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The Nexus Between Magical Realism and The Post-Colonial Discourse

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The study examines the nexus between magical realism and the postcolonial discourse in Ben Okri's *Infinite Riches* and *The Famished Road*. The study relies on the postcolonial theory as formulated by Frantz Fanon. Ben Okri's two novels, *The Famished Road* and *Infinite Riches* which form the basis for this study, form the basis for this study and also help to explore and understand the connection between Magical realism and the Postcolonial discourse. Using the postcolonial theory, the study examines how the postcolonial narrative is portrayed using magical realism. The study employs close reading and interpretation of both the primary and secondary data sources. The study establishes that magical realism aids the rendition of a postcolonial narrative. Magical realism is also employed in the two postcolonial narratives as a way of resistance and as a dominant voice of the colonial encounter.

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INTRODUCTION

This study explores how magical realism aids the rendition of the postcolonial discourse in the texts

Infinite Riches and *The Famished Road*. According to Adeniji, A, the word *Abiku* in the Yoruba language means children born to die young. This phenomenon cuts across many of the tribes in

Nigeria including the Igbo. To call someone an Abiku, is to confer on the person the powers of both mortality and immortality. This study closely examines how Azaro, a spirit child, and the other spirit beings mirror the contemporary literary issues in his society. So as to establish how magical realism aids the rendition of the postcolonial discourse in the selected texts, the study explored the overall effect of the carnivalesque mood in the two texts under study to unpack the effect that the carnival has on the characters in the book and also in highlighting issues in the texts.

The study takes note of the psychological and physical effects of the blatant portrayal of the lower stratum. Finally, the death motif in the text is also explored. It emerges that characters find solace and meaning in their very existence through death. Thus in the wake of the suffering evident in the two texts, 'death' acts as a way of scrutiny into the real essence of living. The aspect of symbolism in the two texts, with the view of bringing to attention the various postcolonial issues in the two texts, is also explored in this study. The question of whether to shun or embrace aspects of European cultures is also further explored in this chapter where rebellion against the 'norm' or the standard way of living is seen.

Deconstructing Post-Colonial 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-colonial Theory and Post-colonial Literature*, postcolonial literature theory 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, according to Ashcroft et al. (1989), in *The Empire Writes Back*, "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 literature of African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, 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 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, specifically Nigeria while at the same time addressing the issues that bedevil the African continent. The rulers who are corrupt and inefficient have gone against the wishes of the new nations.

In *An Introduction to, Post-colonial Theory and Post-colonial Literature*, Said (1978) defines

postcolonial theory as 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.

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 operated 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 the woman happy who would be his mother.

Spirit children remained in 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 back 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 he is born, Azaro chooses to stay and this is symbolic of Nigeria's choice to grapple with the challenges of post-independence after the

colonialists had left. In agreeing with this argument, Bhabha (1990) 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 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 nations are like children. He says that all the nations kept being born and reborn and after every birth, there was betrayal and bloodshed.

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

The road symbolises the path of a communal way of transportation. The road is a harbinger of the colonial presence in Africa since, before the 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 heralded 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 had no desire to change the status quo. This could be mainly attributed to the slave mindset that was initiated by the colonialists. It was a state of complacency. Fanon (1963) 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 turns the colonised into a kind of quintessence of evil" (6). Therefore, the colonists succeeded 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 a 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 connected people to their destinies. It also acted as a shaper of human destinies, and anyone who travelled the road was bound to reach their destiny. The ultimate destination of the road too was not assured and one required 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 could not be satisfied as he ate 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 Koto,

Nigeria is an obese country. Madame Koto takes advantage of the youth 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 are enriching themselves and in the end they end they never find satisfaction. They are shamelessly gullible.

The corrupt leaders thrive on the sweat and blood of their young population. The young people are unemployed and are 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 was 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 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's 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 can 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 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 of 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 with that of Madame Koto. Just like Azaro's father, his mother is determined to fight against oppression by the rich.

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 in 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 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 evidence of the political differences between the main and the minor cultures. Heaven and hell are metaphorically presented near 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 person 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 a lifetime and recognise 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 creates an atmosphere of unpredictability around him. He is an epitome of mystery as were Azaro and the other spirit children. The king is depicted as being an abnormal being, "sometimes a man and, 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, traverses 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 he is a small boy, Azaro possesses 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 despite the fact that he is a spirit child who 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 to 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 in the slums where he grew up.

