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Ben Okri's Spirit-Child: *Abiku* Migration and Postmodernity

John C. Hawley

"It is a long farewell!

It is now a matter of meeting along the road,

It is now in dreams."

—Yoruba prayer celebrating the change in relationships
wrought by death

The widespread notion of the *abiku* in Nigerian culture says volumes about the heartrending deaths of countless newborns throughout the region's history. It also testifies to a belief in the permeability of the membrane separating the spirit world from "our" world. As the *abiku* puts it, in his family he is surrounded by people "who are seeded in rich lands, who still believe in mysteries" (*Fam* 6), people who hold that "one world contains glimpses of others" (*Fam* 10), and people who acknowledge a personal relationship with these spirits in the course of daily life. In western Nigeria, however, a mother who suspects that her newborn is one of these child-spirits must do whatever she can to persuade the baby to stay in this difficult world, rather than have it return to the spirit-world where it will be bathed "in the ecstasy of an everlasting love" (*Fam* 18). Mothers will give such children names like "Malomo—Do Not Go Again"; "Banjoko—Sit Down And Stay With Us"; "Duro oro ike—Wait And See How You Will Be Petted"; and "Please Stay And Bury Me" (Maclean 51, 57). Special jewelry and foods are prepared to tempt the baby to choose life, and circumcision for such young boys is frequently postponed (56). John Pepper Clark has recorded a poem from one concerned observer's view:

Coming and going these several seasons
Do not stay out on the baobab tree,
Follow where you please your kindred spirits
If indoors is not enough for you.
Then step in, step in and stay,
For her body is tired,
Tired, her milk going sour
Where many more mouths gladden the heart. (cited in Maclean 51)

The Famished Road dramatizes the *abiku*'s difficult choice, an interior struggle that adult onlookers recognize as beyond their ken (*Fam* 20). Wole Soyinka has a poem from such a child's point of view:

In vain your bangles cast
Charmed circles at my feet,
I am *abiku*, calling for the first
And the repeated time. (cited in Maclean 51)

But Okri nicely stresses the *abiku*'s perceived responsibilities toward *this* world, as well: "I wanted to make happy the bruised face of the woman who would become my mother" (*Fam* 5).

As I hope to suggest, Okri's choice of this narrator is particularly significant; but youthful narrators have always fascinated him. He will not talk about his own childhood in interviews, specifically because he believes that one's youth is inevitably the stuff of one's fiction (qtd. in Wilkinson 77). His first novel, *Flowers and Shadows* (1980), written when he was 19, is a study of the impact of the sins of the fathers upon their sons. As Adewale Maja-Pearce notes in a foreword, this violent story is nonetheless "a novel of great optimism: The cycle of corruption and evil has been played out and Jeffia [the young protagonist] can begin all over again" (x). In the short story "Laughter Beneath the Bridge" (*Incidents at the Shrine*), a man reflects back on his girlfriend's murder by the military when the boy was only ten. Honing his artistry, Okri briefly does here what it took him many more pages to do in *Flowers and Shadows*; as Alastair Niven notes, "in twenty-one pages a boy has been educated in the harshest lessons that life can offer" (279). But since the story is presented as a memory, we have little way of knowing the impact the murder has had on the narrator's own subsequent life. In the title story from *Stars of the New Curfew*, on the other hand, a young man learns the cynical realities of a political system, and learns, as well, how to make the most of it.

Okri's preference for youthful protagonists finds echoes in the writings of many of his contemporaries, of course. In comparing the portrayal of the child in stories from Africa, India, and Australia, S. K. Desai notes that

the concept of the child as manifested in the African stories is, what one might say, modern. The child is no Romantic angel; he is a raw soul, a bundle of impulses, sensations, emotions and perceptions, facing life, struggling to comprehend it, trying to piece together his fragmentary experiences; he is a complex being with an unformed mind, often more complex than the adult, subjected to an unpredictable process of growth. (45)

Okri's use of the *abiku* is, perhaps, the most cogent and concentrated version of the poignancy of such a witness: this is a character who still remembers bits of knowledge acquired in his former life, one who can often see *through* the material world of objects, one whose apparent bewilderment ("I prayed for laughter, a life without hunger. I was answered with paradoxes"—*Fam* 6) is really clairvoyance ("As a child I could read people's minds. I could foretell their futures"—*Fam* 9).

