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**Analysis of Postcolonial Realities in Ben Okri's Novels "*The Famished Road*" and "*Songs of Enchantment*"**

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**Abstract**

This article examines the postcolonial settings of *Songs of Enchantment* and *The Famished Road*, two books by Ben Okri. To provide light on the postcolonial reality in post-independence Nigeria, these works are subjected to textual analyses that begin with postcolonial theory. The people and themes in Ben Okri's art are brought to light by these postcolonial realities. By fusing the spiritual and material worlds, this article examines how Okri used the abiku myth (spirit child) to highlight the postcolonial conditions in Nigeria. Corruption and other social ills are shown in both works as being pervasive in Nigerian society. Two factions engage in a power battle in the books, with one side trying to impose its ideas on the other. On the other hand, the oppressed group is questioning the beliefs of the ruling class. This research concludes and maintains that Okri used prose fiction to shed light on the postcolonial conditions in Nigeria that he depicts in his novels.

**Keywords:** Postcolonial, Abiku, Realities, Nigeria, Ben Okri.

## **Introduction**

Literature depicts reality by highlighting the expected facts and principles inside people and society. It includes the complex relationships between a society's constituent parts and inhabitants. Mary Kolawole (2005:9), Ayo Kehinde (2011:62), and Joy EboMbiom (2011:62) are among the literary critics who have lent credence to this argument by arguing that literature is more of a construction than a plain representation of reality. The chosen books' depictions of postcolonial reality are one of these ideas that this research will attempt to dissect.

In this article, "postcolonial realities" refers to people's lived experiences, a topic many postcolonial authors, such as Ben Okri, seek to shed light on via their writing. On top of that, African authors often tackle postcolonial issues while portraying and recounting African experiences. Recurrent themes of oppression, hardship, unemployment, misery, poverty, and famine define postcolonial African nations. The points put forward in this paper are those mentioned above. For Nigeria, the country's political independence has yet to improve security or economic growth. J.F. Ade Ajayi described it as an "obsession with politics" for its own sake in Oko (2010), and paradoxically, it has contributed to economic stagnation and an excessive concentration on politics. The person asserts:

The elusive aspect of growth, whichever is defined, has been the defining feature of Nigeria since independence. This suggests that the general welfare of the ordinary rural family farmer and the average urban worker has been profoundly impacted. There has been little to no progress in urban development since independence; in some ways, it is worse than before. Help is needed to ensure that the people of Nigeria have access to sufficient food

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and energy resources. In order to rally the people, Nigeria must first establish solid political institutions marked by a deep commitment to the country and the advancement of social justice. Even within the same region, there still needs to be a noticeable gap in development between rural and urban communities. In addition, the widening economic gap during colonial rule worsened dramatically after independence. As a result, there has been an increase in civil war and instability, and people's sense of safety has drastically decreased.

Land and property. On rare occasions, despicable and abnormal regimes have emerged, preying on their people rather than protecting or improving their lot in life (9). Achebe (1983) adds weight to this argument by saying that the problem in Nigeria is essentially and directly linked to an absence of competent leadership. All parts of Nigeria, including the terrain, weather, water, and air, are in excellent shape. The issue in Nigeria arises when the leader is unwilling or unable to take charge... (1).

Even though imperialism and colonialism have ended in Nigeria, the nation is still dealing with the neocolonial problem, and the books discussed in this article take a close look at these issues. These books introduce two groups into the postcolonial Nigerian country: the wealthy and the poor. Okri reveals the pervasive disillusionment that has marked the postwar African experience through these pieces. Postcolonial literature, argue Ashcroft Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Hellen Tiflin (1989), finds its voice via repurposing the prevailing language and fusing it with a discourse entirely in touch with the colonized site.. To express the postcolonial realities and experiences of the colonized, this replacement is achieved by appropriating and erasing some aspects of the language used by the colonizers. The remark above explains why Okri chose the abiku myth and how the road hunger for sustenance always. Okri draws parallels to the mystical abiku, the road, and magic in his analysis of Nigeria's

So, criticism of post-independence period realities political unrest is central to the thematic concerns of postcolonial African novels (Kehinde, 2005, p. 87). So, this dissertation mainly focuses on how postcolonial Nigeria failed to live up to the hopes and dreams of the African leaders who spearheaded the struggle for liberation from European colonization. Okri claims that the leaders' ineptitude and corruption have led them to betray the hopes and dreams of the young country. He has faithfully shown the terrible situation in this African nation, particularly Nigeria, using his artistic skills.

