

WALKING BETWEEN WORLDS: MAGICAL REALISM AS POSTCOLONIAL RESISTANCE IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN FICTION

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ABSTRACT

This article examines hybridity and magical realism in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* from postmodernist and postcolonial perspectives. Developed from a thesis-based qualitative study, the article focuses on how the two Nigerian novels use extraordinary modes of narration to represent liminal identity, cultural negotiation, postcolonial resistance and African futurity. The theoretical framework is primarily based on Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity, liminality and the Third Space, Stephen Slemon's idea of magical realism as postcolonial discourse, and selected concepts from Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism. The article uses close textual analysis and comparative interpretation. Its central claim is that hybridity is not merely a theme in the two novels; it structures character, space, time, language, community and narrative form. In *The Famished Road*, Azaro's abiku identity, the hungry road, family poverty and corrupt political parties create a magical-realist world in which the visible and invisible coexist. In *Lagoon*, Ayodele's alien identity, the living ocean, Bar Beach, Lagos media culture and ecological transformation extend hybridity toward Afrofuturist and interspecies futurity. The textual evidence shows that Okri transforms Yoruba cosmology into a discourse of postcolonial survival, while Okorafor transforms alien contact into a discourse of ecological and planetary change. The article concludes that both novels challenge Eurocentric binaries of real/unreal, human/non-human, rational/irrational and past/future by affirming African epistemologies as active sources of literary renewal.

Keywords: Hybridity, Magical Realism, Postmodernism, Post colonialism, Afrofuturism, Third Space

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Nigerian fiction has repeatedly returned to the question of how a society shaped by colonial history, indigenous memory, political instability and global modernity can narrate itself without reducing its experience to one stable category. Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* are important in this regard because both novels refuse narrow realism. They present Nigerian reality as layered, unstable and open to several worlds at the same time. Okri's

novel places poverty, family life, political manipulation, spirits, dreams and Yoruba cosmology within one narrative field. Okorafor's novel imagines Lagos as a city transformed by alien arrival, the ocean, technology, media panic, environmental consciousness and interspecies negotiation. Both texts therefore create a literary world where identity is produced through crossing, mixture and negotiation.

The title of the original thesis, Exploring Hybridity and Magical Realism in Okri's *The Famished Road* and Okorafor's *Lagoon*: A

Postmodernist Study, is retained here in a lightly paraphrased form as a postmodernist reading. This article keeps the same conceptual direction but reshapes the thesis material into a journal article. The focus is not simply to describe magical events or futuristic incidents. Rather, the article examines how magical realism and speculative imagination operate as analytical tools for producing hybridity. The Famished Road uses the abiku child Azaro to dramatize an identity divided between the human world and the spirit world. Lagoon uses Ayodele and the alien encounter to dramatize an identity divided between human, non-human, oceanic, technological and planetary forms of life.

1.2 Rationale of the Study

The comparative value of the two novels lies in their difference as well as their similarity. Okri's text belongs mainly to magical realism, although it is also postmodern in its circular form and rejection of closure. Okorafor's text belongs more clearly to Afrofuturism and science fiction, although it preserves mythic, spiritual and ecological forms of knowledge. When the two novels are read together, they show a movement in Nigerian literary imagination from spiritual hybridity to future-oriented hybridity. The Famished Road recovers suppressed African cosmology in order to critique postcolonial suffering. Lagoon projects African urban life into a speculative future in order to imagine ecological transformation and planetary contact. The two texts are therefore not separate examples of unrelated genres; they are connected points in a larger history of African narrative experimentation.

The rationale for selecting these two novels lies in their shared concern with cultural crossing and their different narrative directions. Okri returns to Yoruba cosmology, the abiku tradition and the politics of postcolonial poverty, while Okorafor extends African narrative imagination into alien contact, ecological transformation and Lagos futurity. The pairing therefore allows the article to examine how Nigerian fiction moves from magical-realist survival toward Afrofuturist

reconstruction without abandoning African epistemologies.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this article is how Nigerian fiction represents postcolonial identity through hybrid narrative forms that combine myth, spirituality, modernity, political struggle and futurity. The Famished Road and Lagoon both disturb fixed distinctions between real and unreal, human and non-human, local and global, past and future. However, the specific movement from Okri's magical-realist world to Okorafor's Afrofuturist city requires focused analysis. The central issue is therefore to examine how hybridity operates not only as a theme but also as a structural principle of character, space, language and narrative form.

