Data from texts is what informs a qualitative analysis research. In, *Qualitative Content Analysis Research*, Hossein Hashmnezhad observes that the first approach of a “qualitative content analysis is “conventional qualitative content analysis” in which coding categories are derived directly and inductively from the raw data.” (60) What this implies is that the proposed study utilises qualitative analysis where the two texts are the basis of the raw data from which the topic is generated.

Through the data gathered, the researcher was able to validate the interpretive and descriptive tools of textual analysis that empowers this study to investigate and gather data on Okri’s postcolonial vision for Africa as influenced by the magical element in the texts under study. Chapter two explores how magical realism is used to convey the socio-political ills in the two texts. Chapter three analyses the nexus

between magical realism and the postcolonial discourse. Chapter four focuses on leadership, greed and hope with the intent of bringing out Okri's vision of postcoloniality. Chapter five presents the summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the study.

1.11.6 Ethical Consideration

This study observes the highest standards of academic honesty by acknowledging all sources consulted and giving proper credit to the authors through accurate MLA citation. It strictly avoids plagiarism and respects intellectual property and copyright laws in the use of primary and secondary materials. Since the research is purely and does not involve human participants, issues of consent and confidentiality are not applicable. The study further maintains ethical sensitivity in interpreting cultural and postcolonial themes, ensuring that all analyses are conducted with fairness, respect and scholarly integrity.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 THE USE OF MAGICAL REALISM TO REPRESENT SOCIO-POLITICAL AND MORAL ILLS IN *THE FAMISHED ROAD* AND *INFINITE RICHES*

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines how Ben Okri deploys magical realism as a narrative strategy to represent and critique the socio-political and moral crises of postcolonial Africa. Okri's magical realist vision transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary, allowing the supernatural to reveal dimensions of social and political reality. Through the interweaving of myth, dream and material experience, he constructs a fictional world that mirrors the contradictions of postcolonial life- where hope coexists with despair, and renewal emerges from ruin. The analysis draws on postcolonial theory, particularly Homi Bhabha's notions of hybridity and ambivalence and Frantz Fanon's reflections on decolonisation and psychic dislocation, to show how Okri's narrative form unsettles colonial hierarchies and redefines African identity. A full chapter is devoted to magical realism since it forms the core of Okri's aesthetic and ideological vision.

The discussion is organised around interrelated subtopics. The Abiku as Narrative Center explores how the spirit-child, Azaro functions as a symbolic mediator between life and death, embodying the instability of postcolonial identity. Magical realism as Social Critique analyses how Okri uses the fusion of the real and the

fantastic to expose corruption, greed and exploitation in the post-independence nation. Magical realism and nationhood investigates how his narrative reflects the fractured, transitional state of postcolonial nation struggling toward moral and spiritual cohesion. Finally, time and foresight examines Okri's cyclical conception of time and prophetic vision as instruments of reimagining social renewal. Together, these section demonstrate that magical realism in Okri's fiction is not an escapist aesthetic but a dynamic mode of political and moral engagement.

2.2 The Abiku as a Narrative Center

Azaro is the protagonist in the novel *The Famished Road*. He is a spirit child or an *Abiku* in the Yoruba language. As an *Abiku*, he can be likened to, “an unwilling adventurer into chaos and sunlight and into the dreams of the living and the dead” (558). Azaro is symbolic of the desires of a new state, the yearning to exist freely in a dignified manner. He is a spirit-child that traverses both the spiritual and the physical world just as a nation is caught between histories. His oscillation between the spirit and physical world reflects the tension between modernity and tradition. Further, through the *Abiku*'s cyclical existence Okri constructs a narrative that mirrors the instability and fragmentation of the postcolonial nation, where history seems to repeat its traumas under the guise of independence.

Okri uses Azaro to illustrate the effect of decisions and actions within a restrictive historical setting. Through the protagonist, Okri explores the intricacies of the spirit world that is made to appear similar to the real world. Okri's choice of youthful

characters can perhaps be explained by the fact that they not only make his narration interesting but also add some vigor and zest to his narration. The youthful characters because of their age, also have time to learn, make mistakes and relearn as is with the case with Azaro and Ade. The child character in most cases can be taken as a representation of potential and innocence. The stages of the child character can also be taken as a representation of the process the African countries go through after attainment of independence. Azaro, as a spirit being keeps on changing. His coming to humans is like a materialisation of inspiration that dad desires for his community.

Azaro as an Abiku however, is seen as an evil spirit that is able to revolve around two worlds. As an Abiku, he is also symbolic of the injustices and recurrent tribulations that individuals face. Ben Okri exhibits a high level of creativity in selecting and using experiences that show Azaro's feelings of disgust. These experiences are easily relatable to the common Nigerian citizenry. Adnan Mahmutovic argues that Azaro is at the center of two extremes. He posits: "Azaro, is buffeted between existential issues; Life and Death, good and Evil, personal uniqueness and the predictability of the human condition, the unjustness of the division between the rich and the poor, and the creation of the new social divisions in independent Nigeria" (14). The argument above holds water given that Azaro as a spirit-child if he becomes human cannot escape grappling with existential issues.

Obobolo, Vincent P.A says that for Azaro, fitting in the ideal spirit world is hard since this would mean that he undermines the primacy of the spiritual world over the physical one, or at least it may be a way of surpassing this dichotomy and rooting spirit in mundane human existence, its materiality (6). Azaro finds himself oscillating between the physical and the spiritual worlds. Eventually, Azaro chooses to remain in the world of his parents. This scenario can be likened to when postcolonial nations feel intoxicated by the new culture of the colonised while at the same time have a longing to return to their original state. Eventually, a decision has to be made and majority of them choose to stay and survive within the hostile postcolonial society.

Azaro's decision to remain in the human world is an act that escapes instituted orders of meaning. His actions create a site where the questions of meaning, existence, community and even politics are opened for revision. The Abiku in this text are to some extent used to portray the excesses of human beings. They can do the unimaginable. Adnan further notes that:

Traditionally, the Abiku are the scourge of human beings. They enter the human world only to steal whatever they deem valuable and have no qualms to kill children whose bodies they possess. Many notable Nigerian writers have dealt with the Abiku in poetry, prose and even plays, typically describing inherited and visceral fear. By dramatizing an unorthodox vision of the Abiku realm, Okri maintains a critical distance to the Nigerian mythopoesis. Following Soyinka's emphasis on non-conformity in self-determination, Okri uses the Abiku as an inlet into the exploration of freedom and the possibility to alter the way in which we perceive what is valid and valuable. (15)

In referring to Azaro's need for authenticity, his yearning for the comprehension of the spiritual aspect of life can be easily ruined. Azaro faces the challenge of giving birth to one's true self, to one's new spirit, till the contradictions are right for the new immutable star within one's universe to come into existence, the challenge to grow. Azaro lives in a world that Wole Soyinka describes in terms of the, "animist integrated essentiality of all things" (96). He appears to be out of touch with the reality of the rhythm of life in the real world and prefers the comforts of his spiritual world. When he goes to the market place for instance, he can hardly bear the sight of the merchandise on display. The market place is depicted as follows:

There were stalls of goods everywhere. And filling the air with the smells and aromas of the market place, the rotting vegetables, the fresh fruits, the raw meat, roasted meat, stinking fish, the feathers of wild birds and stuffed parrots, the wafting odours of roasted corn and fresh dyed cloth, cow dung and sahelian perfume, and pepper-bursts which heated the eye balls and tickled the nostrils. And just as there were many smells, so there were many voices, loud and crashing voices which were undistinguishable from the unholy fecundity of things. (161)

Azaro's experiences at the market place and elsewhere in the novel can be likened to the physical world of humans where different individuals lose their focus and become incapable of achieving anything meaningful in the course of their lives. His perception of the different occurrences and experiences within the course of his journey on earth best exemplifies the title of the text, *The Famished Road*, which can be taken to infer the act of exhausting the strength of endurance to something. However, Azaro out of pity for his human parents and sheer determination is able to fit fully in the world of humans.

Okri's descriptions of Azaro's experiences arguably can be taken to refer to the haphazard political and economic realities that most African nations find themselves in. While in the world of humans, or what is referred to as the real world, Azaro is often lost in places such as town streets, at the shopping center and even in his own nightmares as he is sleeping. "I was frightened by the feeling, that there was no escape from the hard things of the world. Everywhere there was the crudity of wounds....."(161). Given a good chance and with enough reasons notably with the assurance that he would not affect his parents by his decisions, Azaro would escape from the world of reality for good but what keeps him from making this decision is the emotions that emanate from looking at his mother's pitiful face. His very existence seems to injure both his soul and body. Unfortunately, the only available remedy for Azaro's wounds were eternal banishment from the harsh cruel world. Azaro, is an excellent representation of the *Abiku* character that is highly prevalent in many of the Yoruba narrations.

Azaro's spiritual home is characterised by some regular soothing music perhaps explaining the reason Azaro keeps on relapsing back there, he keeps yielding his spirit into that world of fantasy arguably to seek peace and comfort that is not readily available in the harsh world of his parents. However, Azaro is fully aware that he cannot mature and grow fully as an individual so long as he allows himself to keep on relapsing back to the soft soothing world and hence despite the harsh

realities of the physical world, Azaro is willing to stay there much to the delight of his mother. In the opening chapters, the spirit children are portrayed:

There was not one amongst us who looked to being born. We disliked the rigors of existence, the unfulfilled longings, the enshrined injustice of the world, the labyrinths of love, the ignorance of parents, the fact of dying, and the amazing indifference of the living in the midst of the simple beauties of the universe. We feared the heartlessness of human beings, all of whom are born blind, few of whom learn to see. (3)

The spirit children are described as being at the shores of a river in the company of the ancestors. The atmosphere is serene and peaceful. They danced to the music of the gods uttering chants and incantations. That description serves as the ideal world for the reader and probably answers the question as to why some of the spirit-children such as Azaro are not willing to leave that utopia into the human world, which as is seen through Azaro has irregular rhythms and is full of discomfort.

Though not easy, Azaro has to bid farewell to the magical world of spiritual existence and he learns to love his parents and even shares with them the burdens of the very difficult lives that they lead. Azaro bonds with his mother as a result of her many sufferings. He says “Grief threw me to the floor, and I thrashed about and wailed because I thought mum had died” (570). That is quite interesting and ironical for at first Azaro could not even conceptualize of fitting in the world of his parents leave alone getting emotionally attached to them. Later on, Azaro learns to identify with his father and even sympathizes with his pains and sufferings. This change in

Azaro is informed by his seeing a porter that was staggering while carrying a load of three bags of salt:

He wobbled in all directions, banging into stalls, toppling tables of fresh fish and neat piles of oranges, staggering into trader's wares, trampling on basins of snails. Women screamed at him, pulling at his trousers. He went on staggering, balancing the weights, slipping and miraculously regaining his footage, grunting and swearing, uttering the words, 'more!' 'More!' under his breath, and when he went past me noticed that his crossed eyes were almost normal under the crush, and his muscles trembled uncontrollably, and he groaned so deeply, and he gave off such an earthly smell of sweat and oppression that I suddenly burst into tears. (145-146)

Ultimately, Azaro learns to identify with the world of his parents thus he is willing to stay in the world of the living perhaps out of pity for his parents whom he has witnessed their sufferings endlessly. He come to the sad realization that unlike the world of his fellow spirit-children, the world of his parents is an unfair one. Frantz Fanon In *The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness*, depicts this world;

. . . these poor, undeveloped countries where, according to the rule, enormous wealth rubs shoulders with abject poverty, the army and the police force form the pillars of the regime, both of which, in accordance, with another rule, are advised by foreign experts. The strength of this police force and the power of this army are proportional to the marasmus that afflicts the rest of the nation. The national bourgeois sells itself increasingly openly to the major companies. (117)

The above depiction is synonymous to the world of his parents that Azaro is supposed to embrace. Policemen are hired by politicians to beat the citizenry who fail to support and vote for them. For Azaro, it is not an easy world to live in. He has to make the decision not to be lured into the spirit world again.

Azaro's consciousness awakens towards the end in *Infinite Riches*. He comes to the realisation that he has been warring against both evil and good forces. He says of himself, "That was when I understood that conflicting forces were fighting for the future of our country in the air, at night in our dreams, riding invisible horses and whipping us, sapping our will while we slept" (495). Azaro realizes that the struggle he was facing was between good and evil. Azaro is not a normal child. Just like a spirit he can explore both the physical and the spiritual worlds. He can disappear and appear at will and also can traverse the two worlds:

I watched the bright point of his cigarette in the dark and it eventually lulled me into madam Koto's bar. The bar had moved deep into the forest and all her customers were animals and birds. I sat on a bench which was really the back of a bull. A massive chicken without feathers strode into the bar, sat next to me, and ordered palm wine and pepper soup. Madam Koto did not want to serve the chicken but Dad said, "Serve him." (50, 60)

The passage above serves to show that for Ben Okri, the fantastic was part of the daily occurrence. Azaro's acts as to realize the supernatural throughout the novel. He dies and resurrects which prompts his parents to name him Azaro after the biblical character of Lazarus. However, the name Azaro is jeered by his peers who beg him to return to their world. They ask Azaro to return to their world where, "tender Sybil, begin spirits and the serene presence of our ancestors were always with us on their radiance of their diverse rainbows" (4). Despite the beckoning from the spirit world, Azaro has firmly resolved to remain in the world of the living, to put a smile on Mum's lips. Azaro keeps wandering around. He moves through

roads, interacts with spirits, encounters witches and gets lost in market places. He encounters abnormal men and women with breasts at their backs and children with three arms. His journeys shows Azaro's adventurous nature.

At one time, Azaro is even accommodated by a police officer and his wife. They take him to their place, feed and lock him up. They even address him by the names of their dead child and even require him to dress in his clothes. Azaro has an unnatural ability to develop into people's mind and read into their imaginations:

As a child, I could people's minds, I could foretell their futures. Accidents happened in places that I had just left. One night, I was standing in the street with Mum when a voice said; 'cross over'. I tugged Mum across the street and a few moments later an articulated lorry plunged into the house we had been standing in front of and killed an entire family. (9)

This clairvoyance in Azaro helps him to avoid many misfortunes and dangers after his life. However, at times, this ability also landed him into problems especially with madam Koto. Dad and Azaro enjoyed a close relationship. However, at times they also had some differences. This is largely because of Azaro's freelance and wandering nature.

By positioning the Abiku at the narrative center, Okri transforms myth into a framework for reading the postcolonial condition. Azaro's oscillation between worlds symbolises the nation's recurring struggles with corruption, disillusionment, and rebirth, while his endurance affirms the resilience of the

human spirit. The Abiku's liminal existence sustains Okri's magical realist form, binding the real and the metaphysical into a single, dynamic vision of survival and transformation in postcolonial Africa.

Moreover, the Abiku's perspectives anchors Okri's magical realism as social critique. Through Azaro's spiritual vision, the corruption, poverty, and moral decay of the physical world are exposed as symptoms of a deeper ethical crisis within the nation. The blending of the real and the supernatural becomes a metaphor for a fractured society struggling to reconcile its colonial past with its postcolonial aspirations. In this way, the Abiku functions not only as a narrative center but also as a moral lens through which Okri critiques the failures and contradictions of the postcolonial project.

2.3 Magical Realism as Social Critique

In Ben Okri's fiction, magical realism functions as a subversive tool that exposes and critiques the social, political and moral decay of postcolonial Africa. By fusing the real with the supernatural, Okri dismantles the illusion of progress that often accompanies post-independence narratives. His magical world reflects the failures of leadership, the persistence of poverty and the erosion of ethical values with the nation. The technique allows him to represent harsh realities through the imaginative, where the mystical acts as both revelation and resistance. In doing so, Okri aligns with postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Frantz Fanon who view narrative hybridity as a means of unsettling dominant courses and reclaiming suppressed voices.

In *The Famished Road*, magical realism is the medium through which Okri critiques social stagnation and political deceit. The recurring image of the road- famished, endless and cyclical symbolises a nation trapped in perpetual struggle, unable to advance beyond its own corruption. Azaro's father's futile attempts to challenge injustice and poverty echo the frustrations of postcolonial subjects bound by systemic inequality. The intrusion of spirits into everyday life further mirrors the intrusion of chaos, disorder into the political sphere, suggesting that the moral illnesses of the visible world reverberates even in the invisible one. Through the coexistence of these realms, Okri exposes the hollow promises of modernity that ignore the moral foundations of social progress.