But Okri's choice of an *abiku* narrator does more than intensify youthful powers of observation. Describing a broadly African aesthetic, he says that "it's not something that is bound only to place, it's bound to a way of looking at the world...in more than three dimensions. It's the aesthetic of possibilities, of labyrinths, of riddles—we [Africans] love riddles—of paradoxes. I think we miss this element when we try to fix it too much within national or tribal boundaries" (qtd. in Wilkinson 87-88). The significance of an *abiku* narrator, in terms of this aesthetic, is that it moves African literature closer to the postmodern movement.

In a recent interview with Alastair Niven, Chinua Achebe turned his attention to the new generation of Nigerian writers, among whom could be numbered Festus Iyayi, Adewale Maja-Pearce, Niyi Osundare, and Bode Sowande. He mentioned that he particularly admired Ben Okri, and said this, Niven relates, as if consciously passing the torch to the younger man (Niven 277). When Ben Okri was later asked

how he relates to the older generation of Nigerian writers, however, he responded, "I accept them" (qtd. in Wilkinson 82). His lukewarm acknowledgment of his forebears suggests that his agenda for fiction is not what he imagines theirs to have been.

In this respect, *The Famished Road* offers support to Alastair Niven's analysis of a difference between the writers of Okri's generation and those in whose footsteps they follow: "Always in Achebe, Ngugi, Armah, Soyinka and Ousmane there is the judgement that the future development of Africa must lie in political action, whether that comes from better leadership, as Achebe would hope, or from the force of popular action, as advocated by Ngugi and Ousmane. Okri does not have that faith in a political possibility. He turns the problems of Africa into self-examination" (281). Stories such as "Laughter Beneath the Bridge" and *Songs of Enchantment* are implicit condemnations of tribal battles within Nigeria, but, in words that practically cry out for misinterpretation by the more politically-minded, Okri has stated that "...there's been too much attribution of power to the effect of colonialism on our consciousness. ...[A] true invasion takes place not when a society has been taken over by another society in terms of its infrastructure, but in terms of its mind and its dreams and its myths, and its perception of reality.... There are certain areas of the African consciousness which will remain inviolate" (qtd. in Wilkinson 86). This consciousness is less personal than it is "African."

While Niven's analysis is basically correct, therefore, his description of Okri's stories as "self-examination" may be focused too narrowly on the individual. In *The Famished Road* and *Songs of Enchantment*, Okri is not intent upon replacing one ruling system by another, but neither is he writing traditionally realistic novels that thoroughly investigate Azaro's psyche. He wishes instead to recognize and celebrate a distinctive way of encountering and describing reality: he has an aesthetic, rather than overtly political or psychological, aim. In comparing Mongo Beti to Wole Soyinka, Abiola Irele suggests that the former emphasizes "the critical documentation of the objective operations and effects of the political system he examines," and the latter "inclines more toward a general meditation upon the inward significance of the relations of power and the tensions of history, [and] upon their repercussions on the individual as well as the collective sensibility" (77). Okri, I would suggest, moves beyond Soyinka's examination of characters. He says of *The Famished Road* that "this book is my modest effort to...alter the way in which we perceive what is valid and what is valuable" (qtd. in Wilkinson 87): he wishes to grind a lens and teach us its use.

If Soyinka can be taken as a mediator between the overtly political and the more self-consciously aesthetic, it is interesting to note his own use of the trope of the *abiku*. In his Herbert Read Memorial Lecture, delivered at the Institute for Contemporary Art in London in 1985, he notes that it is tempting to use the *abiku* as a metaphor for the phenomenon of creativity. Suggesting the controversy over the role of politics in art and its proliferation, though, he goes on to ask: "would it be an optimistic metaphor or an expression of doom.... Will the creative hand earth *Abiku* once for all, or has the world been handed over to Dr. Strangelove—Third World or Netherworld, no difference? The problem is whether one sees, on the cover of an *Ake*, an idyllic image of recaptured childhood, or a figure fleeing in terror from an uncomprehended disaster" (196). The true artist, Soyinka seems to suggest, leaves the question hanging in the air, seeking to wed outrage to hope. Whether or not Okri

explicitly acknowledges it, his own artistry embodies such ambivalence and suggests his generation's sophisticated blend of artistic experimentation and political savvy.