This article argues that hybridity in the two novels appears at several levels. It appears in character, as Azaro and Ayodele are both liminal figures. It appears in space, as the road, the market, Madame Koto's bar, Bar Beach, the ocean and Lagos become threshold zones. It appears in language and form, as both writers rework the English novel through African rhythms, oral storytelling, multiple voices and postmodern fragmentation. It appears in community, as both novels imagine groups that are damaged, changing and yet capable of new relational possibilities. The article also gives special attention to textual evidence from the thesis analysis. Instead of leaving the discussion general, the analysis below places paraphrased textual lines and short key phrases beside close interpretation so that every major claim is grounded in the selected novels.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze how Azaro's abiku identity reflects liminality and postcolonial hybridity in The Famished Road.
2. To examine how magical realism functions as a discourse of postcolonial resistance against Western binaries of real/unreal and rational/irrational.

3. To explore how poverty, politics, spirituality and survival are represented through Azaro's lived experience.
4. To investigate how Lagoon expands hybridity through Afrofuturism, ecological consciousness, alien contact and postmodern narrative strategies.

1.5 Research Questions

1. How does Azaro's dual identity as spirit-child and human symbolize liminality and hybridity in postcolonial Nigeria?
2. In what ways does magical realism function as a form of postcolonial resistance in *The Famished Road*?
3. How do Azaro's experiences of poverty, politics and spirituality mirror the wider struggles of postcolonial Nigerian society?
4. In what ways does Lagoon transform the postcolonial concerns of magical realism into Afrofuturist and postmodern visions of African futurity?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this article is based on the intersection of postcolonial hybridity, magical realism and Afrofuturist speculation. A single theory is not enough for the selected novels because *The Famished Road* and *Lagoon* work through different but connected narrative systems. Okri's novel is built on abiku cosmology, dreamlike narration, poverty, political conflict and spiritual vision. Okorafor's novel is built on alien contact, Lagos urban life, environmental crisis, media circulation and future-oriented transformation. The combined theoretical framework allows the analysis to explain both continuity and change.

2.1.1 Postcolonial Hybridity and the Third Space

Bhabha's theory of hybridity is central to the study because it rejects fixed cultural identity. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha argues that postcolonial identity is formed through translation (Ramzan & Khan, 2024, 2019), ambivalence and negotiation rather than

through pure origin (Ahmad et al., 2022; Amjad et al., 2021; Bhabha, 1994a). His idea of the Third Space is particularly useful here. The Third Space is an in-between location where meanings are repeated, disturbed and remade. In *The Famished Road*, Azaro functions as such a Third Space because his body and vision connect life and death, spirit and matter, memory and modernity. In *Lagoon*, Ayodele and the transformed city of Lagos also function as Third Spaces because they bring together alien life, human fear, oceanic agency, technology, religion and politics.

Bhabha's framework is useful for this article because both novels are built around in-between figures and in-between spaces. Azaro's abiku body becomes a threshold between the visible and invisible, while Ayodele's alien presence turns Lagos into a space of negotiation among humans, non-humans, technologies and ecological forces. In both cases, identity is not fixed in origin; it is repeatedly produced through contact and transformation.

2.1.2 Magical Realism as Postcolonial Discourse

Slemon's idea of magical realism as postcolonial discourse provides the second major lens. Slemon argues that magical realism is not a simple mixture of fantasy and realism. It is a field of tension where different systems of knowledge struggle for authority (Slemon, 1995). This is especially important in postcolonial literature because colonial realism often privileges Western rationalism and dismisses indigenous cosmologies as irrational. Magical realism challenges that hierarchy by allowing spiritual, ancestral and local ways of knowing to share the same narrative authority as material reality. Cooper (1998, 2012), Warnes (2009), Faris (2004) and Ngom (2020) similarly show that magical realism in African and postcolonial contexts is not escapist. It is a way of restoring cultural memory, interpreting trauma and resisting the colonial narrowing of reality.

In Okri's novel, magical realism creates a world where the spirit world is not outside everyday life. Hunger, family struggle, markets and

political parties exist beside spirits, omens, visions and mythic roads. This structure supports Slemon's argument because the novel does not resolve the conflict between rational and spiritual knowledge. Instead, it holds both together. The supernatural therefore becomes a mode of postcolonial truth, not a departure from truth. Azaro's abiku identity forces the reader to accept that Nigerian reality cannot be interpreted only through Western realism.