Okri details the adventures of Azaro, a young lad who is caught up in poverty and political passions of the newly independent state. Azaro, the protagonist lives with his mother and father. Their home is in a small compound that they share with other small families. Azaro is an Abiku, a spirit-child. He makes the decision to be born so as to, “make happy the bruised face of the woman who would become my mother” (5). The author employs a loose and a nonlinear plot whereby Azaro is mostly wandering around, abducted and released. The narration also brings out Azaro’s father exploits and his mother’s suffering. Madame Koto’s bar features constantly and she is portrayed as being wealthy and influential. This contrasts sharply with the state of poverty that afflicts nearly everyone else in the village.

The novel takes the reader through the journey of deferred dreams, poverty and incarnation through nature. It is divided into eight sections. Some of the themes that it explores include; technology, hunger, destruction of the environment and politics. The book refutes major critics who argued that in Africa there was a scarcity of writers who explore the magical element in their texts. It announced Ben Okri’s entry into the world of writers.

It explores colonial themes such as technology, environmental destruction, hunger and lack. Characteristic of a novel capturing the plight of the citizenry in a colonial society, violence cuts across the book. The world order is poised to change through decolonisation. Frantz Fanon on *Violence* writes that;

Decolonisation, which sets out to change the order of the world, is clearly an agenda for total disorder. But it cannot be accomplished by the wave of a magic wand, a natural cataclysm, or a gentleman's agreement. Decolonisation, we know is an historical process. In other words, it can only be understood, it can only find its significance and become self-coherent insofar as we can discern the history-making movement which gives it form and substance. Decolonisation is the encounter between two congenitally antagonistic forces that in fact owe their singularity to the kind of reification secreted and nurtured by the colonial situation. The colonist and the colonised are old acquaintances. (2)

In Book 1, Azaro is kidnapped by a policeman and his mother engages the services of an herbalist who helps her find Azaro. She brings him home and a great feast is held for him which unfortunately makes mum bankrupt. Madame Koto perceives Azaro to be a good charm and asks him to pass by her bar in the afternoon. In Book 2, the politicians invade the community specifically Madame Koto's bar. They bring with them false promises and divisions. They thrive where there are division and disharmony. The politicians are in two parties. The party of the Rich and the Party of the poor. The people are exploited for selfish gains by the politicians since their lives are dominated by poverty and hunger. The party of the rich gives the residents free powdered milk but it turns out that the milk is poisonous and this makes many of the residents ill.

Azaro and his family are spared because his father had thrown away the milk out of mistrust for the politicians. The politicians care less about the ordinary people so long as they manage to have their own selfish ambitions fulfilled. Bhabha's sentiments that, "There is a quest for the Negro, the Negro is a demand, one cannot

get along without him, he is needed, but only if he is made palatable in a certain way. Unfortunately the negro knocks down the system and breaks the treaties” (78), is in sync with Ben Okri’s presentation of Azaro. Azaro embodies otherness as he straddles both the visible and the invisible realms. His very presence is both indispensable and problematic within the community. To the human world he is needed for continuity of family and cultural survival while to the spirit world he is equally necessary as the spirits continually demand his return.

Book 3 highlights oppression and poor politics in the society. Azaro’s family is looked down upon because of their social status and political affiliation. There is distrust between the urban and the rural folks. Frantz Fanon in *Grandeur and Weakness of Spontaneity* posits that the minority intellectual tend to look down upon the majority peasants in the society. He writes that;

The large majority of the nationalistic parties regard the rural masses with great mistrust. These masses give the impression of being mired in inertia and sterility. Fairly quickly, the nationalistic party members (the urban workers and intellectuals) end up passing the same pejorative judgement on the peasantry as the colonists. In our endeavor to understand the reason for this distrust of the rural masses by the political parties, we should not forget that that colonialism has often strengthened or established its domination by an organized petrification of the peasantry. (65)

Azaro and his family who are typical low class peasants have their house broken into. The landlord also raises the rent and pressurizes them to pay. This is because of Azaro’s father’s political views. The local photographer helps foreground the

injustice that is prevalent in this society. At one instance, he captures a moment where a foreigner is being lynched.

Book 4 focuses on Madame Koto and reveals the metamorphosis that she undergoes. “Her fame became bigger. Her voice became arrogant. She wore a lot of bangles and necklaces (. . .). She walked slowly like one who had recently acquired power” (269). Madame Koto’s bar is crowded by many drunkards who frequent there on a daily basis. There are many sexual orgies and after being through one, Azaro encounters many bearded spirits who have the intention of pulling him back to the world of the spirits but he adamantly refuses.

Book 5 details Azaro’s punishments for breaking a window. This offends him and he refuses to eat. He falls sick and his life is between life and death. His journey through the spiritual realms is captured and he is on the verge of dying. However, through his parent’s intervention, he is brought back to life. In Book 6, Azaro’s father has a desire to become a great boxer and as a result he eats voraciously and also engages in training. His feeding leaves Azaro and his mother with nothing to eat.

Ironically, Azaro admires his father’s focus and ambition. He even takes on imaginary opponents successfully. However, his ambition is soon cut short after he intends to take many beggars for training in the school. He now dreams of

becoming a high ranking national politician. Madame Koto's wealth continues to grow. Her bar is connected to electricity and she buys a personal car. In Book 7, Azaro's father pursues his ambition of becoming a great politician. He even starts reading books. At one-time Madame Koto organizes a big party for the influential people in the society and Azaro's father wishes to gate crush. In the process, he is confronted by a man in a white suit and an epic battle ensues. Though Dad wins, his mind and body are devastated by the encounter. 'He falls into a state of comma for several days until Azaro together with Mum help bring him back to the world of the living.

The last section of the book is short. Azaro's father dream of trying to build a better world in his mind continues. He desires freedom, justice and dignity so as to escape from the shackles of poverty. Azaro's father is characteristic of the "colonised intellectual" who makes a determined resolution to disentangle him or herself from the labyrinth of oppression and focus on self enhancement. When he recovers, he summons Azaro and gives him a lecture on reverencing the living and also looking for good in all that he encounters. The following morning when Azaro wakes up, his parents are no longer there. The last line of the book goes, 'A dream can be the highest point of a life.' Azaro and his parent's world is characterised by violence, alcohol, sexual escapades and aspirations for freedom and dignity.

West African writers started incorporating the spiritual outcry in their writings in the 1960's. This is evidenced by the emergence of novels such as Soyinka's *The*

interpreters, Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People*, and Armah's *the Beautiful Ones are not Yet Born*. These writers tended to employ the magical element at different points in their writings to bring to the fore their main arguments. The emergence of *The Famished Road* and took this style further by introducing a spirit child as the main character in a narrative.

As seen elsewhere magical realism texts have predominant features that aid them to stand out. These characteristics are what make magical realism an effective narrative strategy. Firstly, there is the element of magic and the supernatural aspect which are profound and cannot be eliminated from the novel. Notably, these aspect can also not be assimilated into being realistic in the narrative. The magic element forms a bulk of the narration for the novel and without it the novel would not be labelled as a magical realist novel. The story in *The Famished Road* revolves around Azaro, who is a spirit-child and has the ability to traverse both the physical and the spiritual worlds. Being the protagonist in the novel, he helps in the realisation of the key lines of narration within the novel. For instance, Azaro, gives details of the kingdom of the spirit children, "Our king was a wonderful personage who sometimes appeared in the form of a great cat. He had a red beard and eyes of greenish sapphire. He had been born uncountable times and was a legend in all worlds known by a hundred different names" (1). Okri portrays the spirit world of Azaro as real just like the physical world.

Azaro shares many similarities with his king since he has been born several times and keeps returning to the spirit world. He is also known in both the spirit and the physical world. While assisting Madame Koto in the bar, Azaro also witnesses; “People that have very astonishing physical features which are not clear or distinct. The wind can speak and the insects and other crawling animals are staring at him continually. The animals behave like human beings” (43). There is a thin line between the conduct of human beings and animals in this text. A key outstanding feature of this narrative is that there is an imaginary world that is detailed in very realistic terms.

The imaginary world aptly captures the daily experiences in the world of *The Famished Road*. This world portrays relevant societal issues such as suffering, poverty and deprivation. It can be inferred that Ben Okri is portraying the various political divisions that are evident in the nation of Nigeria and also issues indirect criticism as is seen in the characters that he uses. The political landscape of Nigeria is steep. As a nation, Nigeria is divided into Geopolitical zones each with their own states. Muslims live in the north and Christians in the south. Political temperatures are always high in the nation anytime it is election time. Azaro and the likes of Madame Koto belong to the class of the poor people while the likes of politicians belong to the class of the rich. There are two factions that antagonise each other; the party of the poor and the party of the rich.

The politicians make empty promises and the villagers are unsure of the faction that would be of help to them. The politicians also maximize on the disunity among the local people and use it to further fuel the divisions and even advance their own selfish ambitions. The police are brutal and their systems unjust and as a result the citizenry has grown hostile and rebellious against the system. One such incident is depicted:

The landlord hurried away and returned an hour later with the policemen. They fell on us with whips and cracked our skulls with batons. We fought back, we beat them with ropes and sticks. We tore their colonial uniforms and sent them packing. (60)

Wearing colonial uniform by the police in this context makes the world seem as real as possible. The portrayal of the landlord who uses police to beat and intimidate the masses while they fight back with ropes and sticks supports the assertion that magical realism to some extent captures the world of reality while at the same time combining it with some aspects of fantasy. The fantasy in this case is seen where the masses use ropes and stick to fight against the heavily armed police officers. Though helpless, the masses are ready to fight back. Magical realism is also evident as is the case where the policemen crack the skull of the protestors. Ironically, even with cracked skulls, the people fight back. They were ready to liberate themselves at whichever cost. The narrations are based on the real lives of the people and the day to day happenings in the society in which they are set.

Another major aspect of magical realism is that the reader becomes unsure in the course of trying to come to terms with events that are oppositionary. For the reader, it becomes hard to differentiate whether what they are reading is a mirage, vision or mere imaginations since all happenings are presented in a very realistic language. In the text *The Famished Road*, a very thin line separates these two worlds. This is dependent on the reader's beliefs and personal feelings. For Azaro, this is common since he keeps on visiting the woods, which is sometimes by chance or as he wills. Azaro and his spirit companions are born and also die at will. In fact, after pitying his mother Azaro decides to stay in the physical world. Distinguishing reality from the imagination becomes a bit hard: "As I lay there, moving in and out of sleep, moving in and out of dreams, loud new voices cracked from the street. The voices were so magnified that I wondered what sort of human beings were producing them" (92). Azaro's imaginations are quite hard to distinguish from the real happenings around his life. Azaro's dreams can be interpreted to stem from a combination of what he experiences in real life and mere visions. Thus it makes it more complex for the reader to believe. For the reader, the narration therefore appears to be a form of a mirage.

The other feature evident in magical realism is that the world of imagination and the physical worlds are combined together so that one is sandwiched between the two. This world to a large extent is majorly an imagination. Azaro exists on the verge of the two worlds and is largely undecided on the world which he should

settle in. He exists in his village and the spirit world. He keeps on traversing the two worlds through birth and death. Notably Azaro is afraid of living in the real world of the village that whereas Azaro was a spirit child, the world in which he lives and operated in is probably an African country. Azaro's Abiku cycle mirrors the nation's repeated patterns of false political promises and unending poverty. In *The Famished Road*, Ben Okri says of Azaro:

To him this world is characterised by famine, illnesses and suffering. This life also is characteristic of the community of the writer, presumably Nigeria who drink wine and ogogoro. They are undecided. This land is mingled with people who come in all shapes and all sizes, walked backwards, had feet on their heads and children with three arms. (10)

Azaro gets to experience the sufferings of the community of his parents. There is suffering and sicknesses but notable is Azaro's resolve to live in the physical world in spite of the constant nagging from his spirit colleagues to return to them. The spirit children keep on calling Azaro. To Azaro, he is being called to an irresistible life that has no worry and is full of riches, peace and comfort. This call can also be likened to the lures of the civilized and developed world against the harsh realities of the Nigerian life. The spirit-life is aptly comparable to the western civilised life, it is largely free from the worries and daily cares of the world. This explains why spirit-children are reluctant about being born in the world of the living. They prefer to stay in the peaceful spiritual world. This can be further seen to be informed by the writer's life in that he lived his life in a peaceful country, Britain and Nigeria,

and he experienced the harsh realities of the latter. For him, life in Nigeria was full of economic hardships, civil wars and also the possibility of a bleak future.

The novel, *Infinite Riches* is a continuation of Azaro, the spirit-child's journey. He journeys through the spirit world and also the physical one. It combines both African magical realism and modern science. The novel employs magical realism while at the same time making several references to the spirit-children, Azaro and Ade. The supernatural events and dreamlike happenings exaggerate, symbolise and unmask the political, social and moral failings of the postcolonial Nigeria. Politics is highly evident in the novel. Political leaders appear as shape-shifting beast creatures. Power is dehumanised; "There were invisible black insects clinging to the Governor-general's body during the highly anticipated political rally" (232).

The Governor-general elsewhere in the novel is presented as wanting to make life better for his people. He has even built roads to ease transportation. Insects serve to slow down his pace and progress in matters politics. Politics in the novel is highly charged and it evokes a variety of emotions. Hence the black insects serve to pin down the Governor-general. There are riots and disturbances at the rally grounds.

The political temperatures are high. Then it is time to escape:

The August group of leaders got into their cars but the crowd smashed the windscreens. The cars were turned on their sides. The policeman lashed at the crowd, hipped the possessed woman, clubbed down the enraged men. But the Governor-general and the future head of state managed to get through the tumultuous crowd

to a convoy of soldiers, who immediately formed a protective cordon round them. The leaders were ushered into a police car and sirens blasting, sped through the crowd. (286)

The leaders are selfish. The crowd is unrelenting in punishing the politician's perhaps out of frustrations. They seek protection from the angry crowd through the police. Okri through his brilliance shows the work of the party of the rich and the activities of the poor. The politics of the day is highly heated and charged. During a political rally, a rich speaker says proudly; "Victory is ours already. We have won. We bring power to the people. We bring wealth and stability. Those who voted for us will enjoy, those who don't eat will enjoy, those who don't will eat dustbins!" (261). Politicians use intimidation to convince the voters to vote for them and those who don't vote for them are punished by being beaten. They employ propaganda and lies to do politics. The citizens are coerced into voting for them.

The Governor-general, one of the key leaders, in a dream describes how he saw a gigantic sign at the mouth of the road. The sign read "Heart of world" and yet another one "Brave New Darkness". In the midst of this, Ben Okri writes; "Deep in his happy sleep, the Governor-general dreamt of taking the golden stool of the Asante king, masks of Bamako. The Governor-general, despite being a very powerful individual in the society is not content and he dreams of becoming more powerful than he is. He imagines of overthrowing well established kingdoms and conquering new territories. He imagines of new opportunities to entrench his

powers and establish himself the more. He exemplifies the powerful but selfish individuals in the society.

There is pervasive violence depicted through magical realism. Azaro witnesses an innocent man being lynched. This event unfolds simultaneously in both the human and spirit realms: "The air was thick with cries that were not human, and above the mob hovered ghosts of those who had died unjustly" (288). This merging of the supernatural and the natural changes violence into a tragedy. The dead cannot find rest since the living continue evil. Injustice not only the social order but also the spiritual harmony.

Poverty and greed are portrayed in a revealing manner. The peasants fight over the grain which is spilled in the marketplace. The description of the struggle over the beans is beyond realism: "The dust rose like smoke, and for a moment it seemed the air was filled with spirits of hunger, feeding on the living." (201) Economic deprivation is portrayed by the spirit which is depicted as a magical image of hunger. Poverty thus becomes an invisible illness that eats both the body and soul. The supernatural imagery shows how intense suffering is.

By connecting the supernatural with the mundane, Okri creates mirror that exposes the ills of a nation that is caught between tradition and modernity, hope and despair. Through the magical events, vision or transformations the writer seeks to bring out

the deeper social and moral realities. Corruption is portrayed as progress, greed is seen as success and violence is normalized as politics. Through Azaro's perception, the reader notes that the disorder in the world is a reflection of the invisible disorder of the soul. In this way, magical realism is a mirror through which Okri not only reflects the nation's ills but also envisions its potential for healing and rebirth.