### **The Abiku Myth**

The Myth of abiku, in which a spirit-child acts as a portal between the worlds portrayed in Okri's writings, is a theme he often returns to. According to Adeniji (2008), the Yoruba people of southern Nigeria have a phrase for "children born to die young" (240), "my emphasis." This word plays a significant role in the Myth of abiku, which Adeniji argues is a vital part of the story.

So, in the studied scriptures, the ability to die young and be reborn several times is associated with abiku, such as Azaro and Ade. Because a person with this name is thought of as a bringer of death and sorrow to the family, it has a negative connotation in Yoruba culture. The fact that the name Abiku implies a person who may live in the human and spiritual realms simultaneously further reveals that it is a metaphysical being. Because of this quality, the abiku is a fascinating cultural figure but not one that is particularly valued. Okri uses the word abiku, which has an essentially hopeful meaning, to create a compelling habitat for "spirit children" and incorporates them into his prose fiction. The term abiku conjures up images of both death and life beyond the end. Every person, no matter their race or creed, must deal with the inevitabilities of life and death. Therefore, being called an abiku implies a person has moral and immoral traits. The several intricate interpretations associated with the Myth of abiku, which we encounter throughout

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this research provides a thorough understanding of the word. An abiku, or spirit child named Azaro, who is compelled to travel between the human and spirit worlds, tells the tale. His testimony bears out the turbulent history of his family and nation. In addition to describing the human toll of war and the monetary and political corruption in Nigeria, this work is rich with symbolic and mythical elements. In *Songs of Enchantment* and *The Famished Road*, Okri deftly gives the downtrodden and oppressed people the extraordinary imagination of an abiku. Kehinde (2004) provides further detail concerning the social context of poverty. Consistent with the aims of this research, reviewers have hailed *The Famished Road* as a postcolonial work due to its accurate portrayal of cultural and sociopolitical reality. Even if myth and magic are there, according to Harry Garuba (1993).

### **The Famished Road**

"Famished Road" depicts a neocolonial state's socioeconomic problems and political processes in a grim and realistic light rather than a fanciful and fantastical world. The postcolonial elements are what stand out to Garuba in Okri's story. The book might be a prophecy or apocalyptic. Since this would not lead to total freedom, the passionate desire for it would remain unfulfilled. If the rich wanted to reassert their power over the poor, it may lead to political instability and coups. Everywhere you look, you'll see troops—lack of beauty. Disability affecting vision. A spectacular transformation follows, just as the people had predicted....." There are 478 of them. These show postcolonial conditions.

To portray the institutions and culture of modern Nigeria, Okri deftly employs several myths, including the biblical story of Lazarus (Azaro) and reincarnation. Due to the numerous changes in leadership and political culture, Nigeria has experienced substantial political and economic turmoil since gaining independence. The economic and political instability are like the spirit child or abiku,

who appears in *The Famished Road*, in that they keep popping up. Nigeria and its past are fundamental to all of these considerations. The narrative shows the narrator dissecting the Nigerian country in the form of a puzzle:

An irrational explorer of chaos and light, the spirit child explores the worlds of the living and the dead. Because there aren't enough plans in place to sustain their existence, entities that aren't prepared need further preparation before they may emerge or grow. Major life events and unfinished business keep popping up and going until the right time comes. What the spirit-child is like profoundly impacts the material world, as seen throughout history (487).

A recent outbreak in Nigeria has been dubbed "the spirit child's condition." Abikus persistently oscillate until their opportune moment arrives." Here is the number: 487. Given the evidence, the country has not yet achieved its complete independence, similar to the situation in abiku. Also, this is confirmed by Ade, one of the live bikers, who shares your gloomy outlook on Nigeria. Our country, he says, is like an abiku, a spirit kid that crops up and goes again and again. It will decide to remain permanently at some time. I won't see the object's metamorphosis, but it will become stronger. He had a vocal transformation, his voice taking on a gentler, more genuine tone (478).