2.1.3 Afrofuturism, African futurism and Postmodernism

Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism provide a third lens, especially for Lagoon. Dery (1994), Eshun (2003), Nelson (2002) and Womack (2013) describe Afrofuturism as a cultural and speculative practice through which Black communities reclaim the future. Later Africanfuturist criticism emphasizes that African futures must be imagined from African places, histories, ecologies and cosmologies rather than from Western technological fantasies alone (Ogunsiji, 2024; Yusuf, 2024). Lagoon is important because it makes Lagos, not a Western capital, the site of first contact and planetary change. The novel imagines technology and alien life, but it does so through oceanic ecology, Nigerian social realities and African mythic sensibility.

Postmodernism connects these frameworks because both novels question stable boundaries, single truths and linear time. The Famished Road uses circular movement, repetition, dream logic and open-endedness. Lagoon uses multiple voices, rapid transitions, non-human perspectives, media fragments and urban multiplicity. These techniques are postmodern because they disturb the idea of one authoritative narrative. However, in both novels, postmodernism is not merely aesthetic play. It serves a decolonial purpose: it opens space for African epistemologies, plural realities and alternative futures.

2.2 Relevant Researches

Existing scholarship on West African magical realism repeatedly emphasizes that the form is

not ornamental fantasy but an alternative mode of knowledge. Cooper (1998, 2012) reads magical realism in West African fiction as a way of seeing with a "third eye," where spiritual perception and material history coexist. This view is directly relevant to *The Famished Road* because Okri's narrative does not separate poverty, politics and family life from spirits, dreams and ancestral memory.

Critical work on Ben Okri also connects magical realism with postcolonial identity, social crisis and spiritual survival. Warnes (2009) discusses the African worldview in Okri's fiction, while Mathuray (2009, 2015) links *The Famished Road* with sacred realism, subalternity and African modernism. These studies support the present article's claim that Azaro's vision is not escapist; it is a symbolic and political way of representing a society caught between colonial after-effects and indigenous cosmological memory.

Studies on magical realism as postcolonial aesthetics, including Faris (2004), Ngom (2020), Hussein and Barhoun (2020), and Kochupurackal (2021), show that the magical mode can challenge rationalist literary expectations and reopen the meaning of reality. Such criticism helps explain why Okri's hungry road, spirit-child motif and cyclic narrative form operate as postcolonial resistance rather than simple fantasy.

Research on Lagoon usually places Okorafor's novel within Afrofuturism, Africanfuturism and ecological speculation. Leader-Picone (2023), Ogunsiji (2024), Palermo (2025), Banks, Kayat and Rossmann (2023), and Yusuf (2024) read the novel through questions of alien contact, environmental change, technology, Lagos urban culture and posthuman identity. These studies are important because they show that Okorafor's futurism is not detached from African reality; it is rooted in oceanic ecology, Nigerian social life and African-centered imagination.

Comparative studies of magical realism and Afrofuturism suggest that both modes work against restrictive Western ideas of time, reality and progress. Magical realism recovers suppressed memories and spiritual

epistemologies, while Afrofuturism projects African presence into futures from which it has often been excluded. The present article extends this discussion by reading *The Famished Road* and *Lagoon* together as a movement from spiritual hybridity to ecological and interspecies futurity.

3. Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data have been collected from the two primary texts, Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon*. The selected data include character descriptions, symbolic phrases, narrative situations, spatial images and thematic patterns related to hybridity, magical realism, liminality, postmodern fragmentation, ecological transformation and Afrofuturist imagination.

The data have been analyzed through close textual reading and comparative interpretation. Each selected textual moment has been examined in relation to Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and the Third Space, Stephen Slemon's theory of magical realism as postcolonial discourse, and selected ideas from Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism. The analysis connects textual evidence with character, space, language, form and postcolonial meaning.

3.1 Delimitation of the Study

This article is delimited to Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon*. It focuses on hybridity, magical realism, postmodernism and Afrofuturist/Africanfuturist transformation in the two selected novels. It does not examine all works by Okri or Okorafor, nor does it include interviews, surveys, reader-response data or broader historical documentation. The interpretation remains limited to close textual analysis of selected lines, symbols, characters, spaces and narrative patterns that directly support the objectives of the study.

4. Analysis and Discussion

The analysis is organized around the same logic as the thesis: objective-based interpretation, character-based comparison, textual evidence, space, language, form and theoretical discussion.

The purpose is to show not only that the two novels contain hybridity, but also how they create hybridity through narrative technique and textual detail.

