

## I. Introduction

After many years of perpetual struggle, African countries were freed from the reign of European colonialism. Despite the acquisition of political independence after the Second World War, the impacts of colonialism in African aboriginal culture, society, language, religion, politics, judiciary, way of life and socio-economic system have been operating conspicuously. Even in the wake of independence, colonial cultures, economic system and language have been influencing African literature as well as Africa's socio-economic political, religious, judiciary and linguistic systems.

Despite the collapse of direct rule of colonial regime, colonial models of writing have been influencing African literature and literary works tremendously. Therefore, it is very much challenging and complicated task for the African writers to come out of stereotypical models of writing fabricated by the networks of imperialism and its mission of civilizing the non-West.

In the light of political independence, many African writers have started to write against the empire. Writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka have exhibited their super-capabilities in addressing the postcolonial condition of Africa. Some African writers strive to reclaim, revive and revitalize pre-colonial unique cultures, myths, beliefs and way of life whereas some write to erode the fabricated ideology by creating binary between West and non-West and uncover the vested interest of West to hold influence over the vast territory of Africa. Among different African writers, who write about the postcolonial condition, effects of colonialism and lingering imperialism, Ben Okri is prominent one. Apparently, Ben Okri deals with colonial legacy and lingering imperialism in economic, political, cultural, linguistic, religious and judicial fields of African life. In his short story collection, *Stars of the New Curfew*, he reveals how the independent people prefer to communicate in English

rather than in their own national language. Cleverly, he depicts indigenous African rulers as being corrupt and neglecting the problems of common people. Besides, Okri dwells upon the political instability and chaos created by colonialism and its onslaught in the independent African countries like Nigeria. The departure of the colonial powers resulted in sudden political vacuum which the local administrators were unable to handle properly because they not only lack administrative skills but also they inherited the colonial mentality.

Born in Minna, Nigeria, Ben Okri published eight works between 1980 and 1985-five novels, two collections of short stories and a volume of poetry. In each of works, he returns to a consistent repertoire of common postcolonial themes. In particular, he critiques the ubiquity of corruption and violence in contemporary Nigeria, creates a voice for the poorest and most powerless members of African society, and explores the ongoing cultural confrontation between foreign and indigenous traditions in postcolonial Africa. In aggregate, Okri's fiction represents one of the most significant explorations of literary form in the canon of postcolonial African literature.

Ben Okri's literary career can be divided into three phases. In each phase, he has demonstrated a radical shift in style and narrative strategy. Okri's first two works *Flowers and Shadows* and *The Landscape Within* blend the conventions of realism and modernism to explore the effects of modernization in urban Nigeria. In *Flowers and Shadows*, Okri depicts the coming of age of Jeffia Okewe, an idealistic young Nigerian who aspires to be a teacher. Over the course of time, Jeffia struggles to retain his youthful idealism in the face of modern society's complex demands. Along the way, he wanders through lust, love and other common attractions of youth. This novel focuses on Nigeria's confrontation with the modern social, political and

existential conditions that have followed in the wake of colonialism rather than focusing on the original confrontation between the colonizer and the colonized.

In *The Landscape Within*, Okri continues to develop a comparable mixture of realistic narration and modernist stream of consciousness as he explores the inner life of a young Nigerian painter named Omovo. Okri's artist Omovo uses art as way of creating order and meaning in fragmented world. Living the life of a lonely, uncompromising artist who is often at odds with his society, Omovo develops the detached observation and creative expression required of the artist. His paintings portray the miserable conditions of Nigeria's urban poor. These paintings are so influential that they are quickly censored and confiscated because of its powerful social criticism. Instead of describing some abstract theory of beauty, Okri's philosophical reflection on art emphasizes the political dimensions of artist's place in the newly independent nation where he is struggling to free artistic form from the colonial and neocolonial authoritarianism.

Ben Okri's next works, *Incident at the Shrine* and *Stars of the New Curfew* make a new phase in his artistic development. This second phase can be identified by two significant changes. First Okri begins writing short stories instead of novels. Second, he starts experimenting more with African narrative techniques. These collections of short stories mark a turning point in Okri's aesthetic development because they increasingly use African narrative techniques as an essential aspect of their narrative strategy. His short story collection *Stars of the New Curfew* has six short stories set in politically independent Nigeria. In these stories, Ben Okri basically deals with political instability and chaos resulted by colonialism and its onslaught. Even after the acquisition of independence, Nigeria's political, social, cultural, religious and linguistic systems seem to have inherited colonial mentality.

Despite being independent, the African people and their lives are still under colonial influence which Okri endeavours to depict in *Stars of the New Curfew*. Using magical realism as a unique African narrative strategy, Okri reveals how Nigerians have been affected by colonial onslaught. Even after the dawn of independence, African people confront harsh and complicated realities brought down by colonial onslaught. Not being able to cope up with intricate troubles, decolonized Africans enter in the world of fantasy and romance to breathe a sigh of relief. By using magical realism, Orki depicts supernatural world where Nigerians enter when they utterly fail to face harsh realities caused by colonial legacy and lingering imperialism.

*The Famished Road* and *Songs of Enchantment* mark the next phase of Okri's literary career. The former novel is regarded to be the most important till date which won the Booker prize in 1991. Both novels demonstrate Okri's ability to combine the techniques of realism, modernism and African oral traditions. In these two novels, Orki describes the adventures of an abiku, spirit child, who equally possesses a spiritual as well as an earthly dimension. It keeps coming and going between this world and the spiritual world until it finally decides which world it wants to embrace. By making his protagonist, an abiku, spirit child who chooses to live, Okri suggests that African spirit can survive the seemingly endless cycles of colonial and neocolonial violence, by choosing to reconcile its spiritual and mundane dimensions. Using magical realism as a new narrative strategy, Okri creates space for the African people who have been denied access to mainstream culture. Even the herbalists, spirits, ghosts and downtrodden people have been given space to voice their experiences and world views. By portraying political instability and chaos brought by colonial invasion, Okri suggests colonial legacy and imperial mentality have not been fully relinquished. In *The Famished Road*, Ben Okri clearly demonstrates this

tendency of the African indigenous people who still cling to the colonial legacy. His latest novel *Astonishing the Gods* follows the same kind of mystical vision and lyrical form that Okri has developed in the previous novel. But it suggests that Okri's talent is waning. Characters are less developed and its mythical vision fails to gain the same intensity.

Always exploring new aesthetic possibilities Ben Okri has also published a volume of poetry titled *An African Elegy*. Throughout these poems, Okri meditates on various aspects of the human conditions- love, solitude, pain, death and faith. In treating these themes, he moves seamlessly between philosophical reflection and description of intimate details of everyday life. His rich lyrical voice once again demonstrates his ability to continually explore new literary forms, and his intense, personal vision creates an atmosphere that is spiritual without being sentimental.

### **Review of Literature**

*Stars of the New Curfew*, collection of short stories, has generated a series of critical commentaries since the day of its publication. As no text is bound to have single interpretation, several critics belonging to various backgrounds have ventured to interpret and analyze it from diverse angles and point of view. Some critics have appreciated Okri for his capability to creatively experiment new narrative techniques in literary forms. Using very short sentences throughout short stories collected in *Stars of the New Curfew*, Okri has depicted Nigeria and its various aspects of life, argue some critics.