The debate over the possible points of intersection between postmodernism and post-colonialism is by no means settled, and the case of Ben Okri raises interesting questions in this regard. Stephen Slemon notes that postmodernism is variously defined by Fredric Jameson as "the pastiche energetics of Western society under late capitalism, where a 'new depthlessness' in representation—one grounded in the fetishization of the image as simulacrum—marks off a profoundly ahistorical drive which seeks to efface the past as 'referent' and leave behind itself nothing but 'texts'" (Slemon 4-5), and by Ihab Hassan and others as "a catalogue of figurative propensities (indeterminacy, multivalence, hybridization, etc.) whose ludic celebrations of representational freedom...are grounded in a 'dubious analogy' between artistic experimentation and social liberation" (Slemon 5). Linda Hutcheon strategically argues that postmodernism displays a "contradictory dependence on and independence from that which temporally preceded it and which literally made it possible" (*Poetics* 18). In Hutcheon's view, it seems, postmodernism is a victim of colonization by history, an anxiety of influence writ large.

But if postmodernism "necessarily admits a provisionality to its truth claims" (Slemon 5), Slemon and others argue that "an *interested* post-colonial critical practice would want to allow for the positive production of oppositional truth-claims" (9). There is in much post-colonial fiction, in Slemon's view, a great deal that is postmodern: it may be "fundamentally fragmented and hybridized; it engages overtly in a decentring and decanonizing labour; it is enormously self-reflexive and ironic; it draws obviously and excessively on the devices of 'fiction' to demystify imperialist versions of 'history'; it 'uses and abuses' the received codes of popular culture in order to effect a serious intervention in the Production and circulation of majority opinion" (Slemon 10)—and much of this can be seen in Okri's works. But post-colonial fiction also "retains a recuperative impulse towards the structure of 'history' and manifests a Utopian desire grounded in reference" (Slemon 10). As Linda Hutcheon elsewhere argues, "the post-colonial, like the feminist, is a dismantling but also constructive political enterprise insofar as it implies a theory of agency and social change that the postmodern deconstructive impulse lacks" ("Circling" 171). In Benita Parry's words, this involves a recuperation, a remembering and relearning of "the role of the native as historical subject and combatant, possessor of an-other [sic] knowledge and producer of alternative traditions" (34). And Parry's words are true of Okri.

But Hutcheon's description of "a theory of agency and social change" are vaguely present, at best, in Okri. Before the publication of *The Famished Road*, critics turned their attention principally towards *The Landscapes Within*, his 1981 *Kunstlerroman* that has been compared to Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (see Porter, Mamudu). In discussing the book, these critics grapple with Omovo's frequent withdrawal from the problems of the world around him, his apparent attempt to find or create a quiet zone for the creation of something beautiful. A bit defensively, these critics insist that Okri's protagonist shows more gumption than his counterpart in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1969), despite Omovo's obvious desire for protection. Thus, Abioseh Porter writes that, "unlike Armah's anonymous protagonist, who merely drifts aimlessly and helplessly in a sea of corruption...Omovo...become[s] capable of making

down-to-earth assessments of events around him and able to act accordingly" (204). The "action" to which he refers, however, is principally the creation of art—art that is honest and, therefore, a politically dangerous response to the chaos from which he has temporarily withdrawn, but hardly the sort of action that will topple a government. But Omovo does learn what Dr. Okocha tells him, that "[i]t's always a duty to try and manifest whatever good visions we have.... In dreams begin responsibilities" (*LW* 119). Eleven years later, Azaro learns the same lesson in *Songs of Enchantment*.

Ayo Mamudu describes the artist Omovo's "suspended animation" as escapist, but "only in the sense that, in the flights of fancy, detachment, and retreats into self, Omovo seeks relief for his perfervid consciousness" (88). All the ugliness that oppresses him, becomes grist for his artistic mill. For Omovo, in Mamudu's words, "passionate involvement and detachment are paradoxically linked, in leading to moments of heightened consciousness" (88). It is interesting that both of these critics show a need to demonstrate a political consciousness in Okri's character, implicitly asserting the author's lineage as a like-minded descendant of the established generation of Nigerian novelists. But he is not, in fact, all that like-minded.