4.1 Azaro's Liminal Identity and Postcolonial Hybridity

The first major analytical point concerns Azaro's identity as an abiku child. In *The Famished Road*, Azaro is not simply a child with supernatural qualities. He is a living threshold between the human world and the spirit world. The thesis analysis uses the textual moment in which Azaro is introduced as a child who resists birth and is destined to struggle with death (Okri, 1993, p. 5). Paraphrased, the line presents Azaro as a being caught between arrival and departure, body and spirit, life and death. This is the first sign of his liminality.

This textual line is important because it makes Azaro's identity unstable from the beginning. He does not enter the human world as a fully secure subject. His birth is already a conflict, and his life is already marked by a pull toward another realm. Through Bhabha's concept of the Third Space, Azaro can be read as an in-between figure whose identity is produced by negotiation rather than by purity. He belongs to his poor Nigerian family, but he also belongs to the spirit companions who call him back. He is emotionally attached to the human world, yet metaphysically connected to the world of the dead. His existence therefore challenges binary thinking.

The thesis also highlights another textual moment in which the abiku condition is described as a dreadful state of liminality:

"always in-between" (Okri, 1993, p. 3)

This short phrase captures the whole logic of liminality. Azaro's in-betweenness is not only personal. It represents postcolonial Nigeria itself, a nation caught between indigenous cosmology and colonial modernity, spiritual memory and material poverty, hope and political disappointment. Azaro's body becomes a symbolic map of a society that cannot return to a pure precolonial past and cannot fully accept the violent terms of colonial modernity.

The textual evidence also shows that Azaro's liminality is not a weakness. Although he is vulnerable, hungry and often afraid, he sees what others cannot see. His perception brings together the visible and the invisible. He notices poverty, labour, party politics and family exhaustion, but he also notices spirits, omens and hidden forces. Through him, Okri refuses to divide African reality into rational and irrational parts. Azaro becomes a hybrid consciousness through which the novel presents Nigerian life as plural and layered. In this sense, hybridity is not merely a cultural mixture; it is a mode of survival.

4.2 Magical Realism as Postcolonial Resistance

The second major analytical point concerns magical realism as a form of postcolonial resistance. The *Famished Road* does not use magic to escape reality. Instead, it uses magical realism to reveal the depth of reality. The novel begins with a mythic sense of origin. The thesis analysis identifies lines in which a river becomes a road and the road becomes a symbol of movement, hunger and postcolonial uncertainty. Paraphrased, the text suggests that the world begins in flow and transformation before becoming the road of history. This symbolic beginning is not ordinary realism. It places the reader inside a world where nature, myth, history and human struggle are connected.

The following textual line is one of the clearest signs of magical realism in the novel:

"Our road was hungry" (Okri, 1993, p. 7)

The road is personified; it is given appetite and agency. On the surface, this is a magical image. Analytically, however, the hungry road represents poverty, unfinished nationhood and the endless struggle of ordinary people in postcolonial Nigeria. The road is not just a route. It is the condition of the country. It consumes energy, hope and labour. Through this image, Okri joins social reality with supernatural symbolism. This is exactly the kind of postcolonial magical realism described by Slemon: two systems of meaning remain active at the same time.

The road also creates hybridity because it is both material and metaphysical. It is a place where people walk, traders move, politicians appear and families struggle. At the same time, it is connected with spirits, dreams, return and mythic movement. The road therefore becomes a Third Space. It does not belong entirely to geography, nor entirely to cosmology. It brings both together and forces the reader to understand postcolonial reality as a layered field. Magical realism is also resistant because it challenges Western realism as the only form of truth. If the novel had used only social realism, it could have described poverty and corruption, but it could not have fully represented the spiritual and cultural depth through which the community understands suffering. By allowing spirits and symbolic landscapes to exist beside hunger and political violence, Okri restores legitimacy to African cosmology. The magical in the novel is not irrational excess. It is a decolonial method of seeing.

Lagoon performs a related but different operation. It is more openly Afrofuturist than magical realist, yet it also normalizes the extraordinary. The arrival of aliens in Lagos is not narrated as a distant Western spectacle. It becomes part of the social life of the city, the beach, the ocean, the media, religious voices and political anxiety. This textual line summarizes the novel's speculative logic:

"Everything is changing" (Okorafor, 2014, p. 15)

Change is not an external event; it becomes the condition of the city. In this way, Lagoon continues the postcolonial function of magical realism by expanding reality beyond Western rational limits, but it shifts that expansion toward futurity, ecology and alien contact.