Ade is optimistic that Nigeria will be able to attain national stability as a result of its reform initiatives. But he knows he won't be around to see this prophecy come true. Someone who bravely fought for national unity and stability but unfortunately died too soon is Ade, who was a vital architect of the Nigerian country. Consequently, there is substantial Nigerian significance in representing the three motorcycles and their placement inside Madame Koto's tummy. Azaro's powers of clairvoyance and super-sensory telepathy make this depiction clear to the reader. He said that Madame Koto was expecting three unusual children. Three of

them were lying within her womb, two of them upright and one on its back. Three stood out: one with a well-groomed beard, another with fully grown fangs, and a third with menacing eyes. They acted naughtily, vigorously kicking and pulling at their collars. Particularly problematic were these spirit-children, who showed a marked aversion to being born.

Madame Koto approached me and said, "Why were you staring at my belly like that, with those evil eyes of yours?" (464). Azaro brings bad luck to his Nigerian parents, and Madame Koto knows it. The echo of independence and the difficulties it entails are likened to Azaro. "This state of autonomy has resulted solely in difficulties" (169). To Azaro, the Nigerian country is like a baby being born. The inability of the three surviving abikus to establish themselves as a sovereign country is the root cause of their rejection to be taken, which is seen as an extension of Azaro. The narrator's portrayal of Azaro's Nigerian family, based on the behavior of the three motorcycles in the womb, powerfully shows the nation's poverty depth. Poverty in Azaro's home is only one more example of the widespread ineffectiveness of Nigeria's government.

Lack of competent leadership undermines efforts to curb the unpredictability in Nigeria impacts the connection between the Abiku realm and a Nigerian figure named Azaro. While we Nigerians are not to blame for our country's problems, they did arise due to the colonizer who founded our nation. These problems are foreseen by the herbalist, who calls Azaro (Nigeria) "a child who resisted being born but will also confront mortality." (8). This declaration clarifies that the colonizer's involvement is necessary for Nigeria to be a sovereign country. The dream that Azaro's father had is likened to the diviner's predictions. In his plan, he blamed the colonizer and our government's incompetence for our problems. He saw our people doing art amid poverty, hunger, drought, strife, and the horrors of war, as Azaro notes. He saw firsthand how the Western world's other powerful forces routinely exploit our people

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and how our achievements and history are being obliterated. He kept an eye on our country's wealthy and corrupt leaders, whom he perceived as oblivious to our destiny and driven by greed (492).

This exemplifies how the leaders of Nigeria put their interests first rather than focusing on the country's stability and prosperity. They persist in amassing money that is eventually useless. "...how oblivious we are to our future," which depicts the country's impending collapse and its precarious state regarding the formulation and implementation of policies.

### **Songs of Enchantment**

The Famished Road continues in Songs of Enchantment with more exploration of the story of Azaro, a spirited kid or abiku who lives in a transitional realm between this world and the next. The narrator is still Azaro. The novel paints a bleak picture of African culture and, more significantly, Nigerian society, where a few wealthy people consistently rule, oppress, and deprive the masses of the population. The oppressed masses. The affluent minority continues to re-colonize the poor majority, creating an image of a dark and disorderly society. People who are seen as enemies of the "neo-colonial rulers" are also killed in the story. Madame Koto represents the neo-colonial overlords in this story. The residents of the rundown city are utterly enchanted by her magnetic presence. The report depicts Madame Koto's pessimistic nature as she treats the poor people oppressively, especially Dad and Azaro. In the story, the villains loyal to Madame Koto kill Ade's father, the Carpenter, but they don't bury his corpse. "The eagle disappeared, and a gush of blood, slender and transparent, erupted from a vein in Ade's father's neck as one of the individuals stabbed him in the throat" (212). Several recent political events in Nigeria are reminiscent of these phrases. The henchmen of Madame Koto kill Ade's father when he calls for his son's death. Also, the poor town's Party of the Poor has declared that the Carpenter's killer should be the only one allowed to go to his funeral. Consequently,



the residents of the rundown neighborhood consistently avoid going near the decaying corpses close to the forest.