Magical realism as social critique therefore aids in bringing to the fore various societal issues such as lack, deprivation and affliction in the society in *The Famished Road*. The persistent political conflict that has bedeviled the nation of Nigeria for a long time is also highlighted and this can perhaps be said to be the reason as to why the spirit children, who are symbolic of this nation are reluctant about being born in the physical world. Ultimately, Okri's use of magical realism extends beyond exposing social corruption and moral decay- it gestures towards a deeper vision of collective renewal. The same imaginative force that unveils injustice also reconstructs the moral and spiritual foundations of the nation.

By turning suffering into prophecy and chaos into creative energy, Okri transforms critique into the groundwork for re-awakening. The collapse of the boundaries between the physical and the supernatural prepares the reader for a broader meditation on nationhood, where magical realism becomes not merely a mode of resistance but a means of envisioning how a fractured postcolonial society is capable of moral and spiritual regeneration.

2.4 Magical Realism and Nationhood

The writer Ben Okri, likens the Abiku to an unstable nation. The Abiku is used to capture the level of instability in most post independent nations. In *The Famished Road*, this is revealed by Ade who says, “Our country is an Abiku country. Like the spirit child, it keeps coming and going. One day it will decide to remain. It will become strong (478).” Azaro’s father also makes the discovery that their nation too was like an Abiku child which kept coming and going. For an Abiku, the experience of coming and choosing to stay in the physical world is not an easy one.

These spirit children bring out the joys of living in the fantasy world with the other spirit children while at the same time bringing out the pains and conflict of living in the world of their parents. Few of these spirit children are willing to endure the physical pain of the world of the living. Some spirit children such as Azaro try to figure out their way in the world of the living and eventually come to terms with it. Consequently, most post-colonial nations find it very hard to accept self-governance and taking charge of their destiny. Most of these nations prefer to continue existing in the shadow of their former colonial masters. And just as an Abiku prefers to live in the spiritual worlds, such nations are assured of constant aids and protections from their colonial masters.

For a nation to come into maturity, it needs to demonstrate willingness to live just like the Spirit child Abiku makes a firm resolve not to return to the world of the

spirit but rather live with his parents. A sacrifice is made so that Azaro can now come into the world of the living completely. Therefore, it follows that for a postcolonial nation to come to maturity, its leaders have to choose to forego the comforts that come with constant aids and take charge of the steering wheel of their destiny. Adeniji describes the spirit child as “an icon of the nation.” Azaro is used to portray the image of a nation that is coming to terms with the “pains” of its birth and existence. This is unlike Ade who keeps on appearing and disappearing. Azaro is willing to endure the taunts from his spirit companions so as to bring joy to his mother. He is also willing to endure the agony and pains of physical existence so as to live in the world of his parents. Ultimately, there is optimism concerning the stability of the Nigerian nation.

Ade, says, “One day it will decide to remain. It will become strong” (478). Ade expresses the possibility that things will get better overtime for the nation of Nigeria. Azaro’s decision to stay therefore can be seen as the fulfilment of Azaro’s wishes for the Abiku nation. There is a ray of hope that the nation will survive despite the many odds against her. The Abiku, therefore exemplifies the process of reinvention and establishment of a nation.

Okri’s location of the political-economic wars and the ensuing violence in the ghetto is significant for the following reasons; first it conforms to the colonial reasoning where the ghetto or the slums was seen as the habitation for the African.

Frantz Fanon argues, that the colonial world is distinctly clear with the natives living in the slums. These slums are a place of sicknesses, infirmity, filled with malicious men. In these ghetto evil lurks (28). The slums also rhyme with the novel, *The Famished Road's* title which means hunger. Hunger in this case is not necessarily the absence of food but the presence of pain, atrocities and suffering. Hunger also designates the existing struggle and desire by both the postcolonial nation and individuals for a better future, different from the current one.

There is a deep sense of hopelessness articulated by Azaro's father; "They have begun to spoil everything with politics" (96). In Madame Koto's bar, one drunk person also notes that their independence had brought no hope but trouble for them (199). Though the young road is a representation of the modern state of Nigeria, the new nation is increasingly portrayed as a deviation from the envisioned beginning. The King of the Roads unleashes terror and suffering to the people. These scandals are the reason behind the failure of the postcolonial politics of beginning and representation. The political parties promise to enrich the lives of their people and usher them hooked on prosperity but ironically they deprave them further. For instance, the party of the Rich promises new roads, electricity, schools, hospitals, free food and even education to the poor people but ironically they end their campaigns by giving them free milk that is poisoned.

In *Infinite Riches*, Okri employs magical realism to dramatise societal collapse through surreal floods that engulf both humans and spirits. (45) These floods serve as a metaphor for national instability and moral failure, revealing the consequences of greed, corruption and leadership negligence. Applying Frantz Fanon's tenet of postcolonial alienation, the narrative demonstrates how structural and moral collapse produces psychic and spiritual dislocation, leaving citizens in a state of existential uncertainty. (67) The simultaneous presence of spirits and humans underscores the endurance of cultural memory and spiritual continuity, highlighting the capacity of magical realism to mediate the complex interplay between political failure and ethical reflection in the postcolonial state.

Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* in many ways serves as an unconscious of *The Famished Road*. While Fanon argues that violence which is committed by people, having been organised by their educated leaders makes it possible for them to understand their social truths, Ben Okri is of the opinion that violence brings instability and undermines the reality of transitioning to the state of being an independent nation (118). Therefore, though there are traces of violence in both *Infinite Riches* and *The Famished Road*, the violence is propagated by the natives upon other natives.

Very little discussion is given to colonialism in *The Famished Road* although the novel is about the transition and the emergence of the nation from colonial

domination. Fanon attributes the plight of the natives to poor leadership and tyranny. To him, the leaders are willing to sell their country for their own selfish gains. He argues:

The living party, which ought to make possible the free exchange of ideas which have been elaborated according to the real needs of the mass of the people (. . .). This party which of its will proclaims that it is a national party, and which claims to speak in the name of the totality of the people, secretly, sometimes even openly organizes an authentic ethnical dictatorship. We no longer see the rise of a bourgeois dictatorship but to a tribal dictatorship (. . .) and not anger but shame is felt when we are faced with such stupidity, such an imposture, such intellectual and spiritual poverty. These heads of government are the true traitors of Africa, for they sell their country to the most terrifying of all its enemies: Stupidity. (136, 147-8)

Fanon's argument above raises the critical issue that political parties in Africa and other third world countries operate as gangs because they are run and dominated by individuals from similar ethnic backgrounds. The other reason why there is no tangible development in these third world countries is because their leaders are traitorous and anti-liberal. Okri gives the possibility of a postcolonial ethical act by Azaro betraying his spirit companions and in the process he is a traitor. The problem with the postcolonial nation therefore is its inability to bring out and address the betrayal and treachery by its leaders as is exemplified by Azaro's traitorous behavior.

Okri's depiction of the nation's cyclical suffering gestures towards a prophetic awareness-one that anticipates regeneration beyond repair. This vision naturally

leads to Okri's meditation on time and foresight where perception of temporal cycles become central to understanding his postcolonial imagination.

2.5 The Concept of Time and Foresight

Time as a concept has always elicited mixed reactions among scholars since the ancient days to the present era. Philosophers such as Plato and Saint Augustine have devoted much of their learning endeavors to the exegesis of time and its connection to eternity. Stevenson in *Modernist Fiction: An Introduction*, argues that realist whereas realist novels focused on the outside world, modern ones focused on the internal world. Through the revelations of Azaro's dream content and the narrations by the dreamer, Ben Okri puts forward the argument that reality resides on a different ontological state. The effects of time on a reader's vision forms the backbone of the story. Through this temporal fluidity, Okri transforms magical realism into a philosophical meditation on destiny, memory, and the nation's capacity for rebirth.

Azaro's father has a conflicting relationship with time. In *Time and Vision in Ben Okri's The Famished Road*, Mahdi Teimouri says that Azaro's father has a metaphoric myopia which affects the scope of concern for his family (6). Initially, he is concerned only with himself and his family only but as time passes his vision widens and he embraces others as well. This is made possible as he manages to conquer time in a trance-like sleep. Initially, he suffers immensely in his efforts to uplift his family from the squabbles of poverty. They live the ghetto life and he

devotes himself entirely to lift his family from this state. Sadly, his efforts bear no fruits since there are many of socio-political disparities. The party of the rich is out to take advantage of them. The consequences of incomplete decolonization are huge in the livelihoods of the people. The situation is similar to that raised by Fanon in *'Pitfalls of national consciousness'*. In this book, the rich and the haves are blind to the plight of the folks that they lead. There is a similar situation in *The Famished Road* where the party of the rich and the party of the poor are involved in a tussle.

The party of the rich even gives presents to the people so that they can support them. Ben Okri's sentiment are seen through this incident as brought out by Azaro's father. The argument is that in a world pervaded by selfishness, the only favorable solution was to rise above selfishness and embrace universal love. Through a dream journey, Azaro's father emphasizes these sentiments; "My son, our hunger can change the world, make it better, sweet.

People who use only their eyes do not SEE. People who only use their ears do not HEAR. It is more difficult to love than to die. It is not death that humans are afraid of, it is love" (498). The question the above quotation begs is why would people prefer death to love? The immediate answer would be that love brings a sense of responsibility not only for oneself but also for others. Being concerned about the feelings and the pain of others is an issue that cuts across the whole novel. This is indeed emphasized by the protagonist, Azaro who stops his coming and going after looking at the pitiful face of his mother, a face that he resolves to make happy by

staying. In writing about responsibility for others, Emmanuel Levinas writes that it is fundamental to consider the feelings of others. He argues, “Responsibility is a bond...This bond not only determine a being to act but, is constitutive of subjectivity as such, determines it to be...the locus where this imperative is articulated is the other who faces-the face of the other...” (iii).

For Levinas, responsibility is the response to the imperative addressed in the concrete act of facing. Responsibility is in fact a relationship with the other. In his very alterity, then a relationship with alterity, then a relationship with alterity as such is constitutive of subjectivity. The above quotation aptly applies to the instant sense of responsibility that comes over Azaro as he is captivated by his mother’s face. Prior to his arrival to the physical world, Azaro feels less obliged to live by the wills of his parents or live by their whims. However, the absolute unconditional love he feels for his mom compels him to stay.

On the other hand, Azaro’s father limited vision of individual consciousness that is only tied to the fulfilment of his family’s basic needs broadens and he is able to include the immediate surroundings. This is seen through the way he cares for the beggars. The need to raise their awareness of their very existence is also brought out through a dream. In *The Famished Road*, Azaro gives the narration of his father’s dream, “he saw the world in which black people always suffered, he saw people drowning in poverty, in famine, drought, in divisiveness and the blood of war and he saw the wars in advance” (492). Azaro’s father prophetic dreams helps

his eyes to open to the reality behind his imaginations. He is further able to perceive that the world he is living in and the world that is there are distinct. He is finally able to overcome his acute myopia as he even thinks of becoming a politician so as to be able to fight for the rights of his oppressed people.

Magical realism overthrows the notion of time, personality and also existence. Unlike the real world, the world of magical realism is not limited by time and the identity of individuals. When the characters see the imaginary events and encounter unreal creatures formed in their imaginations or being witnessed in reality, several instances of viewing the story emerges. The notion of time in *The Famished Road* is quite non-existential. The beginning of the narration is even before the protagonist is born in the real world. After this birth, Azaro's way on narration shifts from 'I' to 'we' presumably in reference to other spirit children. For instance, Azaro narrates that; "When I was very young, I had a clear memory of my life stretching to other lives. There were no other distinctions. All seemed to be in resemblance. Sometimes I seemed to be living many lives at once (3). The standard notion of time, identity and existence diverge into several ways. There is no one clear way of living and existing for the characters in the novel which is unlike the real world that follows a rigid and rigorous system of existence. At one time, for instance, Azaro is lost in the forest. While there, he encounters another boy that has the same features as him. This astonishes him immensely as he wonders whether he has another version of himself.

Azaro is further shocked when he realizes that the short walk he has been having in the forest is not as short as he had imagined but rather, it was several days that he had been missing in action. Few moments for him turn to be days and a long time. The exact age of Azaro is also unknown. He keeps on being born and dying, having the privilege of operating in the spirit-world where there is no reality of time. Even the other spirit children have no concept of time and they loathe being born into the real world probably because of the limitation of time.

Ben Okri portrays a conception of time that rhymes with the tenets of magical realism. Time is portrayed as being cyclical and interwoven with the physical and spiritual realms. Azaro's movements between the physical and spiritual worlds shows how temporal boundaries are illuminated through magical realism. Through magical realism, time becomes a mode of resistance. It collapses aspects between myth and reality, history and dreams within the postcolonial experience.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that Okri's use of magical realism is a deliberate artistic strategy for interrogating the moral and socio-political decay of postcolonial Africa. Through the Abiku's liminal perspective, the merging of worlds exposes corruption, disillusionment, and the fragility of nationhood while reimagining the possibility of moral and spiritual renewal. Okri's manipulation of time and

symbolism challenges colonial logic, positioning magical realism as both resistance and vision.

Overall, the chapter affirms that Okri transforms narrative hybridity into a tool of critique and reconstruction. The next chapter builds on this argument by exploring the nexus between magical realism and postcolonial discourse, showing how Okri's narrative form engages theoretical concepts such as hybridity, ambivalence and resistance to articulate the fluid realities of the postcolonial condition.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 THE NEXUS BETWEEN MAGICAL REALISM AND THE POSTCOLONIAL DISCOURSE

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the intersection between magical realism and the postcolonial discourse, showing how Okri's narrative form becomes a tool of cultural resistance and reconstruction. Unlike the previous chapter, which examines how magical realism reveals socio-political and moral ills in *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*, this chapter focuses on how Okri's art engages directly with postcolonial theory dismantling colonial ideologies and redefining African consciousness. This chapter matters because it establishes the conceptual and aesthetic nexus through which Okri's fiction reclaims African modes of knowing, reimagines the postcolonial subject, and contests hegemonic Western paradigms of truth and reality.

The discussion unfolds through several sections: Deconstructing postcolonial discourse analyses Okri's challenge to colonial logic; Magical Realism and the Language of the Postcoloniality embodies the tensions of postcolonial identity; The voyage of a Postcolonial Nation through Symbolism interprets national identity through recurrent symbols; The Milieu of the Spirit Beings shows how the spirit world mirrors social realities; Defiance of Colonial Norms through the Carnavalesque Mood examines subversion through laughter and inversion;

Opposition to Colonial Convention through Fuselage Depiction studies narrative fragmentation as resistance; and Death as the Interlude between Life and Nihilism reads death as a metaphor for postcolonial renewal.

Together, these sections aim to demonstrate that Okri's magical realism constitutes a postcolonial discourse of resistance and reconstruction that articulates the complexities of African existence through a blend of myth, symbolism, and narrative innovation.

3.2 Deconstructing Postcolonial Discourse

The term postcolonial has proved to be quite a problematic word to define. Different scholars have come up with varying definitions. In an Introduction to *Post-Colonialism, Post-colonial Theory and Post-colonial Literature*, postcolonial literature is literature that addresses the problems and the consequences of the decolonisation of a country. It has themes such as colonialism, racism, poverty, social class struggle and abuse of power. However, in *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft et al. posits "We use the term postcolonial to cover all the cultures affected by imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present age. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by the European imperial aggression" (2). From Ashcroft's definition, it can be inferred that the literatures of African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, and Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan,

Singapore, South Pacific Island countries and Sri Lanka are all postcolonial literature.

Postcolonial literature is the literature of the colonised. As citizens of British and European heritage migrated into new landscapes, they created new national myths, struggled to define their own national literature, and finally encountered the originating tradition as others. Every established colony had emerging literature trends which mimed but at the same time differed from the main European traditions. The colonisers inhabited countries which were dominated by quite a large number of people from other heritages and cultures. By so doing, they adapted to the use of myths, symbols and definitions of various traditions. Thus postcolonial literature is often literature of otherness and resistance. It is mainly written out of the specific local people's experiences.

Postcolonial literature concerns itself with the reading of literature produced in previously or currently colonised countries. Both *Infinite Riches* and *The Famished Road* mirror the Nigerian society and also the whole of Africa to a great extent. Through the two books, the Nigerian society can be categorised into two social classes; the haves and the have-nots. These two texts are used to bring out a mood of hopelessness that was prevalent in the Nigerian society at the time. Okri, as a writer, connects the imaginary world of the Abiku, the spirit world, the untraveled route, and witchcraft to the unstable nature of the nation of Nigeria. The two texts

explore the weakness of the postcolonial African countries and specifically Nigeria, while at the same time addressing the issues that bedevil the African continent. The rulers who are corrupt and inefficient act against the wishes of the new nations.