4.3 Poverty, Politics, Spirituality and Survival in The Famished Road

The third objective of the thesis concerns Azaro's lived experience of poverty, politics, spirituality and survival. The *Famished Road* is not only a spiritual novel. It is also deeply concerned with material deprivation. The thesis identifies textual moments in which Azaro's family reduces its food and in which Azaro

directly experiences hunger. Paraphrased, these lines show that the abiku child is not detached from the body. He may see spirits, but he also feels hunger, fear and exhaustion. This combination is central to Okri's magical realism because it prevents the spiritual from becoming escapist.

The line in which the family cuts down its food (Okri, 1993, p. 8) is especially important because it shows poverty inside the home. Hunger is not abstract. It is measured through reduced meals, family anxiety and the pressure of survival. Azaro's liminality therefore exists within material hardship. His spiritual struggle is inseparable from economic suffering. Through this combination, Okri represents postcolonial Nigeria as a society where the visible crisis of poverty and the invisible crisis of spiritual dislocation occur together.

The father's exhaustion is another important part of this analysis. The thesis refers to lines in which exhaustion seems to infect the whole room and humiliation appears on the father's face. Paraphrased, these moments show that poverty is not only physical. It enters the emotional atmosphere of the home and damages dignity. The father is not merely tired; he is humiliated by a social order that denies justice to ordinary people. His struggle reveals the psychological consequences of postcolonial poverty.

Political corruption is represented through the following sharp textual phrase:

"party of thieves" (Okri, 1993, p. 8)

This short phrase exposes the people's anger toward postcolonial politics. Political parties are supposed to offer representation, but in the novel they become symbols of manipulation, greed and violence. The poor are remembered when their votes are needed, but they remain abandoned in everyday life. This political context deepens Azaro's symbolic function. His fragmented vision mirrors a fragmented nation. His world is haunted not only by spirits but also by corrupt institutions.

Spirituality, however, keeps the novel from becoming a simple account of despair. Azaro's ability to see several worlds means that suffering

is never reduced to one explanation. Hunger is economic, but it is also symbolic. Politics is institutional, but it is also moral and spiritual. Survival is bodily, but it is also communal and metaphysical. The Famished Road therefore presents postcolonial survival as a struggle of body, family, community and spirit. This is why magical realism is necessary. It gives the novel a form capable of holding material and spiritual suffering together.

4.4 Lagoon, Ayodele and Future-Oriented Hybridity

The fourth objective concerns Lagoon and its movement from postcolonial magical realism toward Afrofuturist hybridity. In Lagoon, hybridity is not limited to culture or spirituality. It becomes ecological, technological, urban, interspecies and planetary. Alien arrival turns Lagos into a contact zone where humans, aliens, marine creatures, gods, politicians, religious groups, soldiers, scientists, artists, media voices and ordinary citizens respond to change. This multiplicity makes the novel postmodern because no single voice controls the event.

The thesis analysis gives special attention to the phrase below and to the related expression *Aman iman*, both of which link water with life, change and ecological relation:

"Water is life" / "Aman iman" (Okorafor, 2014, p. 10)

These textual moments are central because Lagoon begins its transformation through the ocean. Water is not a passive background. It is the medium of alien arrival, ecological renewal and future possibility. The ocean becomes a living participant in history. This is why Lagoon's Afrofuturism is also ecological. It imagines the future not only through technology and aliens, but through human responsibility toward non-human life.

Ayodele is the central figure of future-oriented hybridity, and her thematic role is condensed in the following statement:

"I am change" (Okorafor, 2014, p. 12)

She is not simply an alien invader. She is a force of transformation. Her identity is fluid because she can move between forms and communicate

across boundaries. She challenges the distinction between human and non-human, self and other, science and myth, threat and possibility. Through Ayodele, Okorafor rewrites the alien invasion narrative. Instead of presenting alien arrival as conquest, the novel presents it as negotiation, disturbance and potential coexistence.

The following line further changes the meaning of alien contact:

"We are guests" (Okorafor, 2014, p. 13)

The aliens do not describe themselves as colonizers or conquerors. They describe themselves as guests. This does not remove all danger or conflict from the novel, but it shifts the encounter from invasion to dialogue. The word guest also produces a postcolonial reversal. Historically, arrivals from the sea have often been associated with colonial violence, slavery, extraction and exploitation. Lagoon reworks that history by making the sea the place of transformation rather than simply domination.

The city is also transformed. The textual statement that Lagos will not remain the same after alien contact shows that the event changes urban reality itself. Lagos becomes a hybrid space where science, religion, media, military power, ecological crisis, popular culture and alien intelligence collide. This is not a clean or utopian future. The novel shows fear, greed, violence, social inequality, religious manipulation and political anxiety. Yet it also imagines possibility. Afrofuturism in Lagoon is therefore critical rather than simply optimistic. It does not pretend that the future is free of crisis. It insists that Africa belongs inside the future and that African cities can become centres of planetary change.