Ben Okri has provided room for the marginalized indigenous African people who have been denied access to hegemony and mainstream culture. Indeed, Okri provides space to the voices, the experiences and worldviews of deprived and

downtrodden people. In the race of commenting Okri's *Stars of the New Curfew*, a renowned critic, Robert Bennet pens:

Okri critiques the ubiquity of corruption and violence in contemporary Nigeria, creates a voice for the poorest and most powerless members of African society, and explores the ongoing cultural confrontation between foreign and indigenous traditions in postcolonial Africa. (4)

Critics have been quick to pigeonhole Okri and his oeuvre as belonging to certain literary trends or particular "schools" of writing. African, Black British, magic realism and postmodernism literature seem to be the most recurrent labels assigned to his works. And this collection of the stories has been praised for providing new perspectives to all these labels.

Elleke Bohemere finds Okri indulged in mythical and visionary ideas to develop his nationalistic theme in the collection of the short stories. He states:

Okri, in *The Famished Road*, and his short stories collected in the *Stars of the New Curfew* and *Incidents of the Shrine*, upends conventional chronology by introducing cyclical pattern and a seemingly national dream logic derived from Yoruba myth. The noisy congruence of disparate cultural forces, usually taken as characteristics of cosmopolitan narrative, in his work becomes a conduit into the more bizarre conjunctions of a feverishly visionary Africa. (242)

Likewise, Tom Wilhelmus shows Okri making a fusion of realistic details, fantasy and dreams in this collection of short stories. He highly appreciates Okri's narrative techniques and comments:

For the first 150 unrelentingly paratactic pages, simple sentence followed simple sentence, scene followed simple scene, nothing

connected, nothing was subordinated and every experience seemed as important as other. The narrator jumped so freely from realistic passages depicting African village life into surrealist passage of fantasy and dream that they exhibited a blurred and possibly primitive inability to separate fact from fiction. (6)

Over the course of imparting comments on Okri's *Stars of the New Curfew*, renowned critic, Michael Thorpe projects growing violence and overt display of military power. He asserts:

Okri's settings are Nigerian-Lagos, a provincial capital, the village dotted bush-but could belong to another tormented country of tropical Africa, the mode of apprehension is hallucinatory dream, a nightmare. In this, though not in language, one is reminded of Tutuola, yet Okri's fabular and allegorical journeys are linked with the African life. Everywhere images of sudden violence and rando cruel power erupt: the whip flailing, guncraddling soldier; the bloated, body guarded big men. (1)

Throwing light on the widely disseminated chaos, disorder and corruption of Nigeria, a popular critic, Robert S. Newman, voices; "The stories collected in the *Stars of the New Curfew* reflect chaos and corruption, the lost chances and waste of human abilities and natural resources" (2).

He further argues:

In this brilliant collection of African short stories, there is the difficulty standing in one's ground. There is a world where superstition, poverty and irresponsible use of power combine to destroy effective social bonds. In the title piece, an unholy mix of alcohol, oil of marijuana

and chloroform called power Drug causes a bus crash and the death of seven people. (10)

This critical commentary unlocks the abuse of state power by unaccountable and indifferent authority and pervasive poverty due to unequal distribution of wealth and land. Critiquing on the *Stars of the New Curfew*, Wole Soyinka notes:

In these tales the mind is constantly pulled towards "place of things remembered", a timelessness of human suffering, self destruction and the paradox of the survivalist will. The genre is as familiar as the work is unique, stamped with the case of a truly original imagination. (11)

This critical response depicts the proliferation of suffering and unavoidable agony of the postcolonial Nigerians. Shedding light on the escalating mess and disorder of the postcolonial Nigeria, a popular critic, Slemon Stephen, tells:

Another piercing collection of short stories. This Africa is not the fault of people like Emokhai, the hero of the "*In the City of Red Dust*" who has to sell his own blood to settle his bar bill during the governor's birthday celebrations. Instead, it is the shambles, created by those who rule in order that they may rule. Small vicious men bringing the world down to their level. A masterful collections. (4)

Thus, collection of the short stories, *Stars of the New Curfew*, has been interpreted and analyzed by different critics from various angles and views. Some critics underline the themes of violence, brutality and apathy of the government resulting in the burning fundamental problems faced by the poor and downtrodden citizens where as some other exert a great deal of emphasis on the questions of widespread chaos, anarchy and political instability and uncertainty of recently decolonized Nigeria.



Some tend to believe that he has sowed the seeds of liberty and independence voicing the agony and difficulties of the postcolonial Nigerians with the use of magic realism. Some critics are of the opinion that Ben Okri has opened a space for subaltern by depicting the poor and marginalized Nigerians who have been denied access to mainstream culture. Mounting pressure on the rising rate of poverty, corruption and wide and unbridgeable gulf between haves and have-nots, some critics show off inequality and social injustice prevalent in postcolonial Nigeria. Nevertheless, no one, so far has ventured to dig out and bring to light the virgin, unexplored, burning and pertinent facet of the collection, i.e. undercurrents of colonial legacy circulating and influencing economic, social, religious, linguistic and educational systems of Nigeria even in the postcolonial period.

Indeed, the collapse of direct colonial rule didn't bring full-fledged independence to African countries. Even after the rise of independence, colonialism and its legacy have been directing indigenous life, culture, religion, education and other different sectors. After independence, native people had expected that local rulers would resolve all the fundamental problems of the country and bring stability and peace. On the contrary to such expectation, local rulers seem to have inherited colonial legacy. Instead of solving the problems confronted by country dwellers, they began to display power neglecting the people. For instance, the governor of *Stars of the New Curfew* doesn't care when people like Emokhai are dying of starvation but he spends a large sum of state revenue in celebrating his own birthday. Independence couldn't and didn't bring independence in religion too. Many African people are Christians. For instance, narrator, Arthur, of *Stars of New Curfew* while suffers from dreams, goes to church to get rid of them. Linguistically too Nigeria seems to have inherited colonial legacy. The narrator of the title piece while selling power drug

prefers to talk in English with customers. In terms of education, Nigeria is not free. It has many catholic schools. For instance, the father of the girl who is sought by Assi and Odeh contributes a considerable amount of money to establish catholic English schools in Nigeria. Regarding judiciary, Nigeria is dependent on British colonial system. It still has high courts. The concept of high courts was imported from Britain. A number of references of high courts in *Stars of the New Curfew* reveals colonial legacy does exist in judiciary too.

Being unable to cope with corruption prevalent in independent Nigeria and harsh and complicated realities brought by colonial onslaught people prefer to enter in the world of romance and fantasy to escape the former. For instance, the narrator of the title story and Ede of "*When The Lights Return*" escape in the domain of romance and fantasy when they cannot face the social realities resulted by colonialism and its invasion.

Thus, this researcher yearns to uncover legacy left behind by colonists in almost every aspect of politically independent Nigerians.

This research work has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter fundamentally deals with an introductory aspect of the study which encompasses the title clarification, hypothesis elaboration, introduction to the short story writer's background, his works and their themes, various critical commentaries on the story writer.

The second chapter is primarily about the theoretical modality which is to be effectively applied in the study in order to bring into light the colonial legacy left behind by former colonialists. It, therefore, provides a brief introduction of the tool drawing ideas from diverse available sources. This part of the study defines and gives

meaning to post-colonialism by presenting an elaborate history and background of postcolonial theory.

The third chapter of the study presents an analysis of colonial legacy at considerable length on the ground of theoretical modality defined and developed in the second chapter. Of course, it consists of necessary extracts from the text so as to justify the hypothesis of the study. Moreover, this chapter will serve as the centre of this research work.

The fourth chapter is completely related to the conclusion of the study. Standing on the strong foundation of the analysis of the text done extensively in third chapter, it will present the explanation, elaborations and arguments put forth in the preceding chapters on the ground of textual evidences.

## **II. Theoretical Tools**

### **Postcolonialism**

Postcolonialism deals with the effects of colonization on indigenous cultures and societies. From the late 1970s, the term has been used by literary critics to discuss the various cultural, political and linguistic experiences of societies that were former European colonies. Since postcolonialism is a wide terrain of study and analysis of European territorial conquest, it is increasingly used to uncover contemporary colonial legacies in both pre and post independent nations and communities.