In *An Introduction to Post-colonial theory and Post-colonial Literature*, postcolonial theory is defined as the theory of resistance, mimicry or opposition. A large portion of it is built on the concept of otherness. Otherness includes, doubleness. Postcolonial theory is best suited to explore the postcolonial discourse since the colonisers largely inhabited countries which absorbed the people of a number of other heritages and cultures.

In deconstructing postcolonial discourse, Okri's magical realism becomes a strategy of ideological resistance and renewal. His narrative dismantles colonial binaries- reason and myth, center and margin- revealing, as Homi Bhabha notes, that cultural meaning is negotiated within a space where hybrid identities emerge (56). Drawing on Edward Said, Okri subverts Western constructions of African inferiority by reclaiming spiritual and communal dimensions of existence as valid epistemologies (3). In a similar way Frantz Fanon's call for decolonisation of consciousness resonates in Okri's portrayal of characters seeking liberation from mental enslavement (210). Through this synthesis, Okri's magical realism operates as a decolonising aesthetic, destabilising colonial authority while reasserting the imaginative power of African storytelling. The deconstruction of postcolonial

discourse naturally leads to an examination of how Okri's magical realist language enacts hybridity, resistance, and uncertainty, revealing the complexities of postcolonial identity and consciousness.

3.3 Magical Realism and the Language of Postcoloniality

In both *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*, Okri fashions a language that embodies the postcolonial struggle for self-definition. His syntax often resists linear logic, weaving dream and reality into fluid, recursive sentences that reflect the disjointed consciousness of a people negotiating between indigenous cosmology and colonial modernity. This syntactic indeterminacy is what Bhabha refers to as the hybrid linguistic realm that destabilises the authority of colonial language while opening rooms for indigenous expressions. Through such structures, Okri's prose mirrors a consciousness negotiating between two worlds, rejecting the confinement of colonial realism.

Repetition functions as an act of linguistic and cultural resistance across both novels. Okri's constant recurrence of phrases, visions and journeys reproduces the cadence of oral performance embedding African rhythm within the English novel form. This cyclical pattern undermines the Western idea of progress and linear time, insisting instead on a regenerative understanding of history. Azaro's repeated crossing between the living and the spirit realms in *The Famished Road*, and the

father's recurring struggles in *Infinite Riches*, symbolise a collective endurance that transforms repetition into renewal- a linguistic echo of survival and reclamation.

Okri's metaphors further deepen this postcolonial re-signification. The recurrent imagery of roads, journeys, and metamorphosis blurs the boundary between the physical and the metaphysical, turning language into a medium of transformation. Through metaphor, the novels articulate uncertainty not as a weakness but as a creative potential- a refusal of fixed colonial meanings. The magical realism idioms thus become a language of hybridity, where ambiguity, rhythm and imagery collaborate to recover African epistemologies and challenge presumed stability of colonial truth.

Okri's hybrid language, marked by fluid syntax, repetition and metaphor, anticipates the symbolic voyage of the postcolonial nation. The instability and transformation within his prose mirror the nation's own uncertain passage from colonial domination towards self-definition. Through this evolving linguistic landscape, *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches* chart a collective journey in which language itself becomes a vessel of renewal, carrying the fractured postcolonial nation towards imagined wholeness.

3.4 The Voyage of a Postcolonial Nation through Symbolism

Symbolism is hinged on the simple notion that things represent other things. The two novels under study have profound aspects of symbolism. This symbolism not only adds aesthetic value to the two books under study but also adds deep meanings to them. The spirit-children operate between the world of the living and that of the dead. In the Yoruba mythology, the Abiku were wandering spirits who were meant to die while young and then return to the same mother to be born again. The two spirit children in the texts are Ade and Azaro. The two cause untold suffering to their parents. However, finally, Azaro decides to stay and cuts ties with the world of the spirit. He was tired of being born and dying and also wanted to make happy the woman that would be his mother.

Spirit children remain in between the inter-space between the spirit-world and the world of the living. Azaro is symbolic of the nation of Nigeria and his experiences are synonymous with the historical experiences of the nation. A nation should grow and advance just like a normal child. However, this nation as Okri suggests, is unwilling to take responsibility for its existence. It is in denial and keeps relapsing into the spirit world where there is comfort and company of the other spirit children. This state of denial is symbolised by the numerous deaths and resurrections that the spirit-child undergoes.

After being born, Azaro chooses to stay and this is symbolic of Nigeria's choice to grapple with the challenges of post-independence after the colonialists leave. Azaro represents the fractured state of identity and cultural conflicts that postcolonial nations find themselves in. In agreeing with this argument, Homi K. Bhabha argues that, "Nationalism . . . seeks to represent itself in the image of the enlightenment and fails to do so. For enlightenment itself, to assert its sovereignty as the universal ideal, needs its Other; if it could ever actualise itself in the real world as the truly universal, it would in fact destroy itself" (141). This resolve to stay and take charge of his own destiny is not easy as Azaro keeps on being threatened by the other spirit children to join them. In *Infinite Riches*, Ade says; our country is an Abiku country. Like the spirit-child, it keeps coming and going (478). This is further supported by Azaro's father who argues that all the nations are like children. Just when the postcolonial nation seems to move towards progress- democracy, independence and development, it falls back into old traps. The postcolonial nation relapses to corruption, violence, poverty and political instability. The nation is caught in a cycle where forward motion is repeatedly undermined just like Azaro's oscillation between the spiritual and the physical world.

The Abiku child is like a nation that goes through birth, betrayal and death. Notably, towards the end, there is hope for this country. Ben Okri is optimistic about the future of the postcolonial nation. He concludes; "One day it will decide to remain. It will become strong" (478). The author has unfading optimism that the nation will

not only grow but also advance despite the many births and rebirth that it had witnessed. This will put an end to the cycle of irresponsibility evident in the African nations. Maturity will finally be witnessed.

The muddy and the half built roads symbolise the political corruption and the broken promises that permeate postcolonial nations. Politicians offer promises that they are not keen to fulfill as is seen through the stalled development. The road is a harbinger of the colonial presence in Africa since before colonial invasion roads never existed but instead there were paths running across the villages. It also acts as a mediator in the people's desire to commune with their gods whilst also serving as a platform of sacrifice to the gods. In *The Famished Road*, the story begins; "In the beginning, there was a river. The river became a road and the road branched out to the whole world. And because the road was once a river, it was always hungry" (3). The road came out of a river, symbolising the various changes that came with the advent of colonialism. Further, the road spread to the whole world but yet still was unsatisfied. Colonialism not only heralds a new era but also brought with it changes that were felt everywhere.

Azaro's father says that the road was famished because the citizenry have no desire to change the status quo. This can be mainly attributed to the slave mindset that is initiated by the colonialists. It is a state of complacency. Frantz Fanon posits that, "The colonial world is a Manichaeian world. The colonist is not content with

physically limiting the space of the colonised, i.e., with the help of his agents of law and order. (. . .) The colonist turn the colonised into a kind of quintessence of evil” (6). Therefore the colonist succeeds in crafting a complacent mindset amongst the colonised. This state of complacency is manifest throughout the selected texts where the party of the poor had no desire or aspiration to change their status. The colonist succeeds in instilling the state of complacency in the mind of the colonised.

In *The Famished Road*, Azaro says of the road; “It led to heaven and hell. It leads to worlds that we did not know about” (326). The road connects people to their destinies. It also acts as a shaper of human destinies and anyone that travelled the road was bound to reach their destiny. The ultimate destination of the road too was not assured and one requires faith to journey through it. In *Infinite Riches*, the narrator explains that the stomach belonging to the king of the road was washed off into the roads. The king’s appetite cannot be satisfied as he eats everything greedily and selfishly. The Mighty Green Road is also symbolic of the unending cycles of failures and success and of the expectations and betrayals in the society. This cycle of failures and success is the norm in this society and no one is assured of being able to break it.

In *The Famished Road*, Madame Koto belongs to the class of the rich. She enjoys dominating the poor and derives pleasure from impoverishing the masses. She has a huge physique and her corrupt nature, wealth and power are shown through her

moral and spiritual decadence. Just like madam Koto, Nigeria is an obese country. Madam Koto takes advantage of the youth just the same way as Nigeria's youthful populace is taken advantage of by their politicians and wasted. They are unemployed and their talents remain unexploited. In agreeing with this, Frantz Fanon argues that, "The great mistake, the inherent flaw of most of the political parties in the underdeveloped regions has been traditionally to address first and foremost the most politically conscious element: the urban proletariat, the small tradesmen and the civil servants. This is a small portion of the population, barely half" (64). The interests of the politicians is to enrich themselves and in the end they are never satisfied. These leaders seek personal enrichment and privilege. They are shamelessly gullible. The leaders may have replaced the colonisers but they continue the exploitative systems.

The corrupt leaders thrive on the sweat and blood of their young population. The young people are unemployed and are seen constantly demonstrating for their rightful share. Moral decadence in *Infinite Riches* is best brought out by Madame Koto. Azaro says of her:

The evening made the faces of the crowd into masks. There were a light wind and the universal commotion of traffic. Madame Koto got into a van with her protectors; the van drove through the crowd, cutting a path through the density of bodies...I felt...terrified by the heated smells of their intolerable lives. Madame Koto's van disappeared through the bodies. (259)

Madame Koto is symbolic of how power is acquired in the society and also how intimidation is used as a tool of oppression by the ruling class. The ruling people

use their authority to intimidate the masses. They have little value for the poor as seen in the way Madame Koto's van recklessly drives through the crowd of people gathered at the marketplace. The old man child stands for the nation of Nigeria which has come of age but ironically refuses to show maturity and behaves like a child. The Boy-king has the ability to grow since he possesses the requisite energy and resilience but is unwilling. In *The Famished Road*, his rich resources are a "palace of turquoise mirrors" (245). This man symbolises a society that has become famished nothing grows. Just like the green road that is not complete, the nation moves on, albeit no tangible progress is seen. The citizens continue to advance the injustices, oppression and exploitation inherited from the colonialists.

Azaro's mother represents the plight of the women. She experiences the pain of living in her country and also that of losing her child. Azaro's mother is depicted as the consciousness in her society. Though morally upright, she is economically emaciated. She is a contrast to Madame Koto who owns a business and is financially stable yet morally rotten. She also embodies resilience and determination. After being chased away from the stalls, she becomes a hawker in the streets where she displays hospitality towards the beggars. In *The Famished Road*, she tells one of the beggars; "we are too poor to be wicked and even as we suffer, our hearts are full of goodness" (444). She is an embodiment of motherliness and warm-heartedness. Her personality contrasts that of Madame Koto. Just like Azaro's father, his mother is determined to fight against oppression by the rich.

Okri employs symbolism to show the postcolonial nation's voyage as a continuous struggle for identity and transformation. The images of the road, journey and rebirth which cut across the two texts show a society on the verge of decay and hope. These symbols show that the journey of the postcolonial nation is incomplete but rather is fraught with contradictions yet at the same time kept alive by the enduring spirit of resistance. The voyage of the postcolonial nation through symbolism seamlessly extends into the milieu of spirit beings, where the supernatural realm becomes a reflective mirror for the social and moral crises of postcolonial Africa.

3.5 The Milieu of the Spirit-Beings in Highlighting Social issues in Postcolonial Africa

The novels, *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches* highlight the way of the weak and the oppressed in the society. Ben Okri's novels can be categorised into what is known as the rhetoric of excesses. The narratives within the Abiku framework range from colonial to the neocolonial context. Frantz Fanon argues that, "Deloconisation is the encounter between two congenitally antagonistic forces that in fact owe their singularity to the kind of reification secreted and nurtured by the colonial situation. Their first confrontation was colored by violence and their cohabitation – or rather the exploitation of the colonised by the coloniser" (2). There is the evidence of the political differences between the main and the minor

cultures. Heaven and hell are metaphorically presented in close proximity with each other and the spirit-child can traverse both worlds at will.

The spirit world is aptly depicted in the two novels under study. One major element that one encounters in the Abiku trilogy in *The Famished Road* is the image of the ruler of the spirit-world:

Our king was a wonderful personage who sometimes appeared in the form of a great cat. He had a red beard and eyes of green sapphire. He had been born many times and was a legend in all worlds, known by a hundred different names. It never mattered into what circumstances he was born. He always lived the most extraordinary of lives. One could pore over the great invisible books of lifetime and recognize his genius through the recorded and the unrecorded ages. Sometimes a man, sometimes a woman, he wrought incomparable achievements from every life. (5)

The way the spirit king is referred to as living many lives and also changing his form of existence brings about an atmosphere of unpredictability about him. Thus he leaves an impression that makes it hard for the reader to predict his future and also to relook into his past. He is an epitome of mystery as was Azaro and the other spirit children. The king is depicted as being an abnormal being, “sometimes a man, sometimes and a woman”. The king traversed both the world of the living and the spiritual world, perhaps explaining his legendary nature.

The description of characters such as Azaro’s father, Ade and the old woman overlaps in comparison to the myths that are a sub-category of folk literature. Interestingly, Azaro who exhibits a multifaceted nature, transverses both the spirit

and the natural realms and is also the only one who behaves as a spirit that is a trickster in nature. As a spirit-child whose motives and intentions are hard to predict, Azaro is an agent of change and also a political symbol. Azaro journeys through dreams, roads and an infamous forest. All these journeys are in search of an identity and something to satisfy his soul. His very own existence is a puzzle that is hard to solve as depicted in *The Famished Road*. Azaro's myth of creation places him in a temporary and spatially indefinite zone. This is somewhere in the interspace between the spirit world and the world of reality. His very existence is unsure.

Though a small boy, Azaro possess the ability to read and even fathom complex previous philosophies and literature. He is constantly harassed and even expected to exercise submission towards his parents. This is in spite of the fact that he is a spirit child that can choose to defy authority and relapse into the world of the other spirit-children. As a "normal child", he is even intimidated when thieves from the party of the rich appear at their home. He even clung unto his mother as a helpless child would. However, through his supernatural nature as a spirit-child, Azaro who is portrayed as a very positive character, highlights the weaknesses of the society. They include oppression of the citizens by their rulers, selfishness by the leaders and poor living conditions at the slums where he grows up in.

Azaro knew that the physical world was characterized by suffering but nevertheless he purposed to stay and contribute positively to it. This resolve is seen elsewhere as Azaro says; “I wanted to find or create new roads from the one which is so hungry, this road of our refusal to be” (5). Despite all the odds and challenges that Azaro encounters, he seems curious and eager to experience the joys and pains of his world. However, the key reason as to why Azaro resolves to stay was his mother. He pitied her. She had suffered so much pain and afflictions in the physical world. He wanted to be able to make her smile after the many years of calamities that he had subjected her to while in the land of the living.

Fortunately, Azaro seems to be succeeding in his mission because towards the very end of the novel, *Infinite Riches*, the conclusion is inspiring; “After the weeping and the fevers, a gentle change came. It gladdened my heart to see how the faces of the women had lightened. How their eyes shone. It touched me also to see that the men had lost their vaguely stupid expressions. An inexplicable pestilence that had been lifted from our collective air” (392). In his narration, Azaro portrays different stages of his life and that of the people around him. Azaro can be a cultural hero in the sense that he contends with the evil forces in his own society. Just like his father he is determined to ensure that there was justice in the society. He felt for them. At one scene in *The Famished Road*, the photographer shows Azaro many pictures:

There were pictures of a fishing festival, of people on the day of masquerades. The Egunguns were bizarre, fantastic and big, some were very ugly; others were beautiful like those maidens of the sea who were weak and eternal smile of riddles (. . .) these were images

of a great riot. Students and wild men and angry women were throwing stones at vans. There were (. . .) pictures of a child on a mother's back; of a house burning; of a funeral; of a party; with people dancing, women's skirts lifted, baring lovely thighs. (263)

Azaro has many faces to his personality. While at one time he is a small child on his mother's back, on another instance he is taking part in an obscene scene. This portrayal shows the potential that Azaro has with himself. Magical realism is used to access closed territories and boundaries and even cross the various limitations. There is even outstanding contrast, for instance, the burning of a house is contrasted with a party and serious occasions such as a funeral are contrasted with lovely bare thighs. Both the learned students and the not so learned wild men and angry women are all involved in the destructive behavior of hurling stones at vans. Destruction in this society is perpetuated by both the literate and the illiterate. Ironically, they are unbothered by the wanton destruction.