4.5 Character-Based Comparison: Azaro and Ayodele

A proper comparative article must not focus only on Azaro. The thesis analysis rightly adds Ayodele as the parallel liminal figure in Lagoon. Azaro and Ayodele come from different narrative systems, but both function as mediators between multiple realities. Azaro is positioned between the spirit world and the

human world. Ayodele is positioned between alien life, oceanic space and human society. Both characters disturb fixed identity, but they do so in different historical and generic contexts. Azaro's liminality is mainly spiritual and cyclical. He is an abiku child who repeatedly faces the pull of the spirit companions and the demands of earthly life. He is vulnerable because he is a child, and his body is marked by hunger and weakness. Yet his perception is powerful. He sees the hidden spiritual map of postcolonial life. He does not transform the world directly; he witnesses its layered condition. His power is therefore the power of vision.

Ayodele's liminality is transformative and Afrofuturist. She is not a child caught between worlds. She is an alien mediator who deliberately enters human society to change it. She does not merely witness overlapping worlds; she causes worlds to overlap. Her body and identity are fluid, and her presence reorganizes Lagos. She turns the city into a field of negotiation among human beings, aliens, marine creatures, technologies and spiritual signs. Her power is therefore the power of change.

The difference between the two characters shows the movement from magical realism to Afrofuturism. Azaro's world is haunted by the unresolved wounds of postcolonial history. Ayodele's world is opened toward ecological and planetary futurity. Azaro's hybridity is perception; Ayodele's hybridity is transformation. Yet both characters reveal that African identity cannot be fixed within one category. Azaro challenges the border between life and death. Ayodele challenges the border between species, planet and environment. Together, they show why hybridity is the bridging concept between the two novels.

The moral dimension of both characters is also important. Azaro remains connected to his parents and community despite suffering. His attachment shows that liminality is not a refusal of responsibility. It is a difficult mode of belonging. Ayodele, similarly, forms relations with Adaora, Agu and Anthony. Around her, a small hybrid community forms: science, military ethics, music, alien intelligence and ecological

awareness meet. Lagoon therefore presents transformation as communal rather than individual. Both novels use liminal figures to imagine new forms of responsibility.

4.6 Space, Community and the Hybrid Nation

Hybridity in the two novels is not limited to characters. It is also produced through space. In *The Famished Road*, the road, market, forest edge, home and Madame Koto's bar are threshold spaces. They are ordinary social settings, but they are repeatedly opened to spiritual and political meanings. The road is the most important spatial symbol because it combines journey, hunger, national uncertainty and metaphysical return. When the road is described as hungry, the place becomes alive. It is not a neutral background; it participates in the symbolic logic of postcolonial suffering.

Madame Koto's bar is another hybrid space. It begins as a social meeting place, but it becomes connected with political ambition, spectacle, bodily transformation and moral confusion. The bar shows how community energy can be captured by power. It brings people together, but it also reveals how postcolonial politics exploits desire, hunger and entertainment. In Bhabha's terms, the bar can be read as a Third Space that has been corrupted. It creates mixture, but the mixture is not automatically liberating. Hybridity can produce possibility, but it can also produce manipulation.

In *Lagoon*, Bar Beach, the lagoon, the ocean and Lagos perform a similar but future-oriented function. Bar Beach is a threshold between land and sea, human life and alien life, city and planet. The thesis analysis refers to the beach as still sacred despite its trash (Okorafor, 2014, p. 17). Paraphrased, this line shows the double condition of Lagos's ecological space. The beach is polluted, damaged and socially neglected, yet it still carries sacred and transformative significance. This double condition creates an ecological hybridity: the environment is wounded but still active.

The ocean in *Lagoon* is especially important because it becomes an agent. The thesis identifies the line that presents the ocean as alive

(Okorafor, 2014, p. 14). Paraphrased, the ocean is not merely scenery; it acts, responds and participates in the making of the future. This is a major difference between *Lagoon* and many conventional science-fiction narratives. The future is not produced only by machines, weapons or laboratories. It is produced by water, marine life, alien intelligence and human ethical choices.

The comparison between Okri's road and Okorafor's lagoon is therefore central. The road represents cyclic struggle, hunger and unfinished postcolonial history. The lagoon represents fluid transformation, ecological contact and planetary futurity. Both are threshold symbols. Both move across boundaries. Both show that Nigerian identity is not formed in sealed spaces but in zones of movement, contamination, negotiation and change.