The acts of the Party of the Poor show that they are against the murder of an innocent person in a poor neighborhood. They tried to protest, but it didn't work. So, the locals gathered and buried the corpse quickly. The corpse symbolizes a widespread problem that the ghetto dwellers in Nigeria encounter daily. Politicians who were supposed to free the ghetto dwellers oppressed them on top of all the hardship they had faced. The wealthy elite use frightening and intimidating techniques to gain support for the Party of the Rich. At its core, the book delves into the many ways human beings endure pain, and Okru recognizes this. Any child reminiscing about their past would tell a story like this, but with their twists and turns. One may find many. Although there may be several interpretations, the point is that a single god is going through anguish in that setting. According to Hawley (1995:27), This symbolizes the tremendous suffering endured by Nigerians, who possess an abundance of anecdotes to share. The ghetto is a place of spiritual conflict in Nigeria, where several spirits fight for control of the local population. A plague, starvation, excruciating pain, and deep sorrow befall the people. Azaro expresses this viewpoint in the following way: Everyone assumed that the family's mental stability had taken a nosedive due to the trauma.

In addition to this, it was alleged that Ade had also been bound for medical attention on two other occasions. Recently, despite his diminutive stature, he had been able to break free from his restrictions and had begun roaming around the vast woods as well as the busy streets of the city. Both his feet hurt, and the sores that covered his shaved head were noticeable. He rushed and screamed obscenities, inciting panic among the birds and animals owing to his insane condition (187). This elucidates the common misery suffered by all members of society when their dwellings and valuables are exposed to vandalism. Take Ade's family as an

example; they are forced to leave their home because vandals have caused it to sustain substantial damage that cannot be repaired. The wall is leaning, the roof has fallen, and the home is flooded with water, amphibians, and reptiles. The house is in desperate need of repair. The mental breakdown that Ade's mother had may be attributed to this particular cause. His father runs away into the woods and returns at a later time to voice his disapproval of the injustice, but he tragically meets his end in a manner that is more than horrifying. The postcolonial society of Nigeria is characterized by a substantial prevalence of poverty and numerous occurrences of violence that result in the loss of life among the populace. This is a feature of the society. Even though it is difficult, Azaro's father is forced to do physical labor to provide for his family. And about his husband, she is subjected to the sun's scorching heat. While selling her low-cost goods, she is traversing the sweltering road, which is being heated to an extreme degree by the scorching sun.

In addition, Madame Koto is a significant barrier that prevents the growth of the promising community in Nigeria from proceeding without interruption. To eliminate Madam Koto, who represents political oppression, subjection, and superiority, Ade, Azaro's ethereal companion, is working toward her elimination. Although the dagger is stuck in her arm, she has not sustained any injuries that are considered to be life-threatening. Ade's efforts may be likened to the steps the Nigerian government is making to clean up the political system via its reform agenda. Still, these efforts have yet to produce any results. In addition, Ade emphasized this issue even though he was aware that it would not be effective. He proceeded by saying, "I was not successful." The destiny that was destined for me was not to become an assassin but rather to act as a catalyst. "I anticipated my failure." Ade's comment demonstrates that he shares the mindset of Nigerian nationalists, who have been quite vocal in their support for the Nigerian motherland.

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In addition, how Black Tyger conducts himself demonstrates a conscious effort to cultivate a political culture that benefits the general public and is founded on practicality. He unequivocally condemns the Party of the Rich due to its pretentiousness, aggression, and self-centeredness (characteristics shared by other political parties in Nigeria). He recognizes that the Party of the Poor and the Party of the Rich are closely associated when it comes to inflicting violence on the populace and instilling terror among the ordinary residents of the ghetto. According to his point of view, the two parties reflect two complementary aspects of the same problem. Subsequently, he endeavors to cultivate his autonomy separate from the current two.