In the "compromise" reached between Stephen Dedalus and his alter-pater Leopold Bloom, the modernist James Joyce moves away from the cool aesthetic he had earlier advanced in *Portrait*. By contrast, in his own most recent work Okri specifically endorses the aesthetic he earlier espoused through Omovo: "When I think of Omovo," he writes,

it's not just as the young artist: he's what the artist in his progression through time, through age, through experience would end up as. So that's what you are when you're young, but that's what you *should* be, on a higher level, as you get older: seeing experience *pure*, seeing without pre-conceptions.... He's an ideal filter, a prism: in that sense he's an ideal artist. He's a complete contrast from the artists who have ideas, distort the world in terms of their ideas, and then reflect an idea-distorted universe. So it's not the world they're really writing about but something produced from a refusal to see. (qtd. in Wilkinson 81)

If, as another critic has written, "the outstanding attribute of the modern African writer...is his immediate engagement with history" (Irele 69), one is at a loss to shoehorn Okri into such a scheme. The political struggles of *The Famished Road* and *Songs of Enchantment* are fairly timeless. "We have to change our perception of how we speak of people's accomplishments," he recently argued. "Pyramids is one way, but there are pyramids of the spirit" (qtd. in Wilkinson 86). Or, as the *abiku*'s father puts it, sounding a bit like Jung, "the whole of human history is an undiscovered continent deep in our souls" (*Fam* 498). This may support Niven's contention that Okri is interested in self-examination, but Azaro's father is speaking of a collective consciousness.

We should also note Mamudu's second observation: the "swings" between two extremes. This dynamic becomes the central structural device in *The Famished Road*, and suggests Okri's characteristic turn away from overt politics and towards what might be described as the politics of the interior. He has elsewhere significantly described narrative itself as "tension, opposites, anything that pushes forward" (qtd. in Wilkinson 79). If this suggests that Okri's principal demand for his literature is that it move forward *within* its self-contained fictive world, it is nonetheless true that *The Landscapes Within*, while acknowledging the trope of the

artist's escape to a romantic retreat, proposes a theory of art that is confrontational, not lovely (he calls his art "scumscapes"). The confrontation is *first* with the self. Omovo says "I need to face myself before I can face the terrors of this world" (LW 164). He can "speak" only "when the landscapes without synchronised with those landscapes within" (LW 206). Then the confrontation becomes social. As Okri puts it, "The moment you see it, you have to say it. That's where responsibility begins" (qtd. in Wilkinson 78).

Whether the "political" activity is interior or exterior, it is clear that Azaro is not realistic in any sense that a nineteenth-century author would recognize. He is more accurately described as a late-twentieth-century doorkeeper between two imagined worlds: that of the spirits and that of the mortal. The "self," in the traditional Western sense, is therefore not as rigidly defined, nor as amenable to examination. For the *abiku*, one's *personal* vision is a shared possession of the community, and one's *idea* of self is a direct result of the interchange.

We do well to make a distinction between Omovo, the youthful artist, and Azaro, a non-Western creation imbedded in his community. Both *The Famished Road* and *Songs of Enchantment* embody several aspects of Omovo's aesthetic, but they do so ironically. He asserts, first, that "the artist needs to see the one thing, the one experience, in relation to all things timelessly" (Mamudu 89), and Azaro seems to have little choice but to follow this norm. Omovo further asserts that "the [artist's] heightened state of consciousness...represents an intellectual effort at ordering the universe" (89). But this blessed rage for order takes on a markedly postmodern symmetry in Azaro's universe, one that pays comparatively little attention to space and floats in a transcultural synchronicity. Omovo says, "...[T]he sky has no meaning. The meaning is hidden inside me as are many other mad things" (LW 164). But Azaro's experience is different: he finds meaning flooding into the world through its *objects* in such a mad tumult that he reels between the animate and the inanimate. "'Everything is alive,'" his father tells him (*Song* 222). In Azaro's life it is the *plenitude* of these hidden meanings, rather than their vacuity, that comes to the fore. He cannot order them, but they are not "his" meanings to order, and it is largely irrelevant to describe his efforts as "intellectual." "How should I use my eyes?" Azaro asks his father in *Songs of Enchantment*, and he is answered: "By not using your head first" (261). The resulting narrative reveals history as partial even as it suspends all hermeneutics. Closure cannot be brought about, simply because, as Azaro's mother teaches him, "All things are linked" (*Songs* 270).