4.7 Hybridity of Language, Form and Narrative

Both novels also create hybridity through language and form. *The Famished Road* is written in English, but its rhythms, repetitions, symbolic images and visionary movements are deeply shaped by Yoruba-inflected oral storytelling. The language is often dreamlike, parabolic and ritualistic. This is significant because the colonial language is not used as a neutral medium. It is reworked so that it can carry indigenous cosmology and spiritual perception. The English novel form is therefore transformed into a hybrid African form.

Okri's narrative structure is also cyclical rather than linear. Events repeat, roads return, dreams interrupt waking life and beginnings do not settle into final endings. The thesis analysis refers to the novel's idea that beginnings and endings do not fully arrive (Okri, 1993, p. 358). Paraphrased, this means that history in the novel is unfinished and always returning. This structure reflects the *abiku* pattern of return, refusal and rebirth. It also reflects the unfinished condition of postcolonial Nigeria. The form of the novel makes the reader experience the same crossing that Azaro experiences.

Lagoon is hybrid in a different formal manner. Okorafor uses multiple perspectives, quick

transitions, media-like movement, urban voices and non-human viewpoints. The narrative does not belong to one character or one authority. Its fragmentation reflects Lagos itself: crowded, noisy, multilingual, networked and unstable. Rumour, technology, music, religious speech, scientific explanation and ordinary street talk all shape the event. The form of the novel therefore imitates the social experience of alien arrival. The contrast is important. Okri's form is ritual, spiral and visionary. Okorafor's form is urban, networked and polyphonic. Yet both forms challenge linear realism and single authority. Both suggest that Nigerian reality is too layered

to be represented through one voice or one form of knowledge. From a postmodern perspective, this refusal of singularity is crucial. From a postcolonial perspective, it is also decolonial, because it resists inherited Western forms by reworking them through African cultural and speculative imagination.

The following table summarizes the article's main textual evidence in paraphrased form, following the thesis analysis. It is included to make the analysis more clearly grounded, as requested, while keeping the article form concise.

Text / textual evidence from thesis analysis	Novel	Concept	Analytical meaning
Azaro is introduced as a child unwilling to be born and destined to struggle with death (Okri, 1993, p. 5).	The Famished Road	Liminality	Azaro begins as a being divided between birth and death, which makes him a symbol of postcolonial in-betweenness.
The abiku condition is described through the idea of being always in-between (Okri, 1993, p. 3).	The Famished Road	Third Space	The child stands between spirit and human worlds, showing that identity is produced through negotiation rather than purity.
The river changes into a road and the road becomes a world-symbol (Okri, 1993, p. 5).	The Famished Road	Magical realism	Space is not fixed; it transforms into a mythic and historical sign of movement, origin and uncertainty.
The road is described as hungry (Okri, 1993, p. 7).	The Famished Road	Postcolonial poverty	The road becomes a living image of poverty, national incompleteness and the social hunger of the postcolonial community.
Azaro's family reduces its food because of poverty (Okri, 1993, p. 8).	The Famished Road	Survival	The spiritual child is also a poor child; magical realism remains tied to material suffering.
A political group is called a party of thieves (Okri, 1993, p. 8).	The Famished Road	Political critique	The phrase exposes the exploitation, corruption and moral failure of postcolonial political power.
Water is linked with life and ecological relation (Okorafor, 2014, p. 10).	Lagoon	Ecology	Water becomes the source of transformation, not merely a background setting.
Ayodele identifies herself with change (Okorafor, 2014, p. 12).	Lagoon	Afrofuturism	The alien figure becomes a mediator of transformation rather than a simple invader.

The aliens call themselves guests (Okorafor, 2014, p. 13).	Lagoon	Contact and negotiation	The invasion trope is reworked into a discourse of dialogue, coexistence and ethical encounter.
Lagos is said to be permanently changed by the encounter (Okorafor, 2014, p. 13).	Lagoon	Hybrid city	The city becomes a planetary contact zone where human, alien, oceanic and technological systems meet.
The ocean is presented as alive (Okorafor, 2014, p. 14).	Lagoon	Non-human agency	The future is not made by humans alone; the ocean and non-human life become active historical forces.

4.8 Why Both Novels and Theories Are Necessary

The use of two novels and more than one theoretical framework is necessary because the study examines both continuity and transformation. If *The Famished Road* were studied alone, the article would remain focused on magical realism, Yoruba spirituality and postcolonial memory. If *Lagoon* were studied alone, the analysis would emphasize Afrofuturism, ecology and alien contact without showing the earlier magical-realist foundation of African speculative imagination. Reading them together reveals a movement from spiritual hybridity to Afrofuturist hybridity.