Azaro's myth of creation places him in a temporary and spatially indefinite zone; this is a place in which time is essentially non-existent. It is also a place somewhere between the spirit-world and the world of the living. He is a spirit child that is highly revered and also feared. As a 'normal child' in the world of his parents, Azaro is even intimidated when thieves from the rich party appear at their home. He even hung unto his mother just as a normal helpless child would. Azaro is therefore able to fit aptly in the world of his biological parents and expresses emotions such as fear just as any normal child would. However, through his

supernatural nature, Azaro who is portrayed as a very positive character, highlights the weaknesses and failures of the society which include; oppression of the citizens by their rulers, selfishness of the leaders, poor living conditions at the slums where they grow up in.

Azaro keeps on being enticed back into the spirit-world by his spirit-companions but he is unrelenting and seems determined to stay in the world of humans so as to be able to impact positively into it. Azaro says that perhaps his determination to live is influenced by the fact that he wanted to taste of the world and feel it, suffer of it, know it and also make a valuable contribution to it. Azaro is determined not only to live but also to author change. He wanted to leave a positive impact. He was tired with his very way of being non-existent and having to traverse the two worlds. He wishes to carve a niche for himself. He wishes to “come of age” and make a meaning out of his very existence.

Despite the many odds and challenges, Azaro is willing to remain in the world of humans and contribute positively to it. He also was curious to experience the joys and the pains of his world. His resolve to live also shows his bravery and his coming into maturity. He is no longer the naïve Azaro that we encounter at the beginning of the narration, he has come of age. Ben Okri’s message through Azaro is that there comes a time when a nation has to outgrow its fears, cease blaming

colonialism for its present predicament and decide to take responsibility for its own destiny.

Spirits of beggars and spirit dwellers constantly appear in crowded marketplaces. These spirits are symbolic of the silenced poor who endure injustice and exclusion. They embody the postcolonial nation's broken social order and the spiritual dimension of suffering. Further, they embody critique and memory by serving as a reminder that a nation cannot progress while its most vulnerable citizens remain trapped between survival and erasure.

Okri employs the world of the spirit to expose the moral and social ills of postcolonial Africa. Azaro's experiences with the spirit beings reflect the suffering and corruption of the living. Further, the thin line between the visible and spiritual worlds portray a society that is caught in between the spiritual and political decay. The spirits role is to act as witnesses and participants in the affairs of human beings and show the social crises that the living undergo. The milieu of the spirit beings naturally extends into the defiance of colonial norms through the carnivalesque mood, where the fluidity of the spirit world mirrors the subversive inversions of established hierarchies.

3.5.1 Defiance for the Colonial Norms through Exegesis of the Carnavalesque Mood

The unnatural and the grotesque in literature is best studied while employing Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque approach. Bakhtin argues that the carnivalesque spirit has a purpose that is to set free from the prevailing point of the world from the norms and the truths of the world, from all that is humdrum and the accepted norm. Bakhtin defines the carnivalesque as the normal way that covers dances, mode of dressing, the way people conduct themselves and all the forms of the various physical pleasures (1968). It is also the writing that portrays the reversal of power structures in the society. The carnivalesque is manifested in works of literature when the normal routines of the daily life are suspended, traditional rules are set aside and order governing societies is also suspended.

Carnavalesque literature often questions authority, culture and the societal regulations. Ben Okri deliberately employs the carnivalesque in his texts as a way of defying the normal and rigid societal order. The intention is to tear down class and position boundaries and also revel the grotesque and the derided. In *The Famished Road* a carnivalesque atmosphere permeates the day that Madame Koto cleaned her new automobile:

There were many that came. Many people came to celebrate the ritual with her. Our landlord was present. People brought their bicycles and scooters. Many came on foot. There were old men whom we had never seen before. And there were a lot of strange powerful women with eyes that registered no emotion (...) chiefs,

thugs and there were even herbalists, witchdoctors and even acolytes. They gathered in the bar... Eventually everyone was summoned for the washing. They formed a circle around. The greatest herbalist among them was a stern man with a face so battered and eyes so daunting that even mirrors would recoil and crack at his glance. He uttered profound incantations and prayed for the car. (380)

Madame Koto's cleaning of her automobile functions as a symbolic act that destabilises colonial hierarchies. The car, a marker of colonial modernity and masculine authority, is reappropriated by an African woman who redefines its meaning through labor and ownership. By performing this act herself, Madame Koto subverts both patriarchal and colonial power structures, transforming a colonial artefact into a hybrid symbol of indigenous agency. Her cleaning becomes a ritual of purification-an attempt to cleanse colonial residue and assert new epistemic authority. This moment exemplifies Bhabha's notion of hybridity, where mimicry unsettles colonial dominance. (122) The car no longer signifies colonial progress but becomes an emblem of African redefinition of modernity.

In addition, in the carnivalesque sense, the laws and limitations that influence the normal order of living are not in operation. Individuals operate in an opaque nature that that is void of regulations which influence their normal way of life and also their actions. Even the way the parts of the body are referred to, the feeding and the interactions with animals is represented in an awkward manner. Such a representation is further captured in *The Famished Road*, "The long tables tumbled with fruits and fried meat, rice and platters of sweet smelling stews, vegetables and

plastic cutler (. . .) I wandered among the large parrots in cages, saw featherless chicken twitching on plates, and I encountered a Ducker tied to a post” (455-6).

Men are described as dancing with political erections and a sense of sweat and sexual potency permeates the atmosphere. Even the womenfolk are described as having generated heatwaves with the shaking of their behinds. In the same scene a politician is described to be staring at a woman’s behind and a monkey snatches a piece of antelope’s meat from his hand. The politician is unbothered by this and he gets himself another chunk of meat. This shows that the leaders have wallowed in the miasma of self-indulgence. All they bother about is their own pleasure.

Okri’s depiction of the carnivalesque is connected to the infringement on any normal and decent acceptable code of behavior. This can be interpreted as an allusion to the crazy prejudices that the European powers have allowed Africans to engage in so as to normalise colonialism. Even unconventional immoral acts such as staring at a woman’s buttocks blankly is allowed. The politician who is staring at the woman’s buttocks is unbothered by losing what he has, the piece of antelope’s meat, so long as he gets to enjoy the momentary pleasure of staring at a woman’s behind.

Colonialism has linked civilisation to the whites and Europeans while it views Africans as being indecent and backward. By an exaggeration of the effects of the assumed essence on the African body, Ben Okri disrupts the negative portrayal of

the Africans. He uses an ironic tone as seen in his description of the movement that the monkey is involved in and around the prostitutes. The prostitutes enjoy the movements of the monkey. They stare in awe. By portraying the lower parts of the body in an uncanny way, Okri presents the maxim of the colonial narrative.

In postcolonial settings, the carnivalesque becomes a tool to subvert colonial hierarchies, mock civilized values and show pride in indigenous cultural expressions. The significance of the carnivalesque mood is that by making streets, bodies and languages unruly, the culture of authority and modernity is dismantled. It also gives space for ordinary people to voice dissent.

3.5.2 Opposition to the Colonial Convention through Fuselage Depiction

Bakhtin refers to the stomach, limbs, mouth, vagina and the bottom as the lower stratum (430). By constantly referring to the lower stratum, Ben Okri alludes to the fact that the carnivalesque is not a mere animal that is in existence but uses it to pass across a political message which acts as a slap on the face of the colonialists. The blatant portrayal of the lower stratum in the two texts not only acts a way of rebelling against the established colonial norms but also aids the writer to establish his narrative in a tradition that is void of colonial interference. To the colonists, the mention of the lower strata is not only considered inappropriate but also obscene and therefore when Ben Okri constantly describes the lower strata, it is a slap on the face of the colonists.

Homi K. Bhabha's asserts that, "The image of the body returns where there should only be its trace, as sign or letter. The Turk as dog is neither simply hallucination nor phobia, it's a more complex form of social fantasy. Its ambivalence cannot be read as some simple racist or sexist projection where the white man's guilt is projected on the black man" (165). Ben Okri's depiction of the fuselage does not only serve to oppose the conventional in the eyes of the colonialists but is also a means of the colonised asserting himself and his ways. He is not embarrassed to flaunt that which he believes in.

In one instance, in *The Famished Road* Azaro accompanies his mother who was a trader to sell her wares at the market. Crowds of people were pouring to the market place. There were chaotic movements and it seemed as if everyone was there. There were all manner of shapes and sizes of people. Some were walking backwards and there is even a dwarf who is walking on fingers and some people appeared as if they were upside-down. There were even women who had breasts on their backs. A young lass who had eyes round her head is also captured, and ironically she is said to be extremely beautiful. An almost similar atmosphere is captured in *Infinite Riches* while Azaro is inside the forest; "Women who walked upside-down in a serene realm of Sephia. Old woman with yellow eyes (. . .) in the middle of their heads" (105). This portrayal also helps the writer establish his narrative in a tradition that is void of colonial interference. These depictions further defy the

norm and the conventional in the society. The depiction of the human body in a grotesque manner can also be inferred as the brutal resistance and opposition to the colonial writings in trying to impose their conventions on how the human body should be portrayed.

Power, according to John Fiske, stops within the human body and is also exercised from there. The depiction of various body parts thus serve to show the immense power that the human body yields. In essence the human body is powerful, and Ben Okri openly depicts the various parts of the body in an attempt to showcase this power. There are even talking spirits that have many heads and they also sing. A big horse that had the head of a village chief alongside many other headless bodies are also depicted. According to Bakhtin such portrayal of the body parts is referred to as grotesque realism (44). Here the body is portrayed in a degrading demeaning manner. Further, the body is divided into a series of parts specifically the eyes, stomach, breasts and even the fingers. The owners of the said body parts are not known.

Even the said body parts make no contact with the environment around them. Bakhtin in *Rabelais* further argues that; “However divided, atomised, individualised these bodies could not be considered for themselves; they represent a material bodily whole and therefore transgressed limits of their isolation. The private and the universal were still blended in a contradictory unit. The scary spirits

still reigned” (23). Therefore, the inability to depict the human body in its proper representation brings about the issue of opposition by portraying the differences between an imposed system and the way the people wish to be governed. They long for freedom, to be allowed to conduct themselves as they wish.

For instance, in the case of the girl that is depicted as having eyes on the sides of her head, it serves as a way of explaining the variations in the standards of beauty of the West who view beauty as having a fair skin and also a white hair. The girl in this case also represents deformed cultures that are as a result of the mixture of the hatred and attraction that the colonialists have for the black woman’s hull. The depiction of the girl also can be taken to capture the feelings that the whites have for the female African’s body, feelings which are considered unnatural yet at the same time, the whites express their wish to establish contact with those females. This is through either through sexual molestation or having some of these women as concubines.

In *Infinite Riches*, the governor-general is not happy with the fact that he has authority over black people whom he did not like. He was cold towards them and this hatred was innate. Interestingly he still maintains contact with; “Three African women who consoled him while his wife badgered him about the plans of the summer and the seashores of Cornwall. The women bore him seven children, whom he denied, though he sent each of them a meagre fifty pounds a year for life

anonymously” (38). The Governor-general therefore is in a state of denial orchestrated by the fact that he feels humiliated to have sired children with black women. The Governor-general goes against cultural dictates and has African women as his concubines. In *The Banalities of Power*, Achille Mbembe, argues that the obscene and the grotesque are intrinsic to specific systems of domination. The African leaders pay attention to hedonistic satiation as a way of emphasising their powers. The concubines even bear children for the governor-general. Ironically, he denies these children yet he constantly sends them some upkeep.

He manages to keep the concubines without his wife’s awareness. Though his relationship with the black women is secretive, he immensely enjoys their company. This is ironic since in no way are they considered to match up with the ‘white’s way’ of gauging beauty. The Governor-general’s conduct is aptly captured in what Homi K. Bhabha refers to as, “. . . the silent Other of gesture and failed speech (. . .) the search for narcissistic love-objects in which the subject can discover himself, and upon which the group’s *amour propre* is based (166). Therefore by relating with the black women, the white governor-general discovers more about his preferences. Though this is viewed as being improper by his fellow citizens, the governor general relates with this women and is able to keep the relationship secretive. He is embarrassed of being discovered yet he keeps on longing for more pleasure.

Through depictions of collapse, Okri destabilises colonial permanence. In *The Famished Road*, Azaro's visions bring out, "a city of ruins, where towers leaned and statues crumbled, and the air was thick with dust from falling walls" (315). Colonial authority is shown to crumble and lose relevance through the collapsing of the towers. This undermines the colonial myth of eternal domination. Colonialism too just like any other system made by man is not imperial and can lose relevance.

Machines that are supposed to signify progress now represent oppression and dysfunction. Technology is alien and is used as a tool of domination rather than liberation. Police vans drive through the streets that are filled with police officers. Okri contests the colonial notion of civilization by presenting colonial development as decayed debris. This shows the unsustainable and exploitative nature of colonial foundations.

Thus in both texts, fuselage depiction serves as a literary strategy of resistance. It exposes the contradictions of colonial modernity, counters the ideological convention that equated colonialism with advancement, and reclaims narrative space for the colonised. By turning the fuselage into an image of ruin rather than triumph, Okri destabilises colonial authority and affirms a postcolonial vision rooted in resilience and survival. The fuselage depiction of confinement and suspended motion seamlessly anticipates the later exploration of death as the

interlude between life and nihilism, where stasis becomes a space of transformation.

3.6 Death as the Interlude between Life and Nihilism

In the two texts, death operates not as a terminal event but as a liminal space of counter-history- a metaphoric site where colonial narratives of despair and inevitability are reestablished and reimagined. Within this interlude, Okri constructs an alternative epistemology that reconciles the physical and metaphysical realms, allowing his characters to negotiate the trauma of postcolonial existence. In this sense, death becomes what Homi Bhabha refers to as a threshold of translation and negotiation where new forms of consciousness emerge beyond colonial binaries.

A pivotal instance occurs when Azaro's father goes into a coma after the boxing game. He experiences new ideas and a sense of responsibility. He even imagines himself as a politician in a position to free the world and also offer free education to the poor masses. He also starts seeing sense in what Azaro has been reading and what he never found sense in previously. His boxing matches also allude to the struggles that he has with the forces of darkness that threaten to wreak havoc not only in his life but also in the whole society. These forces also threaten to disrupt the process of Africa's fruition to its new realities. It is in his coma in *The Famished Road* that Azaro's father engages in imaginations that portray his postcolonial

ideals. Azaro's father's ideals on leadership are in alignment with Frantz Fanon where he argues, "The masses must realize that the government and the party are at their service. A people worthy of esteem, i.e., conscious of their dignity, is a people who never forget this obvious fact" (139). Azaro's father imagines a colony in which he is the undisputed ruler. Here his subjects are learned and completely aware of what is going on in their world.

In Azaro's father hallucinations unconventional professions such as herbalists and leaders of secret sects were the leading instructors at the country's highest levels of education. These professions still maintain their trades. Under Azaro's father's rule everyone is involved. As their leader, he has constant meetings with the most vulnerable individuals in his society to try and look for solutions to their issues. Elections would be regularly held in this country as a means to try and solve political upheavals in the community. His imagination offers solutions for the constant political turbulence and uprising that is constantly witnessed in Africa. By involving everyone including the outcast and the downtrodden such as the herbalists and sect leaders, Ben Okri seems to argue that Africa would be more politically stable if the systems of governance is more accommodative.

Azaro's father's imaginations depict a world that is not real and only exists in his "fantasies". It is a world of infinite possibilities. Nothing and no concept was hard in this particular world. In his "Imaginations", he envisions himself as the ruler and not the subject for that matter. Interestingly, when Azaro's father comes to, he

observes that through death he has learnt the real art of living. For him, death is not the worst of calamities but rather it brings an end to the boundaries between the real world and the world of imagination. In death, there are infinite possibilities. According to Azaro's father, one cannot discover the infinite riches that they possess unless they die.

For Azaro, his life before death epitomises the highest level of suffering while after he dies, he has a chance to renew and reenergize his life. In his adventures, at one time Azaro shows how it is almost impossible to separate between the two worlds of the living and that one of imagination;

The river was an expanse so smooth (. . .) it seemed like nothing emptiness, air. Near the bank (. . .) there was a dug-out canoe. Next to the canoe was a figure- hood covered in a black head whom I assumed to be the ferryman of the dead. The lights of that world (. . .) made me utterly transparent, as if I had disappeared from reality, became a ghost. For a moment, my eyes were blinded. The figure by the canoe turned towards us and lifted off its black hood. Standing there...The woman slashed the spirit's head and I saw dad standing over me and he slashed the chicken. (335-9)

The two worlds are almost similar in appearance. The image appears unreal. The killing of the chicken, acts as a sacrifice to save Azaro from perishing entirely from the land of the living through death. Azaro's father offers this sacrifice showing that he loves Azaro and wishes that he continues to exist in the world of the living. The river acts as a medium of transportation from one world to the other.