But is this postmodern? Like Slemon, Helen Tiffin agrees that there are many elements of post-colonial writing that have postmodern characteristics—"...the move away from realist representation, the refusal of closure, the exposure of the politics of metaphor, the interrogation of forms, the rehabilitation of allegory and the attack on binary structuration of concept and language" (172)—but she argues that "they are energised by different theoretical assumptions and by vastly different political motivations" (172). Therefore, "the postmodern label should...be resisted" (171). Acknowledging these distinctions, I believe it is nonetheless helpfully descriptive to apply the label "postcolonial postmodernity" to writers who do two things: first, they "resist the European master narrative of history because they can essentially oppose its incursions with alternative ontological systems... [especially] within the societies whose own opposing or differing epistemes are still recuperable" (as Tiffin says Chinua Achebe and Raja Rao do [176]); and, secondly,

they are markedly experimental in their narration, carrying into their fiction many of the postmodern stylistic characteristics described above.

This, I think, is what Okri is doing with the concept of the *abiku*. It portrays an ontological system quite foreign to the colonizer's, at the same time that it does not display a "recuperative impulse towards the structure of 'history'" (Slemon 10). Okri's discussion of "The African Way" (*Song* 158-61) suggests what he *does* feel to be recuperable, but it is hardly systematic: "The Way that develops and keeps its secrets of transformations. Thriving in a universe of enigmas, our accomplishments denied by the dominant history of the short-sighted conquerors of the times" (160).

As with Western postmodernists, this resistance to the fixing of boundaries is one of the strongest characteristics to emerge from Okri's discussion of his own work. His choice of a liminal figure like the *abiku* to serve as his spokesman, straddling both worlds and drawing power from both, summarizes his determination to imagine something new. If his choice of a child-witness places him firmly in the tradition of the novel of the sixties and the seventies, the unself-conscious movement back and forth between the world of the spirits and that of everyday life in *The Famished Road* places him alongside such protean extravaganzas as the Trinidadian Robert Antoni's *Divina Trace* (1992). Like the unique child-narrator of that recent novel, the *abiku* sets himself, Okri says, "against the perception of the world as being coherent and therefore readable as a text. The world isn't really a text, contrary to what people like Borges say. It's more than a text. It's more akin to music.... Texts without words. That's why I probably lean more towards dreams" (qtd. in Wilkinson 85). Strictly sequential narration is not a value, so when Azaro's mother complains to her husband, "Your story isn't going anywhere," she receives the reply, "A story is not a car.... It is a road, and before that it was a river, a river that never ends" (*Song* 266). Narration is "akin to moments in tidal waves" (Okri qtd. in Wilkinson 83).

Not tidal waves as such, but moments *within* them: a forceful moving ahead of the mass, but experienced from within as a series of relationships and countervailences. "The novel moves towards infinity, basically. You're dealing with a consciousness... which is already aware of other lives behind and in front and also of people actually living their futures in the present" (Okri qtd. in Wilkinson 83). A confusing world, therefore, but "so many things that will seem puzzling in the book are actually in the possibility of a life lived simultaneously at different levels of consciousness and in different territories" (83). We are dealing with a type of realism here, or at least verisimilitude, but the world that shapes his character's consciousness is shaped by a non-Western mythology, an animistic appreciation of a surging and constantly transmogrifying reality. In Okri, the Western dilemma of the dissolution of the subject is celebrated. "Isn't it just possible," he asks, "that we are all *abikus*?... [Since] there are no divisions really in life, just a constant flow, forming and reforming..." (qtd. in Wilkinson 84). This is much the conclusion drawn by the *abiku*'s father, who, sounding a bit like Mikhail Bakhtin, tells his son that "many people reside in us... many past lives, many future lives" (*Fam* 499). The masks employed in his novel—those of the *egungun* and *gelede* (Maclean 58), those of the political parties, those even of sequential time—are recognized as masks by the *abiku*. It is the forces of negativity that say otherwise, and that seek stasis: Madame Koto, the blind old man, the thugs, and even the spirits, attempt to hold him in their world (Wilkinson 84).