Bhabha is necessary because both novels are about negotiation, ambivalence and identity in the Third Space. However, Bhabha alone cannot explain why the magical and speculative event is politically significant in postcolonial representation. Slemon is therefore necessary because he explains magical realism as a discourse that challenges colonial epistemology. Afrofuturism is also necessary because *Lagoon* moves beyond traditional magical realism into ecological, technological and planetary futures. Together, these theories show how the two novels challenge Western binaries and create African-centred forms of reality.

The comparison also shows that magical realism and Afrofuturism are not completely separate categories. Magical realism opens reality to multiple worlds. Afrofuturism opens the future to African-centred transformation. Both modes resist closed systems of meaning. Both use

extraordinary events to expose the limitations of dominant realism. Both make African epistemologies central to literary form. The difference is that Okri works through spirits, roads, dreams and cyclic time, while Okorafor works through aliens, ocean, media, science and city life. The shared principle is hybridity.

5. Findings and Conclusion

The first major finding is that hybridity is the organizing principle of both novels. It appears not only in theme but also in character, space, language, narrative form and community. Azaro's abiku identity and Ayodele's alien identity are the clearest character-based examples. The road and lagoon are the clearest spatial examples. Circular narration and polyphonic narration are the clearest formal examples.

The second finding is that magical realism in *The Famished Road* functions as postcolonial resistance. Okri does not present spirits, dreams and mythic spaces as decorative fantasy. He uses them to challenge Western rationalism and to restore African spiritual knowledge as a valid way of understanding reality. Textual evidence such as the hungry road, Azaro's in-betweenness and the family's hunger shows that the novel joins the material and metaphysical dimensions of postcolonial life.

The third finding is that *Lagoon* transforms the concerns of magical realism into Afrofuturist and ecological speculation. Okorafor does not abandon African cosmology; she extends it into alien contact, oceanic transformation and Lagos

futurity. Textual evidence related to water, Ayodele's change, alien guesthood and the living ocean shows that the future in Lagoon is ecological, interspecies and African-centred. The fourth finding concerns the difference between Azaro and Ayodele. Azaro's hybridity is primarily perceptive and spiritual. He reveals overlapping worlds. Ayodele's hybridity is active and transformative. She causes new relations among species, environments and social structures. This difference marks a historical and generic shift from magical-realist postcolonial survival to Afrofuturist planetary transformation. The fifth finding is that both novels reject Eurocentric binaries. They blur real/unreal, rational/irrational, human/non-human, tradition/modernity and past/future. However, they do not blur these boundaries randomly. They do so in order to create literary worlds where African knowledge, memory and futurity can become central.

This article has examined hybridity and magical realism in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* through a postmodernist and postcolonial framework. It has argued that both novels use extraordinary narrative modes to create hybrid identities, hybrid spaces and hybrid futures. Okri's novel uses the abiku child Azaro, the hungry road, family poverty, corrupt politics and Yoruba cosmology to present postcolonial Nigeria as an unfinished and spiritually layered society. Okorafor's novel uses Ayodele, alien contact, water, the living ocean, Bar Beach, media circulation and Lagos urban multiplicity to imagine African futurity as ecological, technological and interspecies.

The textual evidence shows that *The Famished Road* and *Lagoon* should not be read only as examples of magical realism and science fiction. They should be read as connected literary acts of decolonial imagination. Okri recovers suppressed spiritual epistemologies and uses them to critique postcolonial suffering. Okorafor projects African urban and ecological realities into a speculative future where Lagos becomes the centre of planetary transformation. Both authors resist Western models that

separate myth from reality, science from culture, and the future from Africa.

The main contribution of the article is its comparative reading of magical realism and Afrofuturism as related modes of hybridity. Magical realism in Okri opens the present to spirits, memory and ancestral knowledge. Afrofuturism in Okorafor opens the future to African cities, oceans and non-human agency. Together, the novels show that Nigerian literary imagination develops through transformation rather than replacement. The spiritual does not disappear when the technological arrives. Myth does not vanish in the future. Instead, African fiction creates hybrid forms in which past, present and future remain in dialogue.

Therefore, *The Famished Road* and *Lagoon* demonstrate that hybridity is not a sign of confusion or incompleteness. It is the creative principle through which postcolonial and postmodern African literature resists domination, reclaims reality and imagines new worlds.

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