The field of post colonialism is so wide and vast that various ideas and theories regarding it have come into being. Some theorists and critics believe that postcolonialism refers only to the period after the colonies become independent but others argue that it is best used to designate in totality the rich diversity, which characterizes the societies of postcolonial world from the moment of colonization to the present day, since colonialism doesn't cease with the mere fact of political independence and continues in new-colonial mode to be active in many societies.

To make a clear and detailed analysis of postcolonial theory, it is quite relevant and indispensable to bring Said's concept of Orientalism. In Orientalism, Said uses Foucauldian theory of discourse to examine and survey Western idea of the Orient and how it was constructed to maintain hold over the vast territory and natural resources. Discourse, as Foucault theorizes it, is a system of statements within which the world can be known. It is the system by which dominant groups in the society constitute field of truth by imposing specific knowledge, disciplines and values upon dominated groups. According to him, representation is never free from the

relationship of power, and it is the power that creates truth by means of representation. Concerning this Hazard Adam states:

Foucault's principal interest was in how power diffuses itself in system of authority and effects of truth are produced within discourse which in themselves are neither true nor false. Truth then is itself a product of relations of power and of the systems in which, it flows, and it changes as systems change. (1134)

Defining *Orientalism*, Edward Said tells it is colonial discourse of the West about non-West. It can be seen and understood as a way of Western will to govern over the orient.

In Said's own terms;

Orientalism is a corporate institution for dealing with the orient, dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing view of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the orient. (3)

Edward Said's Orientalism laid a strong foundation for the emergence and evolution of postcolonial theory by exploring the vested interests of the West in the guise of mission of modernity and civilization to the Orient. Indeed, this marks the very beginning of what we call postcolonial theory.

As postcolonialism is open to different ideas, it, undoubtedly, derives strategies and characteristics from poststructuralism especially from Derridian deconstruction and Foucauldian discourse theory. Like poststructuralism, postcolonialism dismantles binaries like West/east, primary/secondary, man/woman civilized/uncivilized and so on. It deconstructs such binaries so that it can make a

room for indigenous cultural values and worldviews ignored by the so-called imperialist truths. It debunks and challenges the Western canonical texts. Moreover, it deals with the third world people's traumatic experiences like cultural disruption, hybridity, diaspora, migration and so forth. In the beginning, it was focused upon challenging colonial ideologies imposed upon the natives. It was preoccupied with the issues concerning identity and cultural roots of the indigenous people. Cultural nationalism, therefore, came to limelight. The postcolonial writers concentrated their efforts in trying to establish the identity of the natives by highlighting their culture. They sought to construct the indigenous nationalism based on native myth and culture. The theorists like Said challenged the Western culture and attempted to construct the third world's cultural nationalism. Likewise, the writers like Chinua Achebe tried to construct cultural nationalism by exploiting the Nigerian indigenous myths and rituals. In the same manner, subaltern study group conducted researches on the culture of the subaltern people. They were trying to create a new nationalism made of indigenous culture of the peasants. They brought subalternity into postcolonialism.

Later on, the postcolonial writers, with the rise of postmodernism and poststructuralism, realized that the terms like cultural nationalism and indigenous culture are essential. They shifted their focus to the issues of cultural displacement. As we know, the colonial onslaught disrupted the indigenous culture. It turned the natives into black skin having white masks as Franz Fanon suggests in his book *Black Skin, White Masks*. It brought hybridity with respect to identity, culture, and consciousness of the natives. They were turned into dangling people torn between the native culture and the imperial culture. This cultural displacement touched its peak in diaspora. Homi K. Bhabha, in his book *Location of Culture*, argues that colonialism

not only disrupted the native culture but also the colonial culture. Referring to the in-between condition of the colonized subjects, Bhabha has developed the concept of mimicry. According to him, the colonized people challenge and make the imperialist truths impure through mimicry when they use the imperialist language to express their indigenous experiences.

With rapid rise and proliferation of globalization, transnationalism and multiculturalism across the worlds, cultural nationalism gave in to the growing influence of West over the native cultures. These phenomena, at present, are valorized instead of the essentialist concepts like indigenous culture and cultural nationalism. The writers like Rushdie, Okri and Marquez are marching on this path. They construct ambivalent space to make a room for the indigenous culture ignoring imperial culture. In the same manner, they heavily exploit diasporic as well as multicultural experiences. They achieve all these through the application of magical realism in their works. Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and story collection *Stars of the New Curfew* are examples of magical realist texts, which have been successful in achieving what postcolonial writings are supposed to achieve. Now, the postcolonial writers have realized that it is not possible to restore the pure indigenous culture. Instead of making a hopeless effort to restore and revive indigenous culture, they are trying to establish a bit less hostile relationship between the native culture and imperialist culture. As colonization and its lingering legacy have brought changes in both colonizer and colonized, they have brought ambivalence in cultures. This kind of ambivalence shows the possibility of the simultaneous existence of both worldviews.

With advent of education and explosion of knowledge, colonized countries across the world got unified and fought perpetually against brutal and authoritative

reign of different European colonialisms. Under the slogan of nationalism and nationality, native people held protests and rallied demanding freedom, and sovereignty. Because of the massive protests and continual negation of colonial order and rule, many colonized countries were freed from the cruel claws of British, and French colonialism. Officially, pillars of empire, like French, British abandoned the colonies but to our utter dismay, colonized couldn't jettison values and norms impregnated by colonizers in their lives.

Many years after the acquisition of independence, Asian, African and Latin American countries are being ruled on the ground of systems constructed by colonizers. Though independence was declared to promote and revive native cultures, religion, education, law, language, development and economy, economic, social, political, judiciary, linguistic and administrative fields have been following and functioning on the basis of colonizers' roadmaps and plans. Because of this lingering imperialism in the decolonized countries in Africa, African writers and critics have attempted to show in their texts how much the native people are free and how much they are still dependent on colonizers. Postcolonialism not only uncovers how West had constructed ideology to manipulate and rule over the non-West but also sheds light on how and at what length colonialism and its legacy left behind by colonizers in the decolonized countries continue to affect culture, societies, politics, religion, language, education and so many other aspects of indigenous people.

Concerning this hangover of colonialism in independent countries like Nigeria, Edward Said states:

Imperialism didn't end, didn't suddenly become "past", once decolonization had set in motion the dismantling of the classical



empires. A legacy of connections still binds countries, like Nigeria, Algeria and India to France and Britain respectively. (282)

Said's aforesaid statements clarify that though countries like Nigeria and India have attained political independence from the reign of French and British imperialism, there does exist the connection or legacy among these countries. Said further pens, "Questions of the authority once directed at the classical empires of Britain and France are now thrown at despotic successor regimes, and against the idea that African or Asian countries remain in thrall and dependency" (266).

This notion of Edward Said makes revelation that aboriginal successors of politically independent countries have inherited all the legacy let by their predecessors, former colonizers. For instance, Ben Okri, in his short story collection *Stars of the New Curfew's* second story "*In the City of Red Dust*," depicts a native ruler military governor who seems to have inherited colonial mentality. The time citizens like Emokhai are dying of hunger, he spends entire time in celebrating his birthday and delivering speech to divert people's attention. Despite the known fact that poverty has sunk all the citizens, he wastes state revenue in celebrating his own birthday.