Death in this case is not the end to life but rather the genesis to another life therefore affirming continuity of life. People such as Azaro and his father discover their hidden potential and ability during moments of their unconsciousness. Moments of unconsciousness act as moments of self -discovery for Azaro and his father. Azaro's father develops new ambitions during moments of his death while Azaro's resolve to live is after his last death. Death therefore acts as a phenomenon that traverses from the negative to the positive and vice versa.

Interlude resists colonial erasure. Colonial projects intended to kill that which was African, the people, culture and memories. Okri's interlude hence refuses such annihilation. The death motif in Okri's magical realism becomes a counter-historical act; it rewrites narratives of defeat as sites of resistance, and reclaims the imaginative space where postcolonial subjectivity can be renewed. In reconfiguring death as a passage of vision and self-awareness, Okri enacts Fanon's project of mental decolonisation and Bhabha's vision of hybridity-transforming the threshold between life and nihilism into a locus of postcolonial possibility.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter explores the nexus between the concepts of magical realism and the postcolonial discourse. The relationship between magical realism and the postcolonial condition in Okri's fiction underscores how narrative form becomes a space of resistance and reconstruction. Through the merging of myth and history, Okri dissolves colonial binaries and reclaims story-telling as site of cultural

affirmation. His use of linguistic fluidity, cyclical time, and metaphysical imagery transforms uncertainty into creative potential, allowing the fractured postcolonial self to negotiate identity and meaning beyond imposed structures. Magical realism thus emerges not merely as an aesthetic mode but as a political language of renewal.

Building on this nexus, the next chapter explores Ben Okri's vision of postcoloniality, focusing on how his imaginative world translates these formal strategies into a moral and national philosophy. It examines how Okri envisions the postcolonial nation's voyage from disillusionment to self-awareness, where, hope, struggle and spiritual insight become the guiding forces in the search for collective transformation.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 BEN OKRI'S VISION OF POSTCOLONIALITY THROUGH THE LENS OF MAGICAL REALISM

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores Ben Okri's vision of postcoloniality as reflected through his distinctive use of magical realism in *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*. Okri employs magical realism not simply as an aesthetic device, but as a powerful

narrative strategy that reimagines postcolonial African condition. His blending of the real and the supernatural enables him to depict the spiritual, political and psychological complexities of a society struggling to reconstruct its identity after colonial disruption. Through this narrative, Okri envisions postcoloniality as a continuous journey towards renewal rather than a completed historical phase.

The spirit world and the material world coexist to show the dualities of African existence- tradition and modernity, hope and despair, continuity and change. By presenting the postcolonial experience through mythic and spiritual imagery, Okri moves beyond conventional realism to articulate a deeper truth about survival, resistance and transformation in postcolonial Africa. This chapter therefore examines how Okri's magical realism becomes an effective tool for representing postcolonial realities. It analyses how his characters, especially Azaro and his community, embody the tensions of a society negotiating between inherited colonial legacies and the quest for spiritual and cultural rebirth.

The two texts under study tell a story of both the old and the new world order, the modern and the past, the scientific and the real. They tell a tale of a society that is on the verge of change. The colonialists leave and the natives have to take charge of their nation and destiny. This, the natives do reluctantly. They not only lack confidence in their ability as seen through the Abiku but are also driven by greed and selfishness as is seen through the Party of the Rich and the Party of the Poor.

Paulina Grezda argues that there is always an inner urge to revisit the past and access its implications to the present and the future. She argues;

In a society where identities were long allocated and imposed from above, where memories from the margins were systematically suppressed in the precolonial, colonial as well as apartheid era, the urge to revisit the past and re-assess its implications for the contemporary proved indispensable for the process of reconciliation and identity reconstruction instigated by the decline of segregation. (44)

There can never be a future without a past. The impact of the past is seen on the future. The culture of the colonised carries with it traits from the coloniser. Ben Okri in the two texts takes the task of critically interrogating History in a uniform way. He reconciles the distant past with the present.

Writers such as Brenda Cooper argue that the use of magical realism by a writer not only helps to harmonise the old and new views of the world co-existence but also help to bring out his /her vision of postcoloniality. Cooper argues, that Magical realism arises out of particular societies. These include the postcolonial societies and the unevenly developed places where the old and new, modern and ancient, the scientific and the magical views of the world co-exist (216). In this way therefore, Magical realism as a narrative strategy is exceptionally well-suited for the task of postcolonial fiction. Nevertheless, seamless interweaving of fantasy and realism with the intent of bringing out the writer's vision of postcoloniality can be traced in both *Infinite Riches* and *The Famished Road*.

To comprehend Ben Okri's vision of postcoloniality, this chapter explores the socio-economic disparities evident in the two texts with the view of understanding the writer's disposition towards the same. The issue of the crucialness of the postcolonial state is also explored while at the same time capturing the aspect of the trauma of selfish leadership that is prevalent in the two texts. This chapter also delves into the state of denial by the postcolonial nation, greed as the harbinger of the socio-economic disparities that are rampant in the two texts, afflictions and the political shift and finally the chapter ends on an optimistic note as it explores the flicker of hope that is ignited by the universality of love. Ultimately, the chapter argues that Okri's vision of postcoloniality is not one of mere political recovery, but of metaphysical and imaginative liberation. This process is achieved through the transformative power of magical realism.

4.2 The Crucialness of the Postcolonial state

The postcolonial state occupies a central place in the negotiation of freedom, identity, and governance in formerly colonised societies. The cruciality of the postcolonial state lies in its ability as a political apparatus and also in its symbolic position as an intermediary between colonial dominations and the desires of a people. The texts under study, portray a tension that exists when colonial legacies threaten to continue and when an arena for imagining alternative futures is given.

Okri's vision of nationhood resonates with Achille Mbembe's critique of the postcolonial state as a space of contradictory power and unfinished liberation. Mbembe argues that postcolonial governance often re-enacts colonial authority through spectacle and control rather than transformation. Okri's use of magical realism exposes this fragility. The nation oscillates between renewal and decay, freedom and subjugation. By portraying the state as both vital and vulnerable, Okri affirms Mbembe's view that postcolonial nationhood remains a contested site where the struggle for genuine self-definition is ongoing.

The two novels allude to colonialism and its effects. Though colonialism can be said to be responsible for the status of political milieu highlighted in the two texts, Okri does not blame the colonial order entirely as being responsible for the state of affairs in the formerly colonised nations. Homi K. Bhabha argues; "The inevitability of hybridity within colonial forms of discourse provide an additional suggestion as to why, despite its problematic privatising tendencies, magical realism has served as an effective decolonising strategy (120)." Bhabha's argument can be taken to mean that hybrid colonial forms of discourse have elements from both the colonisers and the colonised. The colonised ape aspects of the coloniser and incorporate them in their culture.

In *The Famished Road*, Azaro's father influenced by the western culture, willingly assumes the role of a boxer. He even harbors some political ambitions as seen

towards the end of *Infinite Riches*. Magical realist texts such as *Infinite Riches* and *The Famished Road* are grounded on mimesis. Mimesis is intrinsic to realism. The two texts reflect the reality in a postcolonial society. The subjects such as Azaro try to fit in the societal standards set by the Governor and his people.

According to Kehinde, the key concern of the postcolonial African writing is a scrutiny of the reality that comes with independence. In agreeing with Kehinde's sentiments, it's notable that the key issues explored in the two books under study is the inability of the independent nation of Nigeria to live up to the dreams and the expectations of its citizenry which is the inspiration for the struggle for independence from the colonialists. The nation is ill-prepared and it keeps relapsing to the state of denial. The leaders betray the nations that they are tasked to lead. Instead of charting new courses for their people, the leaders are not only impose neocolonialism but also betray the trust that the citizens have in them.

Okri creatively mirrors these unfortunate events through his writings. To a large extent, he employs the Abiku narration to achieve this. According to Adeniji; "It should be reiterated that Okri shows a proclivity for the myth of the Abiku, the spirit-child who ushers the gates to the worlds of the novels. The word Abiku is an important word in the myth. An Abiku means, "a child born to die young," in the local Yoruba language. (4) The concept of Abiku cuts across many Nigerian societies including the Igbo as is seen in the writings of Chinua Achebe who is an

Igbo. The spirit-child in many of Chinua Achebe's narratives is similar to that of the narratives by Ben Okri. The spirit child journeys through the world of the spirit and that of the living. The unborn exist in the world of the spirit. In other words, they assume a spiritual form of existence. They exist as animals or even birds. In the opening chapters of *The Famished Road*, Azaro says:

In that land of beginnings spirits mingled with the unborn. We could assume numerous forms. Many of us were birds. We knew no boundaries. There was much feasting, playing and sorrowing. We feasted much because of the beautiful terrors of eternity. We played much because we were free. We sorrowed much because there were always those amongst us who had just returned inconsolable for all the love they had left behind, all the sufferings they had not redeemed, all that they had not understood, and for all that they had barely begun to learn before they were drawn back to the land of origins. (4)

Thus an Abiku possess an uncanny ability in that they can die young and be reborn. The Abiku knew no limitations in their spirit form and they were adventurous. With no sense of responsibility, most of them assumed the numerous forms that they wished. According to Oko Eze Ernest, the Abiku concept is also inclusive of the person who is capable of living in both the physical and the spiritual realms at the same time. Thus to call a person an Abiku is to confer upon them mortality and immortality at the same time. (2) The spirit-child can also exist in both the physical and the spiritual world simultaneously. Thus, Azaro as a spirit-child is able to oscillate between the human and spirit realms. He is able to witness his country's chaotic history.

Homi Bhabha's concept of ambivalence adds a twist to this reading. Bhabha argues that, "the nation is a narration" (201). This shows the instability of national identity. In *Infinite Riches*, the consolidation of power shows this instability. The state fails to allow for democracy. The state is crucial in this case since it influences who is included or excluded from the narrative of nationhood.

In *Infinite Riches*, The governor-general views the people as, "shapes with menacing eyes and too many languages, too many leaders" (38). He torches all the documentations pertaining to the history of the nation and the people are forced to have their history rewritten afresh. The governor-general, a typical representation of the colonial powers has no value for the history of Africans. To him, the history of Africans begins with the arrival of the white men. While writing African history afresh, the Governor-General renames their valleys and their green-patched meadows afresh. This erases the history of their slave trade. He rewrites the meanings behind the customs of the people afresh, their rituals, their philosophies, their religions and their music.

The Governor-general is ignorant of the nature of the place. In *Infinite Riches*, it is notable that he never cares to observe how the Africans live in spite of having stayed in the continent for more than fifteen years (181). The Governor-general-general is curious and overwhelmed by the African culture. He is afraid that one day the power of the colonialists will disappear just as that of the Romans. In his

thoughts, the governor-general appreciates African polygamous system and also the many gods that they worship.

Achille Mbembe's framework of politics is also indispensable. Mbembe observes that, "the commandment . . . constitutes itself as the ultimate source of life, meaning, and authority" (25). This resonates with Okri's portrayal of the postcolonial state as both a source of hope and an agent of repression. In *Infinite Riches*, the politician's authoritarian rule illustrates Mbembe's argument that the postcolonial regime exercises control not only over resources but also over the very conditions of life and death. The state is crucial precisely since it dictates the limits of freedom and survival.

Ultimately, in Okri's works, the postcolonial state is indispensable even in dysfunction. The postcolonial is the crucible in which the contradictions of independence are enacted-exposing fragility, corruption and repression while simultaneously embodying the hope of transformation. Through magical realism, Okri depicts the state not as an abstract institution but as a lived and contested reality that determines the destiny of a people. The next section shows the extent of denial in the postcolonial nation.

4.3 The State of Denial in the Postcolonial Nation

Ben Okri's postcolonial nation embodies what Homi Bhabha terms ambivalence which is a conflicted coexistence of rejection and imitation of the colonial past. The people and their leaders claim political freedom, yet their consciousness remains trapped within inherited colonial patterns of thought and governance. This ambivalent condition creates a nation suspended between liberation and dependence, unable to achieve coherent identity. Reality and illusion blend showing the psychological denial of a society that is not willing to confront its internal fears. Thus, the postcolonial condition becomes a site of contradiction where the promise of independence coexist with the persistence of colonial influence.

In both *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*, the Abiku moves between the human and spirit realms and serves as a testimony of Nigeria's chaotic history. The plight of the poor is also explored in a major way using the spirit-child. For instance, in *Infinite Riches*, an Abiku that is hopeful about the condition of Nigeria says; "Our country is an Abiku country like the spirit-child, it keeps coming and going. One day it will decide to remain. It will become strong and I won't see it. Its voice will change and become more natural almost gentle" (478). Ade's feeling is that Nigeria and other postcolonial nations will achieve full independence in terms of stability. They will take responsibility for running their own affairs.

Ade can be likened to an elder statesman who is optimistic about his country. Though old, the statesman hopes that he will see the changes taking place during his lifetime. However, this may not necessarily happen considering that the leaders are quite incompetent. Madame Koto, the owner of the local pub is described as having three Abiku's inside her belly. Azaro is able to see this through the extraordinary powers which he possesses:

And I saw Madame Koto was pregnant with strange children. Two of them at upright and the third was upside-down in her womb. One of them had a little beard, the second had fully formed teeth, and the third had wicked eyes. They were mischievous, they kicked and tugged at their chords, they were the worst forms of spirit children and they had no intention of being born. Madame Koto straightened, came over to me and said, "Why were you staring at my stomach like that with bad-luck eyes?" (464)

There are Abiku's that have matured and can be born into the physical world but are not willing to exist on their own. This sense of irresponsibility can be likened to the postcolonial nations that have just attained independence from their colonial masters but are not ready to be accountable to anyone, as seen through the way Madame Koto retorts at Azaro for staring at her bulging tummy. They are not only rude to observers but are also not ready to be answerable for their reckless decision which portrays their sense of immaturity. Azaro symbolises the newly independent Nigeria and the problems that independence portends.

Elsewhere, the refusal of the Abiku's to be born, shows their indecisiveness in becoming responsible for their own destiny. They prefer not to be born so that they elude taking responsibility for their own destiny. Though one of them has fully

grown teeth and the other one even spots a beard, they are very comfortable in Madame Koto's belly showing their reluctance in accepting that they have come of age. These Abiku's are the perfect example of how adequate preparations have not been made towards the independence of postcolonial nations. They are in a state of denial and unwilling to accept the reality of their maturity. This scenario is captured in *The Famished Road* as; "In fact being born for them is the last intention in their existence, but any forced attempt to bring them into being would lead to very dire consequences Such as civil war (496). It is not only evident that the Abiku are unwilling to mature up and take responsibility for their own destiny but also it is evident that any forced attempt to bring them into the physical kindly. Azaro further explains why they were afraid of being born and coming into existence:

There was not one amongst us who looked forward to being born. We disliked the rigors of existence, the unfulfilled longings, the enshrined injustice in the world, the labyrinths of love, the ignorance of parents, the fact of dying, and the amazing indifferences of the living in the midst of the simple beauties of the universe. We feared the heartlessness of human beings, all whom are born blind, few of whom learn to see. (5)

To the Abiku, the human world is heartless and insensitive and thus they prefer to live in the confines and security of the spiritual world. Tragedy however, is that as long as they remained in the spiritual world, they would never attain maturity and take responsibility for their own destiny. They prefer to exist in the unseen world and consider the human not enlightened.... "All whom are born blind, few of whom learn to see" (5). The Abiku consider human beings blind perhaps due to the destructive habits that they engage in. None of them dreamed of being born into the

physical world and even the ones who are born such as Azaro, traumatise their mothers with much agony:

In not wanting to stay, we caused much pain to mothers. Their pain grew heavier with each return. Their anguish became for us an added spiritual weight which quickens the cycle of rebirth. Each new birth was agony for us too, each shock of the raw world. Our cyclical rebellion made us resented by other spirits and ancestors. Disliked in the spirit world and branded amongst the living, our unwillingness to stay affected all kinds of balances. With passionate ritual offerings, our parents always tried to induce us to live. They also tried to get us to reveal where we had hidden the spirit tokens that bound us to the other world. (9-10)

The parents of the Abiku children found themselves in the most unlikely of circumstances. They even try to trick the children into staying by trying to get them to reveal where they had hidden the spirit token but they don't succeed. The spirit children are very secretive. A similar scenario is witnessed in *Things Fall Apart*, by Chinua Achebe where Okonkwo forces his sickly child that was an *Ogbanje*, a spirit child in the Igbo culture to reveal the exact place where her umbilical cord that bound her to the spirit world was buried. Okonkwo uses force to achieve this.