Consequently, he places the impoverished individuals at the core of his conviction. He desires to give them shelter, education, and other essential needs. However, his endeavors become unsuccessful as they represent a bold confrontation with the immense political decline that precedes him. The individual's behavior might be compared to the inevitable recurring pattern of Nigeria's historical downfall after colonization and the inability of nationalist ideals and democratic philosophy to endure after achieving political independence.

Furthermore, it can be inferred that Azaro is a metaphor for the political, social, and economic deficiencies of several African locations, particularly Nigeria. It is possible to draw parallels between the cycles of his demise and subsequent revival and the efforts of numerous previous and current administrations in Nigeria to develop a functional political structure, which has been met with a significant amount of disappointment. Individuals in Nigerian society continue to nurse their grief and extreme poverty, which contributes to the continuation of catastrophic circumstances. The section reflects Azaro's contemplations. The ocean attains a state of tranquility. As I monitored the infant's growth, it established eye contact and focused its eyes on me. In the older adult's vision of a

country on the verge of collapse, I experienced turbulence. This nation was newly created and dying due to a lack of foresight, excessive greed and corruption, insufficient love, and numerous divisions. There is a total of 91.

Taking into consideration the material presented so far, Azaro focuses on the political situation in Nigeria, which is now being affected by the phenomena of abiku. As a result of a lack of foresight, excessive greed, and corruption, this phenomenon describes a country that was formed and is now on its way to extinction.

This attribute is shown by the majority of Nigerian politicians, a characteristic considered to be expected. The prevalent political ineptitude has evolved into a story that is often ignored and takes place continuously inside the realm of politics."Corruption afflicted the people and thrived." They were plagued with ailments and endured a tremendous deal of hardship as a result of their condition.

The group included youngsters of varying ages. There was a complete inversion of the Earth's atmosphere. As the creation progresses, it becomes more difficult to understand (75). After that, Azaro decides to stay, which is one of the challenges that people worldwide, particularly those in Nigeria, may take an important lesson from. Nigerians need to broaden their educational horizons to understand their spiritual universe completely. At that moment, they could proudly exhibit their capacity to escape the recurrent misfortune that was having a bad influence on the political and social components of society.

In addition, Ade is mindful of the despicable role Madame Koto plays in the political landscape of the ghetto, and similar to Azaro, he seeks to end her harsh rule. In light of this, he attempts to attack Madam Koto, but his efforts are fruitless still. As a result, he ultimately dies away. As a result of his conflicting ideals, he is unable to use his powerful potential to do damage to the lady. His

goal to destroy Madame Koto is decisive. Still, he also maintains a desire beyond the sphere of living things, which demonstrates that he is not committed to tackling the sociopolitical challenges that are now being faced. Several characters in *Songs of Enchantment*, in addition to Azaro, Ade, Madame Koto, and Black Tyger, represent the difficulties that come with having freedom. Among them are the Masquerade, the Yellow Jaguar, and several other spirits that are metaphors for the nation's vicious, greedy, and repressive leaders. Furthermore, it is essential to emphasize that Black Tyger reflects the heavenly characteristics that Christ has as well as the ferocious, unbridled force that is associated with Ogun, the Yoruba god of war. This association may also be seen in the book that was written by Adeniji (2008).

### **Conclusion**

The postcolonial settings of Ben Okri's books *Songs of Enchantment* and *The Famished Road* have been thoroughly investigated and analyzed in this research. An extensive X-ray analysis of human circumstances is included in the article. Okri used the "spirit child" myth to shed light on postcolonial reality in response to this situation. Ghana is a nation. The books have a unique style of narrative that mixes the real with the otherworldly with ease. As a result, the capacity to transition between the two worlds is central to Azaro's Nigerian culture. Both works show corrupt practices and other societal ills as pervasive in Nigerian society.

The "Rich" enslave the "Poor" and oppress them, reflecting the reality in Nigeria. Madame Koto represents the wealthy elite who takes advantage of the poor, while Azaro and Ade stand for the oppressed. Therefore, this research aims to delve more into how Okri uses the conventions of prose fiction to shed light on the postcolonial realities shown in her works about Nigeria.

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