In terms of colonial legacy and national independence, Edward Said further adds:

To a very great degree that the era of high nineteenth century imperialism is over. France and Britain gave up their most splendid possession after World War Second, and lesser powers also diverted themselves of their far-flung dominations. Yet the meaning of imperial pasts is not totally contained within it, but has entered the reality of hundreds of million of people where its existence as shared

memory and as a highly conflictual texture of culture, ideology and policy still exercises tremendous force. (11)

From this remark of Said, we can draw a conclusion that official **decolonization** or independence has not been able to liberate people. It exposes the fact that imperial forces are still lingering in the politically independent countries.

Industrialization and urbanization brought by the colonizers had heavily changed the cultural values of Nigerian peasant life. The white culture had already become a part of their life. Therefore, there was heedlessness, conflicts and contradictions in the thoughts of Nigerian people. This all helped the West to imperialize Nigeria to this day. More or less, this very thing has been happening in many other newly independent countries across the world. For instance, Ben Okri, in his short story *Stars of the New Curfew*, reveals place of W. simple village turning into a town which has become full of bars, dance restaurants and hotels. All these hotels and bars seem to be full of prostitutes only.

Europe conceded independence to us and we promptly began to misuse it or rather those leaders to whom we entrusted the wielding of our new power and opportunities. So we got mad at them and came out brandishing novels of disenchantment. Actually we had all been duped. No independence was given. It was never given but taken, anyway. Europe had only made a tactical withdrawal on the political front and while we sang our anthem and unfurled our flag. She was securing her iron grip behind us in the economic field. (qtd. in Henderson 7)

Though Nigeria is free from British colonial rule, it has many Catholic English schools and people there prefer to talk in English as a medium of communication.

Ben Okri, in *Stars of the New Curfew*, presents narrator, Arthur, who talks in English with customers in course of selling drugs.

Regarding educational system of autonomous countries, Philip G. Abatch argues: "Most developing countries have maintained the colonial pattern of school administration and many have altered the curriculum only slightly thus retaining much of the orientation of colonial education" (453).

Philip G. Abatch further adds:

The old colonial era some say, is dead. Evidence? Most formerly colonial areas are now independent nations. On the ruins of traditional colonial empire, however, has emerged a new subtler but perhaps equally influential kind of colonialism. The advanced industrial nations retain substantial influence in what are now referred to as the developing areas. (452)

Written in the postcolonial era, Ben Okri's short story collection *Stars of the New Curfew* portrays Nigerian politics, administration and corrupt government, its education system that still follows British model. It also shows rapid growth of towns full of Western vices-dance clubs, hotels and bars frequented by prostitutes. Political instability, chaos and display of colonial power by native governor further throw light on pervading corruption and police force atrocities.

### **Magical Realism**

Many critics and writers have expressed various views on "magical realism". It is not very clear who coined this term. Franz Roh, a German art critic, however, is supposed to have coined this term in 1925. He used the term 'Magic realism' to refer to expressionist and post-expressionist works because such works of art, according to him, reveal the mystery palpitating behind the everyday thing or phenomenon. Angel

Flores brought this term into literature to discuss about the writings of Jorge Louise Borges in 1935. He also changed "magic realism" into "magical realism" and defined it as a technique to present mundane and supernatural simultaneously. Meanwhile, the writers like Jorge Lousie Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and John Fowles began applying it in their works.

If we analyze the various works by the writers like Salman Rushdie, Ben Okri Marquez, Tony Morrison and Borges to name a few, we will find a few common characteristics in most of them. All the magical realists' works exert to move beyond realism. Realism reveals the world as it is. Magical realism, however, uses myth, oral tradition, fantasy, imagination, and other supernatural elements along with everyday things. It exploits myth, fantasy, and other supernatural elements not to make the work a fabulation, fantasy or science fiction. Instead, it uses such phenomena along with everyday things to depict the magic hidden behind the everyday things. Magical realism, with the help of the simultaneous use of supernatural and mundane, defamiliarizes everyday phenomena. That's why we as readers, happen to catch the beauty hidden behind such ordinary things.

Colonization disrupted Asian, Latin American and African indigenous cultures and societies. The natives, as a result, were compelled to inculcate the world views of the colonizers. So, the ideologies of the colonizers somehow shaped them. In such time of cultural collapse resulted by colonization and its lingering legacy postcolonial writers such as Ben Okri have used magical realism as an alternative narrative technique to represent the African indigenous cultures, values, myths, beliefs and experiences. Moreover, these African writers have used this narrative strategy to depict the supernatural world where natives breathe a sigh of relief. Indeed, writers, like Okri, have used magical realism to show harsh, bitter and complicated realities

brought down by colonial onslaught and its lingering legacy in the politically independent countries like Nigeria. These African writers exhibit native people being still ruled by the concept of colonialism and its legacy. Moreover, they depict natives incompetent to cope with complications and difficulties resulted by colonialism and its legacy. When the natives fail to cope with bitter realities of the present situation, they jump in the world of fantasy and romance to escape the former. That's why magical realism deals with escaping of the natives from the situations caused by colonialism and its lingering legacy. For instance, Ben Okri, in his short story collection *Stars of the New Curfew*, presents narrator, Arthur, who when fails to promote the sale of power drugs, immediately enters in the world of fantasy and imagination to escape the former difficult situation.

### III. Textual Analysis

The collection of the short stories, *Stars of the New Curfew*, is set in the different villages and cities of Nigeria after it attained political independence from the oppressive imperial claws of Britain. It is an excellent document which portrays how colonialism and its legacy are operating throughout Nigerian political, cultural, religious, judicial, educational, linguistic, social and administrative fields in the aftermath of independence. Even after having attained independence, colonial impact and legacy have not ceased completely in the soil of Nigeria. Thus, this researcher intends to survey and bring to light the legacy left behind by colonials-invaders and former rulers of Nigeria.

Ben Okri in his title piece *Stars of the New Curfew* has portrayed that white colonial rulers are still having authority over the different realms of independent Nigeria. The following cited lines apparently shed light on this aspect of domination through a character called Rastafarian who looked like a "dishevelled biblical prophets":

He said we were selling our souls, our power, to white capitalists. He talked about Jah's inviolable fire. He said, in a dramatic voice that kept us quiet:

'Africa ! we counting on yuh !'

He began to sour my day. He continued:

'Africa ! It's a long time since di disintegration of our dreams and many years after hindipendence white people dem still fuck us up! Africa, we counting on yuh !' (102)

## **Display of Power**

Officially Nigeria has been declared independent from the direct rule of European imperial powerhouse. However, thinking of the local rulers and their attitude towards the common citizens have not altered. This is found not only among the native rulers and corporal but also amidst the affluent native dwellers residing in different parts of Nigeria. During the heyday of colonialism and imperial rise, colonizers would display power among the native people. Directly or indirectly, natives would be compelled to obey the imperial law and order. To divert attention from the major issues and problems confronted by the natives, colonizers would organize different functions and programmes heavily guarded with a strong military back up.

With the dawn of independence, it was expected that indigenous rulers would bring a complete halt in displaying power to the common, innocent and downtrodden citizens. But to their utter dismay, native rulers seem to have inherited colonial mentality. The military governor of short story "In The City of Red Dust" has largely inherited colonial mentality and attitude in behaving, dealing and ruling over the native Nigerians. The common citizens like Emokhai, Morjomi and Dede are dying of acute hunger and poverty which drives them to sell their blood. However, the military governor doesn't pay attention to this problem. Neither he supplies food nor money. Instead, he wastes a great deal of state revenue in the preparation of celebration of his birthday. When the people are facing grave problems, when they are struggling for their survival, the governor gives damn care and diverts their mind towards the celebration of his birthday, unveiling of his statue and marching military parade and flowers fall from helicopters and planes.