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 is 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 is justice in the society. He felt for them. In 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, in 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 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 behaviour 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 who 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 onto 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 and poor living conditions at the slums where they grow up.

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 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 of 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 meaning out of his very existence.

Despite the many odds and challenges, Azaro seems 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.

Defiance for the Colonial Norms through Exegesis of the Carnavalesque Mood

The unnatural and the grotesque in literature are best studied while employing Mikhail Bakhtin’s carnivalesque approach. Bakhtin argues that the carnivalesque spirit has a purpose which 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 (1968)

defines the carnivalesque as the normal way that covers dances, modes of dressing, the way people conduct themselves and all the forms of the various physical pleasures. 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 daily life are suspended, traditional rules are set aside and order governing societies is also suspended.

Carnavalesque literature often questions authority, culture and 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 reveal the grotesque and the derided. In *The Famished Road*, a carnivalesque atmosphere permeates the day that Madame Koto cleaned her new automobile:

Many 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)

There is a possibility of uniting different personalities in the society. The implication is that people can unite for a common cause if they are given a reason to. People from different walks of life in the society of *The Famished Road* come together to rebel against that which has been instituted upon them as the normal way of life. Although there is nothing unique about a car being washed, Okri manages to give a carnivalesque depiction of the latter by engaging individuals such as the herbalist,

thugs and even a chief altogether in the process of cleaning the car. The process appears natural.

Notably, 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 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 awkwardly. 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 cutlery (. . .) 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 even 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 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 care about is their own pleasure.

Ben Okri’s depiction of the carnivalesque is connected to the infringement of any normal and decent acceptable code of behaviour. 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 seems to be disrupting the negative portrayal of Africans. Ben Okri 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 uncannily, Ben Okri presents the maxim of the colonial narrative.

Opposition for 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 as a way of rebelling against the established colonial norms but also aids the writer in establishing 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.

Bhabha (1994) 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 a 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 not only serves 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 into the marketplace. 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 was even a dwarf who was 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 around 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 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 serves 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 is also depicted. According to Bakhtin (1968), such a portrayal of the body parts is referred to as grotesque realism (p.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 into 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 white hair. The girl in this case also represents deformed cultures that are 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 can also 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 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 does 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* by Achille Mbembe, he 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). 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 these women and is able to keep the relationship secretive. He is embarrassed of being discovered yet he keeps on longing for more pleasure.

Death as the Interlude between Life and Nihilism

The depiction of death in the two texts under study also alludes to the atmosphere that seems to wish for death and life at the same time. The boundaries between life and death are depicted. Moments of death which is highly feared in the physical world, provide Azaro's father with a chance for renewal.

During Azaro's father's 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 into its new realities. It is in his visions 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 Fanon's (1963) 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 imagined a colony in which he was the undisputed ruler. Here his subjects were learned and completely aware of what was going on in their world.

In Azaro's father's 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 maintained 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. Such solutions include; involving everyone including the downtrodden at the table of leadership. 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 were 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 one possesses unless one dies.

For Azaro, his life before death epitomises the highest level of suffering, 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 the two worlds of the living and the 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 of life but rather the genesis of another 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 discovery for Azaro and his father. Azaro's father develops new

ambitions during the 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.

CONCLUSION

The nexus between magical realism and postcolonial is that magical realism is employed in postcolonial discourses as a way of resistance and as a dominant voice of the colonial encounter.

Magical realism is also used as a means of the imagination. To this effect, therefore, the role of the spirit child in foregrounding contemporary literary issues has been explored. Azaro journeys through both texts together with other characters such as Madame Koto, Azaro's parents and the other spirit-children. Spirit-children are symbolic of how postcolonial nations handle their independence. Azaro is symbolic of a postcolonial nation that is willing to not only accept its state of independence but also grapple with the challenges that come about with the independence.

The carnivalesque mood which permeates the two texts serves as a way of showing defiance of the established colonial norms. The blatant portrayal of the lower stratum is a way of showing opposition to the colonial convention. Finally, by exploring the death motif that cuts across the two texts, the study establishes that "death" acts as a way of scrutiny into the real essence of living for the various characters in the texts.

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