
THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY: CULTURAL MARGINALIZATION AND NARRATIVE RESISTANCE IN ACHEBE'S THINGS FALL APART AND OKRI'S THE FAMISHED ROAD

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Abstract :

This paper explores "The Politics of Identity: Cultural Marginalization and Narrative Resistance in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Ben Okri's The Famished Road. Both novels engage deeply with the themes of identity formation, cultural displacement, and resistance to colonial and postcolonial oppression. Achebe's Things Fall Apart portrays the disintegration of Igbo society under the pressures of European colonialism, highlighting the erosion of indigenous cultural identity and the struggles of individuals like Okonkwo to resist cultural domination. In contrast, Okri's The Famished Road navigates the complexities of postcolonial identity through the mystical perspective of Azaro, an abiku child, whose liminal existence reflects the tension between African spiritual traditions and the socio-political realities of a newly independent nation. This paper examines how both authors use narrative techniques—Achebe's realism and the infusion of Igbo language and proverbs, and Okri's magical realism rooted in African mythology—as acts of resistance against the erasure of cultural identity.

Keywords : Identity Politics, Cultural Marginalization, Narrative Resistance, Chinua Achebe, Ben Okri, Postcolonial Literature, Magical Realism, Colonialism

Introduction:

The politics of identity in postcolonial African literature reflects the complex struggles of societies grappling with the legacies of colonialism and the quest for cultural preservation. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991) are two seminal works that vividly depict the tension between indigenous identities and external forces of marginalization. Both novels explore how colonial and postcolonial contexts disrupt cultural continuity, while simultaneously highlighting how storytelling and narrative techniques function as forms of resistance against cultural erasure.

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* chronicles the decline of Igbo society following the arrival of British colonialism, centring on the tragic figure of Okonkwo, whose resistance to cultural and personal change reflects the broader struggle of a community facing displacement. Achebe's use of language, including Igbo proverbs and folklore, becomes an act of defiance against the cultural hegemony of the West, reclaiming African perspectives from colonial misrepresentation. In contrast, Okri's *The Famished Road* portrays a postcolonial landscape



through the mystical lens of Azaro, an abiku (spirit child) whose dual existence bridges the spiritual and material worlds. Okri's use of magical realism serves as a narrative tool to resist the rigid frameworks of Western rationality, affirming the resilience of African cosmology and identity in the face of socio-political turmoil.

This paper argues that both Achebe and Okri use narrative strategies to highlight the processes of cultural marginalization while providing spaces of resistance through the reclamation of indigenous identity. Through their portrayal of disrupted identities and the preservation of African worldviews, Achebe and Okri challenge dominant colonial narratives and affirm the enduring strength of African cultural heritage.

This analysis will proceed by first examining the depiction of cultural marginalization in each novel, followed by a discussion of how narrative forms—Achebe's realism and Okri's magical realism—serve as acts of resistance. By drawing connections between the two texts, the paper will illuminate how both authors articulate the ongoing struggle for identity in the wake of colonial and postcolonial marginalization.

Identity Politics :

In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, identity politics emerges through the exploration of cultural marginalization and resistance against external forces such as colonialism, modernity, and political oppression. Both novels engage with the complexities of individual and collective identity in African societies undergoing profound social and cultural transformations.

Cultural Marginalization :

Cultural marginalization refers to the process by which dominant powers suppress, devalue, or erase the cultural identities and traditions of marginalized groups. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, cultural marginalization is a central theme, as both novels portray African societies grappling with the forces of colonialism, modernity, and political oppression. While Achebe focuses on the direct impact of colonial intrusion on Igbo culture, Okri examines the postcolonial realities of cultural displacement and neocolonial exploitation.

Narrative Resistance :

Narrative resistance refers to the use of storytelling and literary techniques to challenge dominant ideologies, reclaim marginalized voices, and assert cultural identity. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, both authors employ narrative strategies to resist the cultural, political, and epistemic domination imposed by colonialism and its aftermath. Through their distinct literary forms—Achebe's social realism and Okri's magical realism—these novels offer alternative narratives that confront the erasure of African identity and critique systems of power and oppression.

Postcolonial Literature :

Postcolonial literature refers to literary works that engage with the legacies of



colonialism, addressing themes of cultural disruption, identity crisis, and resistance. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, postcolonial concerns are central to the narrative, as both novels explore the effects of colonial and neocolonial domination on African societies. Through their storytelling, Achebe and Okri critique imperial ideologies, reclaim indigenous identities, and assert narrative agency.

Magical Realism :

Magical realism is a literary mode where the supernatural and real coexist seamlessly, challenging the boundaries between reality and imagination. While Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* is a quintessential magical realist text, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* does not strictly fit this genre. However, both novels use elements of African cosmology and mythical beliefs to resist colonial narratives and reclaim cultural identity. This blending of the mystical with the material world reflects postcolonial realities and provides a counter-narrative to Western rationalism.

Colonialism :

Colonialism, as a historical and cultural force, is a central theme in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*. Both novels explore the profound effects of European imperialism on African societies—disrupting cultural identities, marginalizing indigenous knowledge, and triggering acts of resistance. While Achebe focuses on the immediate colonial encounter and its cultural consequences, Okri examines the long-lasting effects of neocolonialism in the post-independence era.

Conclusion:

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* both present compelling explorations of identity politics, cultural marginalization, and narrative resistance in the context of colonialism and its aftermath. Achebe's historical realism portrays the direct effects of British colonialism on Igbo society, where cultural fragmentation and the erosion of traditional authority led to identity crises. In contrast, Okri's magical realism reflects the psychological and spiritual consequences of neocolonialism, capturing the ongoing struggle of post-independence societies against political corruption and economic exploitation. Both works depict how external forces attempt to erase indigenous identities, yet the authors assert that African cultural systems and spiritual beliefs endure as acts of resistance.

Ultimately, both Achebe and Okri argue that colonialism may have altered the sociopolitical landscape, but it cannot erase the deep-rooted cultural identities that shape African societies. Their works demonstrate that cultural resistance is an ongoing process, where memory, spirituality, and storytelling become powerful tools to reclaim agency and identity. In doing so, these novels not only critique the destructive legacies of colonialism but also celebrate the enduring power of African heritage in the face of marginalization.

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