In order to make the governor's birthday celebration a grand success, soldiers have queued in lines. Despite the scorching and fierce sun, they keep on marching with crashing music. This military march pass attracts people belonging to different walks of life. Characters like Emokhai, Dede and school children watch the celebration of the governor's birthday. Most people, leaving behind their duties and responsibilities, have come out to watch the celebration. As a matter of fact, governor's birthday celebration ceremony gives an impression that Nigeria and its people have no social, economic and developmental problems. At a time when the country is rife with poverty, problem of good streets and clean drinking water, the governor gives preference to gun's firing salute and military parade. The following lines present the overt display of power by military governor:

The planes droned above. School children, herded out in great numbers, sweltered under the harsh sunlight. Gun salutes blasted the air. The band, stepping up after the governor gave a salute of terrible authority, brought forth a thunderous roll of military music. The metal boots crashed on the ground with multiplied energies. (53)

Indeed, the local rulers of Nigeria even after independence from the rule of imperial power are following the footsteps left behind by colonists. Common citizens in different cities are dying of hunger due to lack of food. Many children can be seen walking naked in the street. However, local rulers like military governor of "In the City of Red Dust" appear to be unaware of such problems. They keep themselves busy with the unveiling of their own statues in different places. By doing this, they force and oblige the common citizens to offer prayer to them. Flying aeroplanes in the sky, marching soldiers on the streets and constructing hoarding boards and placards with governor's photographs apparently expose the fact of exhibiting power



and keeping innocent citizens under their influence. This mentality is obviously an inherited attitude from the colonial past.

The military governor displays colonial mentality by owning a luxurious bullet-proofed car with automatic telephone, a fridge and other many modern facilities. By riding such means of transportation, he intends to rule over the common people. He further wants to show them that he is important, powerful and inevitable for them. Though the military governor is a native ruler, his aristocratic lifestyle and possession of luxurious car show clearly that he is not better than the British colonist. The following lines present this case clearly.

The car, green bullet-proofed with tinted windows, automatic telephones, a fridge and a set of decanters, was arrowed like an instrument of precise comforts. An aide opened the back door. The governor saluted his officers stamped and ducked into the vehicles. The celebrations had just begun. The other state officials got into their vehicles the outriders started their sirens. The motorcade moved slowly out of the grounds. (56)

In the aftermath of independence, apart from the native rulers, the people, who are considered to be well off, involve in the endeavour of exhibiting power to the innocent, poor and downtrodden people to show who is richer than whom.

As they are senior members of the society, they have to be careful in promoting native culture and developmental activities. But these so-called affluent natives ride imported vehicles like Rolls Royce, Citroen Special to give the sense that they are superior to others. Moreover, in the name of different programme like fund-raising these people publicly display their monetary power so that they can be

declared the richest. So, these well off natives too seem to have inherited the colonial mentality which can be clarified from the following details:

The competition between the two boys-Odeh was tall, Assi was short and fat-soon mirrored the endless financial contest between their parents. In one year Odeh's father was declared the richest man in town. The next year, Assi's father was declared winner. If one of them imported a Citroen special the other would import the same, but with more ostentatious gadgets.

The narrator describes one specific scene from his school days when both these rich men were invited to chair a fund raising function at the school:

They carried over a white sack. Then he began to toss money from the platform. He threw coins and pounds notes at the crowd as if money were nothing but a cheap magician's trick. The students went wild struggling to pick up the scattered money. When Assi's father's turn came, he signaled to his musicians and they piped the organs, strummed their guitars and, squeezed vaguely family tunes from their accordions. When they had finished, he made along speech, devoid of denunciation and presented a cheque for ten thousand pounds to the school. The teachers and the principal privately declared Assi's father the winner of that contest. We the students, beneficiaries of coins crumpled pound notes, declared that Odeh's father had won. (116-17)

The Nigerian police organization follows the hierarchical British pattern. At the head of the Nigerian police force is the Inspector-General. Corporal, constable and Recruit rank at the lowest levels. Because of the colonial pattern of police

organization in independent Nigeria, corporal and policemen don't lag behind in torturing, misbehaving and meting atrocities to the common citizens.

Needless to say, native soldiers in Nigeria even after the acquisition of independence consider themselves as symbol of power and absolute authority. Though they are deployed in different parts of the country to provide security and maintain law and order, they involve in terrorizing and intimidating common and innocent citizens. The indigenus security forces treat local dwellers not better than that of British rulers of colonial era. In the story "*In the Shadow of War*" soldiers arrive in the village of Omovo to provide security and maintain order and law. However, they mistreat villagers, scatter goats and chickens. As these soldiers are in search of a woman whom they call a spy, they inquire about her from people they encounter. At the time of inquiring about the woman, they treat Omovo inhumanely and rudely. After the arrest of the wanted woman, she is being treated brutally by the soldiers. The atrocity and brutality of the police become clearer from the following:

The bare chested soldier pushed her. She fell on her face and lay still. [. . .] Meanwhile, the fat soldier wiped his face and lifted the gun on the level of her stomach. A moment before Omovo heard the shot a violent beating of wings just above him scared him from his hiding place. (3)

This killing of an innocent woman apparently demonstrates soldiers functioning as symbols of power and absolute authority.

Similarly, when Ede in the story "*When the Lights Return*" sets out to meet his girlfriend, Maria after a long time, he stares at the corporal on his way to Maria's house. This stare of Ede infuriates the corporal. Time and again, he reminds Ede that he is the corporal. He is a powerful person and has to be given due respect. When

Ede replies, he shouts angrily, "STUPID RAT ! WHO ARE YOU TO REPLY ME WHEN I TALK! Lifting the whip again (60).

The aforementioned corporal seems to have inherited colonial mentality tremendously. Therefore, brutality and atrocity overpower him and he bestows them upon to the common natives.

The narrator of the story "*Worlds That Flourish*" is looted in modern and innovative way. The thieves take away all his belongings. However, he can not phone police because of the threat given by the robbers. While waiting to get help from the security forces, police arrest him on the charge of theft on the basis of report given by captured thieves. Despite his several pleas that he is the one who is robbed, soldiers beat him mercilessly. This incident of arrest of innocent who is robbed clarifies spreading atrocity of the police authority. The given lines throw light on it.

At night the soldiers came and beat us up with whips when we refused to confess anything. Then in the morning, some policemen took us outside and made us strip naked and commanded us to face the street. That people that went past looked at us and hurried on. I shouted of my innocence and the policemen told me to shut up. We stayed out facing the whole world in our nakedness for most of the day. (16)

### **Rampant Corruption**

It goes without saying that independent Nigerians should be free from the web of corruption which was in practice in colonial regime. The major objective of colonizers was to amass more and more wealth by destroying natural resources and cheating the natives. In the aftermath of independence too, local rulers are following the same footsteps. Though the common citizens of the country are dying of starvation, he doesn't care. Instead, he wastes a great deal of money to celebrate his

birthday. When the people are dying of hunger, the governor is living a life of luxury and aristocratic comforts. This has really enraged and infuriated the common people.

The dissatisfaction is surfaced in the following lines:

'Just because he is a military governor does every birthday have to be a big parade? Stamping dust over the city. Grinding their monster vehicles up and down the bad roads.

How old is he that the city has to come to a halt.

Look at him. Pompous blighter ! Fat like an ox ! Full of the people's food. And to think that he robbed one of our banks during the war.

We are mad. All of us that condone this nonsense are mad!' (53)

African leaders have already forgotten the pains, sufferings and problems of the Nigerians. By ignoring people's hardships and sufferings, they have enriched themselves. In this or that way, they have become corrupt and indifferent towards the sufferings of common people. Corruption prevailing among African leaders becomes conspicuous from this:

The Rastafarian seized on the furore to criticize African leaders who ignored the sufferings of their own people. He said that our heads of states had illegally enriched themselves and their supporters while the people died for lack of basic amenities. (105)

Salesman, singer, musicians, vendors no one is satisfied with the rule of African government. People belonging to different walks of life have been voicing their dissatisfaction and protest in different ways.