Unfortunately, the more worried the mothers to the Abiku became, the faster the process of rebirth for the Abiku's became. For these mothers, there was anguish which added spiritual weight further quickening the cycle of birth (7). The Abiku found themselves unwelcomed in both the spirit and the world of the living. This was due to the agony that they brought not only their mothers but those close to them.

The state of denial in Okri's *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches* shows the weak foundation of the postcolonial nations. The nation is unable to break free from illusions resulting in a cycle where the promise of freedom collapses into a state of hopelessness. The nation is not willing to deal with the inherited colonial fractures. The unresolved history continually disrupts the nation's self-image. Okri's magical realist vision thus shows how denial acts not only as a political mechanism but also as an experience that shapes ordinary lives. Leadership in postcolonial nations is characterised by denial and selfishness as is seen in the subsection that follows.

4.4 The Trauma of Selfish Leadership

The relationship between leadership and literature attracts many literary scholars and critiques, one of them, arguably being Ben Okri. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon warns that postcolonial leaders often reproduce the oppressions of their colonial predecessors. Okri captures this degeneration through leaders driven by greed and personal gain, inflicting collective trauma on the newly independent nation. The people's disillusionment reflects Fanon's notion of a bourgeois elite that replaces colonial masters without transforming the structures of power. Okri's magical realism exposes this betrayal, portraying leadership as both a psychological and moral wound that delays the nation's healing and true emancipation.

The state of poverty and hopelessness of the nation is depicted in *Infinite Riches*. Azaro paints an image of desperation, a pathetic situation when it rains:

God was merciless for two weeks. It rained so much that the sky seemed to have become as inexhaustible with water as the seas. At night, water leaked through over ceiling, which we sworn discovered, was full of holes (. . .) would wake up and find snails, worms and millipedes crawling about the room. Little snails appeared on Rain our walls, in containers we found tiny fishes. (311)

The above ghastly depiction captures the state of lack and poverty in Nigeria and the newly independent African countries. Poverty becomes the biggest barrier for the postcolonial states in their endeavor, if there is any, to develop. The main cause of this poverty is the lack of effective leadership. The state of inadequate development is captured by the leaking roofs and the water sprawled on the ground full of crawling animals such as slugs. The slug is symbolic of the slow pace of development that is in the postcolonial states. The herbalist summarises these problems when he says that Azaro, who can be likened to Nigeria, is a child that was unwilling to come into physical existence yet contends with death. Azaro's father dream gives reasons for the issues that they are facing. Azaro says of him:

He saw our people drawing in poverty, in famine drought, in divisiveness and the blood of war. He saw our people always preyed upon by other powers manipulated by the western world, our history and achievements rigged out of existence. He saw the rich of our country, he saw the array of our politicians, how corruptible they were, how blind to our future, how greedy they became. (492)

Okri posits that Nigeria's problems thus to a large extent can be attributed to the lack of efficient leadership. These leaders' main concern is their own selfish interest. The future of the country does not matter. “. . . How blind to our future we had become” (492). Just like a person suffering from epilepsy and other mental

related illnesses so is the situation of the nation. The leaders thrive in ethnicity and in fueling divisions among the citizenry.

The brunt of their actions unfortunately are worst experienced by the citizens. There is not only war for survival but also death. The war is funded by the West African countries who have their own selfish ambitions and interests. This shows the state of interference by former colonisers. This was the situation that was witnessed in nations such as Congo, Rwanda and to some extent in Libya. These colonial masters financed most of the civil wars in their former colonial states so as to propagate their own selfish ambitions.

Many post independent African leaders rule with violence and disregard justice and the rule of law. This scenario is replicated in *The Famished Road* where violent history which plagued Nigeria is depicted. Mahmutovic refers to it as an “identity crisis and existential angst.” (1) These leaders have no sense of focus. They create roads that are always famished since they lack the nationalistic blueprint that is critical for steering their nations forward. In *The Famished Road*, this road that leads to nowhere results to dissatisfaction, suffering, and death and even demoralises the citizens. This road is described as; “In the beginning there was a river. The river became a road and the road branched out to the whole world. And because the road was once a river, it was always hungry” (3). The road is always hungry due to several reasons. Principal among them is the fact that the stomach of

the king of the roads was washed away by the rains into the road. This king of the road is symbolic of the leaders with appetite that cannot be quenched.

Most rulers oppress the people that they rule over. This road therefore is symbolic of the many African nations with selfish rulers. These leaders also wish to maintain the status quo. Colonisation introduced a slave mentality to the colonised and they were content to maintain their unpleasant situations. They have no passion to change their status. Okri describes Azaro as “filled with unease and anxiety . . . nausea and bile rising in my throat” (456). Azaro thus, is symbolic of the Nigerian citizenry that is torn in between taking responsibility for their own destiny and being free. A similar scenario is replicated where Azaro stands at the edge of a dangerous pit in the forest that is as a result of industrialization. What makes him afraid is not that he will fall but the fact that he might reluctantly decide to jump. This shows that he suffers from self-doubt just like newly independent African countries. However, Azaro overcomes the strong urge to jump and end his immediate sufferings and he experiences freedom in the decision to hold back and stay alive. Mahmutovic observes of this scenario as:

Okri puts a postcolonial spin on this recognisable motif, suggesting that the history of colonialism and the postcolonial traumas actually drive individuals and communities in finding peace and as sigh of relief from their immediate suffering and the leap of certain death.
(20)

Okri argues that some individuals in the two texts seek means of ending their immediate suffering. Azaro’s mother attempts suicide as a means of escaping her

poverty and hopelessness albeit unsuccessfully. The spirit child is born during times of crisis and chaos. These are times of transition from colonialism into nationhood. Azaro says, “I knew that we were in the divide between the past and the future. A new cycle had begun, an old one was being brought to a pitch” (220). This period is critical as it is a time of famine for the colonized people. No wonder Azaro is reluctant to come to terms with his very existence at first. The world of the unborn and that of the living has many differences that made the spirit-child hesitant about staying in the world of the living. Azaro admits:

There was not one amongst us that looked forward to being born. We disliked the rigors of existence, the unfulfilled longings, the enshrined injustices of the world, the labyrinths of love, the ignorance of parents, the facts of dying, and the amazing indifference of the living in the midst of the simple beauties of the universe. We feared the heartlessness of human beings, all of whom are born blind few of whom ever learn to see. (3)

The experiences that the protagonist, Azaro goes through represent the nation’s unfortunate historical experiences. Everything about this nation is amiss. Education, health and social systems do not function here. The situation is further worsened by unfocused leadership. The state of nationhood is forced on the citizenry. Azaro posits, “Being born was a shock which I never recovered from” (7). This means that most communities were not prepared to be independent and lacked the requisite leadership to steer them into their new states. Sacrifice by the leaders and the nation which was requisite for the successful manifestation into nationhood lacks. Dad discovers, “The child of our will refuses to stay alive till we have made propitious sacrifice and displayed our serious intention to bear the

weight of a unique destiny” (494). Azaro’s, guardians were willing to make any possible sacrifice for him to continue existing despite their poor state.

Okri’s proposition is that for the nation of Nigeria to exist and come of age, its leaders need to have the requisite dedication and sacrifice. Unfortunately, these two vital traits for statesmanship are missing. It becomes difficult for the old and the new systems to fuse and herald a new era for Nigeria. Brenda Cooper argues, “Nigeria is the bizarre product of both new and old tradition and burgeoning change affected by Western money, technology and education haphazardly and unevenly” (67). Okri demonstrates that a conflict between the new and old order exists and only effective leadership can remedy it. Effective leadership has a way of harmonising the new and old world order. Muhtovic echoes Okri’s assertions by arguing that these conflicts when unresolved create aporetic hybridity in them (3). This means that when ghosts, gods and myths are politicised, it even produces more terrible oppressors.

Okri argues that a society void of passionate and dedicated leaders is likely to keep on retrogressing or remain at the same level in terms of development. In the novel, *The Famished Road*, Ben Okri portrays such and its effect through Madame Koto. Madame Koto is rich and she wields immense power. However, she suffers from moral decadence and spiritual famish. Although she increases in wealth and influence, she is mean at heart. The beggars observe this, “She wore clothes that

made the beggars ill” (495). Even her simple way of dressing changes to extravagant. Ben Okri uses her to portray how the rich and the politically powerful accumulate wealth at the expense of the majority who are starving in hunger. Madam Koto becomes very fat so that her house door has to be renovated to allow her enter. The rich keep on accumulating wealth while the poor struggle to survive with the meagre resources at their disposal.

The postcolonial era in Africa heralds a season of uncertainties characterised by a grim reality in Nigeria and the African society at large. Here, the haves and the privileged continue to exhibit dominance in the society. They oppress the poor and continue to perpetuate social class differences. Colonisation continues in the form of the haves oppressing against the have nots. Madame Koto represents the, “present colonial masters”. Those opposed to her suffer dire consequences.

The poor especially Azaro and his father suffer under her brutal oppression. There are myriad narrations about their suffering. Azaro is observant of the sufferings of his parents. They work under very pathetic conditions. The suffering of Azaro’s parents to a large extent stand for the pain of all other men and women in the society. The nation becomes a battleground for the people’s domination. Epidemic, hunger, great pain and suffering are the order of the day. As seen in *The Famished Road*, the suffering of the citizenry is immense:

We concluded that suffering had unhinged the minds of the entire family. They also said that Ade had been bound twice for treatment.

Small as he was, he had just been freed from the ropes and taken to roaming in the wild forests and the hot streets, his feet bleeding, sores on his shaven head, racing and shouting out curses, and frightening the birds and his animals with his madness. (187)

Okri insists that everybody undergoes some suffering in their life. Even their houses have fallen and the roofs are leaking. The suffering has taken a toll on their mental health. This suffering is worsened by the injustice that was highly prevalent. Hard labor sets in as people such as Azaro's father are forced to carry heavy luggage so as to be able to fend for their families. Azaro's mother, experiences the heat of the blazing sun, she is forced to walk down the road that is scorching hot. While at the market place, Azaro observes his mother and the other market women are worn out by fatigue and tiredness. All this she has to do so as to be able to sell her merchandise in order to fend for her family.

The people in the informal settlement experience a lot of suffering as a result of poverty. Sadly, they are also oppressed by politicians who should have helped free them. Okri's choice of this scenario as a writer is deliberate. John. C. Hawley says of this scenario; "Okri accepts the fact that suffering is one of the great characters of the book, the different ways people suffer. . . Anyone of the children telling a story just like this one but with its own particularly. There are hundreds of variations, but there is just one god there, that God is suffering" (28). Suffering cuts across the two novels. The politicians heighten suffering for the citizenry.

In addition, Madame Koto is a symbol of the military and tyrannical leadership that has plagued the country of Nigeria. Her life symbolises the challenges to the normal operation in Nigeria. She tries to conquer the efforts of the people. Azaro's spirit friends try to kill Madame Koto unsuccessfully. This can be likened to elite Nigerians and nationalistic leaders who employ all manner of efforts to ensure Nigeria is rid of the selfish and self-seeking leadership. The fact that Azaro's friends admit their failure shows that committed nationalists have tried to ensure that there is sanity in the nation but no avail. The commitment to defend their nation is motivated by love.

The Black Tyger rejects the party of the rich since they are ego-centric and over-ambitious. He attempts to mold politics that benefits his people but his efforts are worsened by the fact that the poor also align themselves with the rich. Black Tiger tries to introduce a new political ideology in the nation, one that is aligned to neither the party of the poor nor to that of the rich. However, the poor, are in his heart.

Azaro is a metaphorical representation of the economic, social and political failures that are evident in Nigeria and Africa. His constant deaths and incarnations through rebirths can be likened to the effort that the different Nigerian governments put at play to ensure that a workable political framework is enacted but without much results. The situation remains pretty much the same. Azaro says that, "The Ocean becomes calm. I saw the baby growing, and it saw me, and stared at me. I was knocked about in the old man's dream of a dying country that had yet been born, a

nation born and dying from a lack of vision, too much greed and corruption, not enough love, too many divisions (91).

Okri's focus is on the political scenario that is in Nigeria. He portrays it as a country that is chocking from the labyrinth of corruption. This phenomenon has been magnified by the corrupt Nigeria politicians who display ineptitudes. However, there is hope at the end of the tunnel when Azaro decides to stay. This can be seen as Nigeria's capacity to free itself from the shackles of misfortunes that affect both the political and the social realities in the society. Notable, also is the efforts of the other spirit-children who attack Madame Koto albeit unsuccessfully.

Throughout the trilogy, Okri depicts conflicting forces. Azaro contends with his spirit companions who wish that he stays in the world of the spirit. Madame Koto tries to use her influence to win over the people in her bar. Politics dominate the talk at the bar. However, all is not lost. Positive changes are about to be witnessed.

Through Azaro, Ben Okri describes a new era:

I ran through the yellow forests, through deluded generations, through time. I witnessed the destruction of great shrines, the death of mighty trees that housed centuries of insurgents as well as soothing memories, sacred text, alchemical secrets of wizards, and potential herbs. I saw the forests die. I saw the people grow smaller in being. I saw the death of their many roads and many ways and philosophies (. . .) I heard the great spirits of the land and forests talking of a temporary exile. (. . .) I saw the rising of new houses. I saw new bridges span the air. The old bridges invisible, travelled on by spirits and human alike, remained intact and less frequented. As the freedom of space and friendship with the pied kingfisher and

other birds became more limited with the new age, something died in me. I fled deep into the salt caves of rock lands. Hunters with new instruments of death followed. (457)

Azaro undergoes experiences that portray the death of the old ways and he begins to understand the world and the new things that it brings. Azaro even talks of death which shows that the incoming changes are robust. Although ideologies change, the afflictions of individuals accelerate. Azaro desires for a change so that, “human beings and animals understood one another, we were all free (457). Through Azaro, Ben Okri envisions of a future that is harmonious and promotes co-existence. However, this is not the case as Azaro says, “I saw a duiker gazing at me intently drugged on its captivity, gazing at me as if my freedom lay in freeing it from imminent death, from being sacrificed for the opening of the road of Madame Kato’s destiny (458). This duiker is about to be slaughtered by Madame Koto for the party of the Rich. The poor will not benefit.

Through the two texts, Okri brings to the fore the wounds inflicted on the society by selfish leaders. Further, Okri shows that through hope and moral transformation, such hopelessness can be erased. Trauma is not final. Okri, by intertwining the real and the spiritual, shows that leadership is not only noble but a sacred responsibility. Effective leadership is hinged on selfishness, empathy and committed service. By embracing these aspects of leadership, then postcolonial societies can begin the journey of healing their fractured self and lay claim to their growth and wholeness.

Poor leadership is characterised by greed which brings about socio-economic disparities as is portrayed in the next subsection.

4.5 Greed, the Harbinger of Socio-economic Disparities

In both *Infinite Riches* and *The Famished Road*, Ben Okri sheds light on the political distress fueled by greed that permeates Africa and is responsible for its present socio-economic state. There are no much similarities between the party of the Rich and the Party of the Poor. Cooper refers to this as, “The political disintegration and the universal human cycle of greed” (90). Both parties being driven by greed make promises that are meant to lure the people into supporting them. Their campaigns and competition are founded on propaganda and false promises. *In Infinite Riches*, the prevalent greedy nature of the politicians is portrayed:

It became quite confusing to hear both parties virtually promise the same things. The party of the Rich talked of prosperity for all, good roads, education and even prosperity. They called the opposition thieves, tribalists and even bandits. At their rally, they said everyone would be fed all questions would be answered. That evening the van of the party for the poor also paraded our streets. They too blared music and made identical claims. They distributed leaflets and made their promises in four languages. When the two vans, each armed with bodyguards, passed one another, they competed with the amount of noise that they would generate. . . The two vans clashed twice that evening. We kept exchanging some sort of war to break out, but both parties seemed restrained by healthy respect that they had developed for one another. (390)

Okri puts the blame for the socio economic disparities squarely on the wanton greed that is propagated by the political parties. They not only engage in propaganda

against but also in violence against each other. Though colonialism is mentioned it is not said to be entirely responsible for the present socio-economic disparity in the nation. However, the impact of the greed nature of colonialism is also alluded to in *Infinite Riches* during an interview that Ben Okri engages in:

There has been too much attribution of power to the effect of colonialism on our consciousness. Too much has been given to it. We have looked too much into that direction and forgotten about our own aesthetic frames. Even though that was there and took place and invaded the social structure, it's quite possible that it didn't invade our spiritual and aesthetic value and mythic internal structure, the way in which we perceive the world. (86)

Leaders are afraid of being dethroned since they will not be able to propagate their own greedy and selfish interests. In *Infinite Riches*, Azaro mentions a sergeant-major who is afraid when a group of women together with Azaro's mother visit the police station, "The sergeant-major panics and blows his whistle, thinking that colonial order was being overthrown, or that a new war of liberation had been launched" (22). Just like many cotemporary African leaders he is afraid of losing his leadership position and consequently his sphere of influence. The governor-general also views Africans as mere objects that have menacing eyes, many languages and many rulers (38). Afraid that Africans might discover about themselves by reading their own history, he burns all their documents and starts rewriting their history.