The Famished Road's opening, with its play upon the logocentric metaphor of John's Gospel, says as much: "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" (*Fam* 3). But the *abiku*'s father tells him, "[M]y son, our hunger can change the world, make it better, sweeter" (*Fam* 498). The hunger of the road, somewhat incomprehensible but nonetheless threatening to a Western mind, is "our" hunger to Azaro—a part of us, as "we" are a part of it.

This is rather disturbing imagery, but Okri has "come to realize you can't write about Nigeria truthfully without a sense of violence" (qtd. in Wilkinson 81). We have seen him assert that there are essential elements of the African consciousness, the "mythic frame" that "shapes the way we affect the world and the way the world affects us. It's these invisible things that shape the visible things.... The unbreakable things in us" (qtd. in Wilkinson 88). They are here embodied in the frangible: the garish representations of life-and-death battles, drenched in the blood of riots, boxing matches, and sacrificed chickens, a world of intoxication and gleaming machetes.

Little wonder, then, that the *abiku* recognizes that "being born was a shock from which [he] never recovered" (*Fam* 7). Okri accepts the fact that "suffering is one of the great characters of the book, the different ways people suffer." His rationale for its pervasive presence is important to our theme: "It defines the boundaries of self but also breaks down the boundaries of individual identifications.... Any one of [the] children telling their stories would be telling a story just like this one, but with its own particularity. There are hundreds of variations, but there is just one god there, and that god is suffering, pain. But that's not the supreme deity. The higher deity is joy" (qtd. in Wilkinson 85). This seems a bit Manichean, but is another instance of the wave-like consciousness of the book.

If you listen carefully," Azaro's father tells him, "the air is full of laughter" (*Fam* 499), and the *abiku* achieves a sense of joy, and even peace. At novel's end, the air has cleared, the spirits seem in abeyance. The next day begins, and, it is true, he recognizes that "the good breeze" will not last forever—but he is no longer afraid of Time (*Fam* 500): he has learned to swim in it. His consciousness remains focused and courageous, and comfortable in its state of flux. This stands him in good stead in *Songs of Enchantment*, when the usual strains of adolescence are complicated by the estrangement of his parents, the death of his best friend, and the collapse of the political system.

Yet if, as the Greek philosopher noted long ago, all things are flowing, it is little wonder that many on this "road of...vulnerability" (178) are not as resilient as the *abiku*. Okri is obviously aware of this fact, and it is significant that the struggling artist who figured in an early novel like *The Landscapes Within* has been replaced in *The Famished Road* by the figure of a photographer. Like that photojournalist, whose eye fixes reality in the civic memory (who, in effect, does a "freeze-frame" in life's ongoing film), Okri says that one of the things he himself wanted to do was "just to make *visible* one of the stories of the river, that's all. Just one...." (qtd. in Wilkinson 88; emphasis added). It is, admittedly, more static than the flowing aural account from a *griot*, but an *abiku* spokesperson is as close as a writer can get to the semblance of images passing away and coming into view.

Critics like Niven lament that "Okri and his generation will be more introspective, more personal, less historically ambitious, less radical, than Achebe and his peers" (282). Okri, in turn, is concerned that the relative "quietude" at novel's end

might be mistaken for an easy optimism. The *abiku*'s father advises his son that "God is hungry for us to grow.... We are freer than we think.... The man whose light has come on in his head, in his dormant sun, can never be kept down or defeated" (*Fam* 498). If his words strike other African novelists as naively optimistic, Okri wishes to demonstrate that he knows what he is doing. "One should be very, very serious when one is going to talk about hope," he writes. "One has to know about the very hard facts of the world and one has to know how deadly and powerful they are before one can begin to think or dream oneself into positions out of which hope and then possibilities can come. It's one of the steps I try to take in this book" (qtd. in Wilkinson 88).

In the sequel, the optimistic father of *The Famished Road* becomes blind and spends his days shoveling manure. But his life-affirming philosophy becomes, if anything, stronger. In the earlier book, the *abiku* concluded that "a dream can be the highest point of a life" (*Fam* 500). Here in the increasing poverty of his earthly family's life, he puts it differently: "Maybe one day we will see that beyond our chaos there could always be a new sunlight, and serenity" (*Song* 297). If this "manifests a Utopian desire grounded in reference" that is typical of post-colonial writing (Slemon 10), the *abiku*, in his tenuous earthly presence, first chooses the chaos.

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