Poor musicians sang of corrupt government, of bad roads, and of electric failures, when the corporal lashed out at one of their faces with the chicken intestines. Ede, in his attempts to get away, narrowly

missed falling into a manhole. He slipped across the road and hid beneath the fly over, where he tethered goats moved restlessly in the darkness. (160)

Most of the leaders of independent Nigeria are involved in running business houses. To boost up their business, they create scarcity of goods and take maximum benefits from their business. Some leaders are running business of generators. To multiply their business, they create the condition of electric power failure. These leaders are corrupt and act don't better than that of colonists. The below cited lines throw more light in terms legacy of corruption prevalent in the aftermath of independence.

He bought some sand-roasted nuts. Two articulated lorries thundered past. The fumes they left behind made him feel sick, unable to breathe; the clouds of dust in the air made him thirsty. He stopped off at a kiosk and bought a bottle of Fanta. The woman selling had a big fleshy face and frame made massive by the quantity of wrappers she had rounded her. She talked a lot while he drank. She said the government deliberately created black outs so that ordinary people would have to bribe officials at the board. He was a quarter-way through the Fanta when she added that it was really because the government despised its own people, that they wanted citizens to walk off into the wild roads, and to disappear into open drains and manholes. Half way through the Fanta, she changed her entire theory. She said the electric failures existed because of the lucrative business in generators. (161-62)

## **Legacy of Christianity and English Language**

Even after the independence, Christians make up more than three quarters of the population in the eastern states and Christianity has made great inroads since 1960s in the middle belt, which is now the main area of religious conflict. The main established Christian groups are Roman Catholic, Methodist and Baptist. There is an increasing number of separatist Christian groups, of which the largest are the Cherubim and Seraphim, the celestial church of Christ and the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star. Christianity which came with colonial invasion has ruined traditional beliefs and norms and values of Islam of which Nigeria took/takes pride in identifying them. Though colonialists have left the soil of Nigeria, large numbers of churches are still in Nigeria.

People often visit churches to offer prayer to Jesus Christ. No matter it is whether town or village, we find churches into operation. Nigerians, who are troubled with dreams and other supernatural objects, go to church to get rid of them. For instance, narrator, Arthur of *Stars of the New Curfew* is troubled with recurring dreams of implausible things. To get out of this, he visits churches. To his dismay, even churches, priest and biblical personages start to appear in his nightmares. The following documented lines clarify it more.

The nightmare became so unbearable that it was necessary to do something about them. I went to the celestial Church near where I lived and I had the priests pray over me; but the nightmares merely went on to include the priests, the members of the congregation, and biblical personages amongst the auctioneers. (95)

In the wake of independence, so called rich Nigerians are not investing much in establishing schools that teach Nigerian culture, history, religion and myths. Instead,

they are eager to establish English Catholic schools and for this purpose, they fund a large amount of money.

Like Assi and Odeh, she had failed her examinations numerous times and it was only the weight of her father's contributions to various building projects of the Catholic school that made it possible for her to continue to be a student. (120)

Despite the fact that Nigeria has its own indigenous language, it has still been dominated by the colonial English language. Educated people whether teachers or salesman prefer to use English while communicating with others. This reveals the fact that linguistically Nigerians are not independent. Rather, linguistic legacy is operating among Nigerians. For instance Arthur, narrator of *Stars of the New Curfew* while selling power drug uses English as a medium of communication with his customers. Similarly, independent Nigerians either like to pursue English education or buy certificates from Britain. The below quoted lines throw more light in terms of educational legacy prevalent in Nigeria in the aftermath of independence.

Tankwa and Amukpe, unaffected by the decibels, went on telling stories of my escapades. I went and bought my round of drinks. They moved on to talking about how our various schoolmates were doing. One was in jail for smuggling cocaine. Another had become a writer. A third was a footballer. There was one whom we all thought would go into the movies; but who now ran a brothel in Lagos. Another had been repatriated after trying to stow away on a ship bound for America. Odeh had become a lawyer. Rumour had it that he bought his degree from a phony college in England. Assi had also become a lawyer. He bought his degree as well from England. (121)



## **Urbanization and Rise of Colonial Norms and Values**

During the period of British rule, new towns grew up and the older ones grew larger. Many towns originally were primarily administrative centres, but-like Port Harcourt, Lagos and Ibadan as well as the Sudanese towns of Kano and Kaduna. They have become industrialized. Prior to urbanization and industrialization, result of colonization, life in Nigeria was very simple. Women were confined within four walls of a house. But colonial onslaught brought drastic change in the role, status and conditions of women. Though it had liberated women from the four walls of a house, colonialism implanted some colonial norms, values and ways of life.

With the growth of towns and cities, a large number of people from different villages have migrated to the towns in search of better opportunities and facilities. However, opportunities are not easily accessible. As people arrive in towns from villages, they found it hard to adjust with the urban milieu. On the one hand, their familial relation has broken away. On the other hand, they are displaced socially and culturally as they couldn't adjust themselves with urban norms and values easily. In such circumstances, not only women but also men have to do any sort of job to continue to survive. Because of rapid urbanization, great numbers of brothels have engulfed different towns and cities. Sex works have emerged as an industry tremendously weakening indigenous norms and values. For women coming from villages and even for those poor class town dwellers the only alternative remains to indulge in sex works as they are easily available. Nigerian towns- like Lagos, city of W. -are replete with dance restaurants, bars and brothels. People belonging to various walks of life go to brothels to satisfy their lust. Visiting bars, dance restaurants and brothels have become the way of life.

Indigenous Nigerians like Emokhai, Dede and Marjomi are extremely poor. Having no option left to fill empty stomach, Emokhai and Marjomi sell their blood to hospital. Nevertheless, they squander their money received from the sale of blood in visiting bars, dance restaurants and excessive drinking. Though life is being pushed towards the vicious circle of uncertainty and economic crisis, Emokhai, Dede and Marjomi often visit bars. This becomes clear from the following lines:

Emokhai watched her. When she came over he put his arm around her waist, but he pushed him away. She stood outside the bar hesitant. Emokhai went in, swishing his way past the striped curtains. The smell of palm-wine made him thirsty. Without looking to see if Dede had come in with him, he pushed his way to bar and ordered two beers. (62)

Job opportunities are unavailable to men let alone to women. Women either opt as sex worker or they were forced into it. Dede is the best example of a woman who has been forced into it by soldiers in “In The City Of Red Dust”. In fact, the profession of prostitute has reached its peak. The rampant cases of prostitution can be verified from these lines.

People with drinks in one hand, a cigarette in the other stood against the walls. The lights were dull. The ceiling fan **rotated** slowly, barely stirring the dust on its blades. Voices rose from everywhere in rough waves. In one corner, several men competed for a prostitute's attention. In another corner, several, prostitutes competed for the attentions of the businessmen. (63)

A significant rise in the numbers of dance restaurants, bars and brothels even after having attained independence from the claws of imperialism is one of the solid

grounds to reveal that colonial legacy is functioning across Nigeria with tremendous force. Independence should have developed national consciousness and Nigerians should have utilized their energy in development of infrastructures – roads, electricity, educational and health institutions, technology and agriculture. However, night clubs and brothels have besieged the cities. Nobody is untouched by this. The narrator, Arthur, of title piece when arrives in his city of W., he wanders here and there in search of his old companions. He is taken aback when he finds drastic change in the social life of city of W. Stunned by the change of his city, Arthur goes from one night club to another night club to spend his night recklessly in merrymaking.