The governor-general credits the ‘advancements’ made by the Africans to the arrival of the white man. To the governor-general, Africans have no civilization or humanity (126). In the writings of the governor-general, he abolishes their sufferings during the slave trade, rewrites the meanings of their customs and beauty and turns their religion into mere superstitions. Ironically, the white man lacks depth of knowledge concerning Africans. In *Infinite Riches*, he realizes that, “though he had been in the continent for quite some time he didn’t have the slightest idea on the true nature of the place” (181). Due to greed and the desire to always rule over the African, he looks down upon him.

Ironically, he praises aspects of the African customs such as polygamy and the polygamous gods (187). He refers to such aspects as polygamy as a genius in paradise. He now starts feeling and behaving like an African and even criticizes the ways of the imperialists. This shows that the African culture has started to take a toll on him. Okri insists that human beings should be stewards and caretakers of all that was in the world including themselves. In *The Famished Road*, this thought is seen through Azaro’s father’s sentiments:

Listen to the spirit of things. To your own spirit (. . .) so long as we are alive, so long as we feel, so long as we love, everything in us is an we can use (. . .) all creatures must be created with respect from now on (. . .) we must not become tyrants, you hear. (499)

However, instead of stewarding what is under his care, man as a result of his materialistic nature, ends up destroying nature. In one of his visions, Azaro witnesses the wanton destruction of that which surrounds him. Man is unable to

understand the rest of the creation and therefore harmony is lost. Leopold argues that it is critical for man to initiate a harmonious existence with the environment since every man is a composite of the various different elements. He argues:

Each of the identifiable life forces of the universe- from the grain of sand to the ancestor- is itself and in its turn, a network of life forces- as modern physical chemistry confirms; a network of elements that are contradictory in appearance but really complementary. Thus, for the African, man is composed of course of matter and spirit, body and soul, but at the same time he is all composed of a virile and a feminine element: indeed, of several “souls”, man is therefore a composition of mobile life forces which interlock; a world of solidarities that seek to knit themselves together. (31)

Leopold argues that man does not exist in a vacuum and therefore he has the responsibility of taking care of the environment and the natural surroundings. If man therefore is driven by greed and fails to nurture his surroundings, he is bound to suffer. However, this is not the case in the two novels as we witness lots of environmental destruction. Consequently, there is hunger, famine and the eventual environmental change. Azaro in a vision witnesses’ great shrines that have been destroyed, mighty trees with many memories that have died. It is man’s selfishness that had resulted in this destruction.

Okri argues that due to man’s greedy and selfish nature, the environment is altered completely. In *The Famished Road*, the author’s sentiments are revealed through the protagonist, “As the freedom of space and friendship with the pied kingfisher and other birds became more limited with the new age, something died in me” (524). The author’s message is that to have harmony in the universe man’s greed

as to cease and man has to protect nature. In another instance Azaro's father tells him of a dream in which he converses with trees and they disappear later on. A spirit man appears and tells him that it is his fellow people that cut down the trees due to greed. Man once again fails the test of responsibility due to greed.

In Okri's postcolonial vision, greed emerges as the major reason behind the deep socio-economic disparities and alienation for the masses. Okri portrays greed as both a symptom and a source of systematic corruption that undermines harmony in the community. The message is clear-genuine progress is not hinged on material progress but on responsibility and empathy. Okri, thus imagines a future where justice and equity replace greed as the foundations of postcolonial nationhood. If the postcolonial states embrace the values of justice and equity, then there is hope for the future.

4.6 Flicker of Hope Ignited by the Universality of Love

Through the two texts, Ben Okri highlight the various dimensions that pertain to human life. Through the three headed spirit which is symbolic of the past, present and future Azaro gets to know that developing and becoming better or worse is an ongoing process. Man has to keep moving on so long as there is life. Ben Okri is of the idea that as long as life is continuing, man should strive to be at harmony with himself and other creations. By embracing love, man has the ability to unlock the infinite potential that he possesses.

Through the two texts, Ben Okri portrays hope as serving both as a mechanism of survival as a realm for imagining alternative futures that transcend the limitations of postcolonial chaos. In *Infinite Riches*, a woman that is disabled and rejected by the society lives in the forest. She takes care of children and animals that are wounded in the forest. She is keen to observe the changes taking place in the society from the confines of her hut in the forest. The old woman's tale and that of the governor-general all point to the fact that all human beings share a status that is equal. The old woman is depicted as, "She even coded fragments of the great jig saw that the creator spread all over the diverse peoples of the earth, hinting that no one race or people can have the complete picture or monopoly of the ultimate possibilities of the human genius alone". (128) Through the old woman in the forest, Ben Okri alludes to the fact that no single race is superior to the other. No human being can claim monopoly of the secrets that lay with the human nature. None could have the complete picture all by himself.

The same notion is revealed through the governor-general. Through him, Okri posits that different people can have the real picture of humanity only when they meet and learn to love one another. No single human being according to the governor-general can claim to unravel the mystery of life all by himself. The idea of the interdependence of the human race is further echoed by Azaro's friend. Azaro's friend tells him that in the coming days the world will be characterised by

myriads of changes. In this new age, there will be many battles, ugliness and even blindness.

Changes will take place and ironically, those who were subjected to sufferings will enjoy justice and beauty. Ironically, after the period of peace, people will once again forget the essence of their struggles and things will worsen. This cycle of good and evil will be repetitive just as the cycle that the spirit child goes through. Ade compares their nation to an Abiku but in the end he is optimistic that it will decide to remain after it matures up. Ben Okri therefore, communicates the hope that in the new era there will be peace and harmony.

Azaro's father is also hopeful about the new age. With this new age, he says that there are vast potentials for the human race. This vast potential and the interconnectedness of human beings will be revealed in this new era. Man will be so empowered in this new age such that he will redream of making the world a better place. Azaro's father revolution contains every item on the new age shopping list; it promulgates spiritual evolutionism a new age, loving monism: we should not be afraid of love because we are interconnected to all things.

Douglas Maccabe captures Azaro's father sentiments, "We can re-dream the world and make it real. There is self-actualisation and, finally the sense that an individual's inner voice can help rise above the sclerosis of institutionalized

traditions and materials conditions of existence. “(12) Okri asserts that man is always occupied by thoughts. Everyone is always thinking about one thing or the other. A man’s surroundings will have direct impact on the quality of his thoughts. Man through his thoughts, keeps on moving from one world to the other. Ben Okri exemplifies this through Azaro who traverses both the physical and the world of the spirit. Other characters also voice out their dreams and imaginations all connected to both the physical and spiritual worlds.

The flicker of hope in Okri’s work depicts the longsuffering of human resilience in the face of despair. It portrays the capacity of citizens to endure pain and suffering while envisioning the possibility of renewal. This powerful light acts not only as a symbol of survival but also as a key element of Okri’s postcolonial vision. Hope becomes the thin thread which keeps life moving even in the midst of chaos and uncertainties.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter examines Ben Okri’s vision of the postcoloniality, arguing that his use of magical realism articulates the moral and the psychological crises of the postcolonial nation. The analyses of the state of denial shows how Okri portrays societies trapped in illusion. These societies are unable to reconcile the colonial past with the realities of independence. The sections on the cruciality of the postcolonial state, the trauma of selfish leadership, and greed as the harbinger of socio-economic disparities demonstrate Okri’s critique of moral decay and

systemic corruption that sustain postcolonial instability. His narrative exposes how greed and power distort the ideals of nationhood and erode collective progress.

The final section on hope affirms Okri's belief in renewal through imagination and moral awakening. Ultimately, Okri envisions postcoloniality as a space of possibilities and as a continuous process of struggle and transformation. This process, confronts denial and corruption which is essential for the rebirth of the nation.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This study set out to investigate the use of magical realism to represent socio-political and moral ills in *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*, how the author, in the texts under study, portrays the nexus between magical realism and the postcolonial discourse and finally the study interrogates how the author employs magical realism to reveal his vision of postcoloniality. To achieve its objective, the study utilised a homogeneous theoretical approach by using tenets from the postcolonial theory.

The postcolonial theory provided the study with literary tools that are useful in interrogating the effectiveness of magical realism in the two texts, the nexus between magical realism and the postcolonial discourse and finally the author's vision of postcoloniality. The postcolonial theory provided the study with the tenets that were applied to identify how the socio-economic, political, cultural and historical happenings shaped the presentation and effectiveness of magical realism as a narrative strategy in the two texts.

In chapter two, the study responded to the first objective that investigated how Ben Okri uses magical realism to represent socio-political and moral ills in the two texts

under study. This objective is based on the assumption that Ben Okri employs magical realism as a narrative strategy in the two texts under study. Chapter three stemmed from the second objective of this study which explored the nexus between magical realism and the postcolonial discourse. This objective was premised on the assumption that Okri's use of magical realism serves to critique colonial legacies, social hierarchies and moral decay.

Chapter four of this study is hinged on the last analytical section that responds to the third research objective of the study. It interrogates how the author employs magical realism to present his vision of postcoloniality. This section is guided by the assumption that the author employs magical realism in the two texts to portray his vision of postcoloniality.

Lastly, chapter five outlines a summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations for future studies. The three objectives were met as summarised below and the research assumptions were proved through the qualitative textual analysis.

5.2 Summary of Findings

This study set out to interrogate the effectiveness of magical realism as a narrative strategy in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*. The study made the

following findings; Objective 1: Interrogate the use of magical realism to represent socio-political and moral ills in *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*

- Magical realism exposes postcolonial moral decay by rendering corruption, greed, and social injustice as both tangible and metaphysical phenomena
- The integration of the spiritual heightens ethical awareness, suggesting that societal collapse is not only political but also spiritual
- Okri's magical realism functions as a lens for moral critique, revealing the limits of governance and civic responsibility.

Objective 2: Explore the Nexus between Magical Realism and Postcolonial Discourse

- Magical realism operates as a hybrid narrative strategy, bridging indigenous epistemologies and postcolonial realities
- Okri's narrative form embodies postcolonial ambivalence, reflecting tensions between modernity, tradition and residual colonial structures.
- Magical realism destabilises linear historical representation, emphasising cyclical time, collective memory, and ethical accountability.

Objective 3: Investigate how Ben Okri employs magical realism to aid his vision of postcoloniality

- Okri's fusion of the real and the mystical envisions postcolonial renewal as a process of spiritual, moral, and social reclamation
- The narrative constructs imaginative spaces where ethical and political consciousness can emerge despite systemic failure.

- Magical realism articulates a philosophy of hope, resilience, and cultural continuity reinforcing African identity and agency.
- Okri's postcolonial vision is inseparable from his magical realist approach; the two mutually reinforce critique and imaginative reconstruction.

The findings also align with Frantz Fanon's theory of postcolonial leadership, which critiques the moral and psychological failures of the national bourgeoisie. In *Infinite Riches*, Okri dramatises Fanon's warning that postcolonial elites often replicate colonial systems of expression. Through magical realism, Okri intensifies this critique by presenting the corruption and greed of leaders in surreal and allegorical forms. The collapse of moral order and the collective trauma it generates becomes part of the novel's dreamlike landscape. This strategy allows Okri to universalise Fanon's insights: leadership is not merely a political crisis but a spiritual ailment that infects the nation's collective psyche. The fantastic, therefore, becomes a mode of diagnosis and moral revelation.

Furthermore, the findings resonate with Achille Mbembe's concept of postcolonial nationhood as a site of contradiction, performativity, and incomplete liberation. In *The Famished Road*, Okri's portrayal of a nation struggling with renewal embodies Mbembe's view that the postcolonial state is caught between transformation and repetition. Okri's imaginative construction of nationhood moves beyond political boundaries to emphasise moral and spiritual restoration. In doing so, Okri validates

Mbembe's contention that the future of the postcolonial state depends on reimagining freedom through new ethical and imaginative frameworks.

Collectively, these theoretical perspectives illuminate how Okri's magical realism functions as both critique and reconstruction. It critiques the failures of leadership and national identity while reconstructing alternative possibilities rooted in African spirituality and imagination. By merging Fanon's psychological insight, Bhabha's ambivalence, and Mbembe's vision of the nation, Okri's art transcends simple political commentary. It transforms the postcolonial condition into a universal reflection on endurance, transformation and human's spirit capacity to reimagine freedom. The findings above form the basis for the following conclusions, which synthesise the key insights derived from the analysis.

5.3 Conclusion

The study set out to examine magical realism as a narrative strategy in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*. This study concludes that magical realism is a powerful and effective strategy for representing postcolonial reality in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*. By merging the real and the supernatural, Okri captures the contradictions of postcolonial life- freedom and oppression, hope and despair, tradition and modernity. Magical realism enables a deeper exploration of the African psyche, revealing both the trauma and resilience that define the postcolonial condition.

The study contributes to scholarship by showing that magical realism in Okri's hands, goes beyond aesthetic to become a political and philosophical tool of resistance and renewal. It validates African modes of perception and challenges Western realism as the sole medium of truth. By engaging the theories of Bhabha, Fanon and Mbembe, this research bridges narrative art and postcolonial theory, highlighting the genre's intellectual depth.

The study advances postcolonial criticism by extending its focus from historical resistance to spiritual and psychological regeneration. Okri's magical realism transforms postcolonial discourse into a vision of hope, demonstrating art's power to critique, heal and imagine new possibilities for the African states.

Although it is limited in scope, this research lays the groundwork for future research into the intersections of magical realism with gender, trauma studies, and comparative literature. The study demonstrates that Okri's use of magical realism is not escapism but a critical narrative strategy that reimagines possibilities for collective survival in a broken world.

Ultimately, the study argues that magical realism is Ben Okri's most effective means of representing postcolonial reality, blending the spiritual and the material to express the hybrid, conflicted nature of postcolonial life. In *The Famished Road*

and *Infinite Riches*, it becomes both a form of resistance to Western realism and a tool for reimagining African identity and renewal.

5.3.1 Recommendations for Future Research

This study interrogated how magical realism is employed to expose socio-political injustice moral decay and postcolonial instability in the selected texts, the nexus between magical realism and the postcolonial and lastly, the author's vision of the postcoloniality. The study has purposively delimited itself to *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches*. Firstly, the researcher recommends that future studies can interrogate the effectiveness of characterisation and structural choices as employed by this author and how these choices illuminate the discourse of magical realism and the author's vision.

The second recommendation is that further studies may compare Okri's use of magical realism with other African or Latin American writers such as Amos Tutuola, Ngugi, Marquez or Isabel Allende. Such comparative work would broaden the understanding of magical realism as a transnational literary mode. Here, the researcher could make use of the comparative literature theory and world literature theory.

Thirdly, future studies may utilise the tenets of Psychoanalysis and New Historicism theory to interrogate how the oppressed and marginalised individuals in the two texts become victims of social and political conflicts.

Fourthly, further studies may focus on how magical realism represents women, gender relations and feminine agency in postcolonial contexts. This line of research could reveal how the fantastic is used to highlight silenced or marginalised voices. This could make use of theories such as feminist literary theory and gender studies.

5.3.2 Recommendations Based on Findings. (Practical Implications)

Based on the findings, several practical recommendations can be made to guide educators, writers, policymakers and readers.

Firstly, universities and colleges should incorporate Okri's works more prominently into African and postcolonial literature curricula to encourage critical appreciation of magical realism as a tool for cultural expression and resistance.

Secondly, government and cultural organisations should promote programs, festivals and workshops that promote African literature employing magical realism, thereby strengthening cultural identity and creative expression. Translation initiatives should be encouraged to make Okri's works and similar African magical realist texts accessible to a broader audience, both within and without.

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