At all night clubs the youths dressed in the latest importation of American fashion. Everyone spoke with a curious transatlantic accent when I asked people about the best place to spend the night they told me that Boom night-club was the centre of the town's sophisticated life. (111)

In comparison to men, the condition of women is vulnerable and pathetic. They are sexually exploited even by the security forces. They cannot stop sexual exploitation because of their hellish condition. Moreover, they cannot give up this profession because of lack of better job opportunities and also because it empowered them financially: "The last thing he had heard about her wasn't that she used to go out with a soldier, but that she had been with five of them. They said she made a lot of money out of it and that she was going into business" (70).

### **Exploitation and Poverty**

In the aftermath of independence, indigenous Nigerians are still being exploited from the hands of native rulers. As a matter of fact, native rulers and affluent people have been following the footsteps left behind by colonizers. During

the heyday of colonial rule, colonial invaders would take some elite people in their hands and use them as agents to suppress and oppress the natives. The innocent, common and poverty stricken people had no option but to obey the order given by the colonizers. Self-government has brought no considerable change in the life of poor and downtrodden people. Common people like Emokhai and Marjomi have to sell their own blood for their survival. Meanwhile the military governor wastes a large amount of money to celebrate his birthday in a very grand, wonderful and sophisticated way. Sheer negligence of the governor towards the sufferings of people reveals that he seems to have inherited colonial mentality. His people are naked and unattended but he celebrates his birthday:

The planes dived, sending some shadows everywhere. The cascade of confetti continued. The naked children rusted about trying to pick up as many strips of paper as they could. Emokhai pushed homewards. He passed the formless rubbish dump which seemed to grow bigger everyday. He went home under the tireless glare of sunlight under the shadow of paper strips that fell over the mud huts that pattered on the heads of all those ghetto-dwellers who hurried or who slouched about their business. (18)

Many Nigerians live in the ghettos and slums of Nigeria. Neither do they have good shelter nor enough food to eat. They are often terrorized and chased by security forces. Poverty has pushed their life towards the verge of uncertainty and insecurity. The time when they are waiting to get help from the self-government, their agonies suffering go unheard. Instead, they are forced to be internal refugees because of sheer negligence of the local government. The following lines reinforce this aspect of life:

Later in the evening troops of soldiers came and woke up the inhabitants of the street. They had come to remove the plane and bury their companion. The soldiers had a special mania that evening. They rounded up the people of the street, roughening them up where necessary. The inhabitants stood with their children and their motley property around them, refugees in their own city. It was a while before the five-service arrived. The lights were cut in the area. The soldiers went about the business of evacuation as if the street were a war zone. Mama Joe, unable to find her son, wailed up down the place. (74-75)

The common Nigerians are being used by the affluent people as means to fulfil their vested interests. They are exploited inhumanely and rudely. They are forced to act as the rich men's agent. For instance, narrator, Arthur, of title piece has been exploited by Assi and Odeh who are from elite family of Nigeria. Both of them want to woo the same girl. In their plan of wooing the girl, they want to hire Arthur as their agent and for that purpose they give him money also:

I was standing besides the goal-post when Odeh came upto me. [. . .]

When he got to where I was standing he asked me to deliver a letter to a certain girl. She turned out to be the daughter of one of the richest men Benin, a bigger pond than town of W. I was apprehensive. [. . .]

He was also the son of a rich man, the other richest man in town.

Without any preamble he gave me a letter to the same girl and he also gave me ten pounds. To buy me off, Odeh strode towards me, snatched the ten-pounds note out of my hands, tore it to shreds, gave me fifty pounds, and pushed me on my way. And so it went. That was how I became a victim of their financial contest. (115-16)

### **Magical Realism in *Stars of the New Curfew***

Most of the magical realist works tend to present the devastating effect of colonialism in the colonized countries. It, at the same time, tries to demonstrate the impacts of colonial aftermath like corruption, cultural disruption, and political chaos in the decolonized countries. The present collection of the stories, of course, does it. It, however, moves beyond as well with the help of the magical realist strategies, it aspires to make room for indigenous experiences and worldviews by challenging the Western worldviews. Indeed, this technique has enabled the writer to demonstrate the indigenous ritual, rites, customs, beliefs, oral tradition and myths which cannot be encompassed by Western narrative technique.

In a way, the technique of magical realism has become a weapon in the hand of Okri to represent myths, beliefs and voices of indigenous being disrupted and shattered by colonial onslaught and lingering imperial forces. Ben Okri, with the application of magical realism, portrays the ground reality that despite independence Nigerians have been under the domination and rule of colonial legacy. Indigenous Nigerians still suffer from complicated realities which are product of lingering colonialism. In such a situation Okri cleverly and artistically uses magical realism to disclose how people escape from these harsh and insurmountable realities in the world of fantasy and romance to breathe a sigh of relief. As a matter of fact, Ben Okri makes use of magical realism in *Stars of the New Curfew* to uncover the fact that indigenous Nigerians are still troubled by colonial onslaught and its lingering legacy. To get out of this, people escape in the domain of romance, fantasy and imagination which is the domain of magical realism.

Omovo and his father in "In The Shadow of War" have been staying at home as the war is taking place in some interior parts of the country. The cases and

incidents of killing are multiplying. Because of the war, they are feeling insecure. At this critical time, Omovo's father has to go out to carry out his personal work. Before leaving home, Omovo's father poured a libation at the doorway and then prayed to his ancestors (4). Similarly, radio is broadcasting news of eclipse and war simultaneously. In African custom, it is believed that at the time of eclipse the entire world goes dark and strange, and unwanted things happen. All the dead people start to walk and sing so people are generally asked to stay inside the house. On the one hand, Ben Okri brings Nigerian custom and myth to the fore by portraying eclipse. On the other hand, the war is going on. Life is completely insecure outside. So Omovo's father asks him to stay inside to escape the possible disaster that can happen outside.

'Heclipse hate children. They eat them.' 'So don't stay out late, eh' (4). This reveals the fact that natives are still terrorized and living the life of insecurity and chaos. Ben Okri has used such types of superstitious beliefs to explain that Nigerians are still deprived of education and living their life in ignorance and darkness though they take pride in attaining independence from the imperial rule.

In fact, African people have their own way of coping with their illness and other problems related to health. They have strong faith in herbalists, witches, spirits and wizards as such. Okri has used magical realism to portray such aboriginal African experiences of life. The narrator, Arthur, of *Stars of the New Curfew* suffers from unbearable recurring nightmares for many years. To get rid of such intolerable nightmares, he consults herbalists. Arthur has attended only Secondary level education so jobs are not available for people like him. Because of poverty, he is thrown out of his rented room and spends six weeks under the bridge with goats and goatherds. Colonial invasion has led to the rise of poverty. Even after the

independence, it is not easy to get job. To earn for his living, Arthur gets involved in selling fake medicines which instead of curing the patients, ultimately cause harm. The idea of manufacturing medicine in large quantity is imported from colonizers. Even at the aftermath of independence, it is still there in Nigeria. When Arthur can not compete with other salesmen and when the medicines sold by him multiply the disease in place of curing, he goes in the world of magical realism.

My nightmares were never quite the same. They were often, however, variations on a single theme. The earliest nightmare I remember began with seeing that all I had ever sold in the way of medicines resulted in the deaths of thousands of children. I would be wandering aimlessly along the devastated streets of Lagos bathed in lurid lights.

Everywhere I saw children drinking medicines as they played on the roadside. [. . .] I would be in the corner of a nameless constellation, a lunar landscape where the dead sang and provided music. The stars in the sky were the objects of the auctioneer's block. One after another the stars were sold off. [. . .] Sometimes the auctioneer would be an old woman who whom I had sold my medicines to on a molue bus. And other times the auctioneer would be a white man with a bent telescope. (92)

Ben Okri makes a clear picture in which Arthur an independent Nigerian feels satisfied in the world of romance and imagination. In the supernatural world, Arthur sees, meets and talks with people. Among these people some are dead and some alive.

The singing would stop. The auctioneer would turn to me with strange eyes and would point at me. I would immediately be bound and



thrown on the block. The auctioneer would bang on the table with a large fibula. [. . .] The money men of the high constellation would crowd forward. They were representatives of all races, all nations, all colours. They had bloated faces, indifferent eyes. Their expressions were acutely wise and callous about the resources and costs of power. [. . .] I saw the face of army general, an English aristocrat, an Asian millionaire, an American tycoon. [. . .] I saw a senator whom I remembered coming to canvass votes in the ghetto of Ajegunle. (93-94)

Life is not as easy as it is thought in Africa though it is politically independent. Increasingly escalating violence, political instability and corruption have further complicated the life of common people. No one remains unaffected. Indigenous Nigerians are suffering from the problems of power cut, and dearth of clean drinking water. When people can not cope with these problems, they often enter in the world of fantasy, imagination and romance to take breath of solace and refuge. For instance, Okri's short story "*When The Lights Return*" presents a character named Ede when he utterly fails to conduct the concert, he is scolded by the audiences. In fact, he is compelled to halt the concert programme because of power failure. Once Ede fails to cope with harsh and complicated realities of the society, he jumps in the realm of romance. This is nothing more than means of escaping the harsh and bitter realities of the society. In the universe of romance, Ede talks with dead people. Indeed, there is African cultural belief that death is not the end of life. After one is dead, he/she certainly has another life:

A lizard ran across the dead man's face and suddenly he moved. The crowds of people ran. They fled across the road and overturned stalls

in their haste to escape. Ede staggered backwards, with the light of clarity coming and going like or loose connection in his head. The dead man stood up. [. . .] Ede didn't know where to run. The dead man came slowly towards him bringing an immense variety of smells. Ede moved backwards. The dead man stopped. Then he lifted his right hand up with one finger pointing at the sky like a demented preacher, and said, in a voice of monstrous power 'REVOLT !' (163)

It goes without saying that independent Nigerians are pushed into the vortex of insecurity and uncertainty. Rampant cases of robbery, theft and loot have terrorized common and innocent citizens. There is no presence of the government in the country to maintain law and order and provide security and peace to the common people. With the growing insecurity and cases of loot and robbery, people have migrated to the secure places. Ben Okri in his story "*Worlds that Flourish*" presents a narrator (I) who has been sacked from his job. After being thrown out of his job, he spends day wandering across the town. He feels shocked when he finds human settlements vacant. No men and women are there in the houses. Only dogs, goats and cobwebs have reigned the town. Once, he is also robbed in an innovative and modern way. Though he has become victim of robbery, he is arrested and mistreated by the police. After the narrator fails to adjust himself amidst growing insecurity and rampant robbery, he sets out on a journey without a destination through the vast, uncultivated country. During his journey, he often enters in the universe of romance, fantasy and imagination. As a matter of fact, his entry into the magical realism exposes his failure to cope with the harsh and complicated social realities caused by lingering colonial legacy functioning with tremendous power.

While travelling, he reaches in the village where he sees unimaginable and extraordinary things.

Some of the people of the village had their feet facing backwards. I was amazed that they could walk. Some people came out of the tree trunks. Some had wings, but they couldn't fly. After a while I got used to the strangeness of the people. I ceased to really notice their three legs and elongated necks. (28)

Indeed, the narrator breathes a sigh of relief and achieves a sense of solace and refuge in the domain of fantasy, romance and imagination. In reality, his wife is dead. He is living alone in the absence of his wife but in the supernatural world, he sees his wife.

Then I saw the woman who had screamed, and for the first time I recognized her as my dead wife. She tore after me in great distress. Men and women and disembodied voices came after me with their wings that didn't help them fly and their feet which were turned backward. (32)

In a nutshell, Ben Okri, with use of magical realism, has opened a room to represent indigenous worldviews, experiences, beliefs and myths like eclipse and libation which were ignored by Western narrative writers. Moreover, presenting complicated, harsh and difficult realities brought by colonialism and its lingering legacy, Okri uses it as a medium for the people to have solace and breathe a sigh of relief by entering into the world of romance, fantasy and supernatural.

#### IV. Conclusion

Masterpiece of Ben Okri's short story collection, *Stars of the New Curfew*, attempts to survey and bring to light legacy left behind by colonists operating throughout political, cultural, educational, linguistic, administrative and social realms of post independent Nigeria.

Even after the acquisition of independence, Nigeria suffers because of the imperial power and its tremendous influence. The Nigerian police organization still follows the British colonial pattern. According to this pattern, Inspector General is the head and corporal and constable rank at the lowest levels. Because of this inherited colonial trend, corporal in the story "When The Lights Return" misbehaves and tortures Ede taking laws in his hand. Though he is deployed to provide security to common citizens, he demonstrates power and terrorizes common and innocent citizens. Instead of promoting and consolidating national language and educational systems, independent native Nigerians love to speak and communicate in English language. This linguistic legacy of colonialism gets reflected when Arthur of title piece prefers to talk in English with his customers while selling power drugs.

In spite of having gained independence, cases of corruption, political instability and chaos have multiplied affecting the social structure of Nigeria. Natives aspire to live life under certainty, security and political stability. However, because of local rulers' colonial mentality and attitude, chaos, anarchy, insecurity and disorder have engulfed the entire nation. As local rulers have sunk in the factory of corruption, they completely ignore and give damn care to the sufferings and hardships of common people. Indeed, independence has enriched native rulers only. At a time when the common and impoverished people are dying of hunger, these rulers travel by imported expensive and luxurious cars manufactured in Europe. The military

governor and Assi's and Odeh's fathers ride Roles Royce cars, one of the most expensive brands. In terms of religion too, Nigeria has not received freedom from the network of colonialism and its lingering legacy. Despite having its own religion, religious rites and rituals, the number of Christians have increased. Reference to considerable numbers of churches exhibit this religious legacy. Arthur of the title piece, when suffers a lot from recurring nightmares, visits churches to get rid of them. Similarly, girl's father in *Stars of the New Curfew* donates a great deal of money to construct Catholic schools in Nigeria even after it has achieved political independence.

Since Nigeria is a Muslim country, it restricts women from extramarital affairs and keeps them in veil. This is African Muslim belief. However, colonial invasion and its legacy have brought significant change in status and role of women. They can be seen walking freely without veil. Pure African norms and values have been destroyed because of colonial contact. No matter which city we go in, we find cities rife with brothels, prostitutes, dance restaurants and bars. These imported European cultures have dominated independent Nigerian life to a greater degree. Open, fresh, clean and green roads have been covered with piles of rubbish, heaps of plastic, coca cola cans and stout. Without feeling ashamed and embarrassed, indigenous women like Dede keeps on following the footsteps of the colonialists. Without any hesitation, they embrace adultery openly.

Ben Okri, with the use of magical realism, has tried to reveal how complicated, harsh and intolerable life has become because of colonial influence and its lingering legacy. With use of magical realism, he has presented intricate realities and failure of native people to cope with them. Due to their failure, they adopt the world of romance, and fantasy to escape from the harsh realities of life.

To put in a nutshell, Ben Okri's *Stars of the New Curfew* reflects undercurrents of colonial legacy functioning amidst administrative, social, linguistic, educational and cultural fields of Nigeria even after they have gained independence from the colonial power.

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