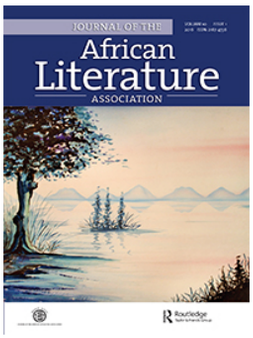

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Ken Walibora Waliaula

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Disenchantment with the State of the Nation in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road,* Orhan Pamuk's *Snow* and Rashid al Daif's *Passage to Dusk*[1]

In this essay I focus on the theme of disenchantment with the state of the nation in three novels, namely Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, Rashid al-Daif's *Passage to Dusk* and Orhan Pamuk's *Snow*. Drawing on Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities I will trace how in this fictional works the state is rendered incapable of functioning without friction. The paper operates on the premise that all the three writers are preoccupied with the nation and/or nation-state as a site for interminable contestation and conflict. There appears to be certain elements within the ontological reality of the nation that negate and threaten its stability. These elements express themselves subtly and overtly in a multiplicity of ways, which are all largely predicated upon difference in class, ethnicity, race, religion, sect and ideology. Therefore the central thesis of my paper is that these novels do not just epitomize the failure of peoples in a nation-state to strike a proper balance between their sameness and difference, but more radically the novels implicitly mourn the loss or absence of the nation-state. And in mourning this loss or absence, these novels constitute the authors' poignant statements about the contemporary sorry state of the nation in Nigeria, Lebanon, and Turkeys.

My idea of disenchantment is derived from Max Weber's use of the German term *Entzauberung Welt*, which has been translated variously as "de-magification" or "the disenchantment of the world" in which he points to the absence of happiness in the world in spite of or due to the advent of modernity (Bobock 175). The terms "nationalism," "nation" and "nation-state," are apparently fairly modern concepts, and therefore constitute an integral part of modernity and the concomitant interplay between enchantment and disenchantment. As I hope to demonstrate through the three novels written under diverse geopolitical, socio-political, cultural and historical backdrops, the nation is at once full of promise and disillusion. Pamuk sets his novel in his native Turkey where secularism and religion are duelling for control of the body politic. Daif's narrative dramatizes the spectre of civil war in Lebanon in particular, artistically presenting useful insight into the complex Middle Eastern politics and poetics. Okri sets his novel in a fictitious country, but we cannot read it without seeing his native Nigeria and its past, present and future ambiguities, conflicts and

contradictions. It seems to me the disillusion with the "state" and the state of the nation in these novels far outweighs the promise.

It is germane to include in the discussion of the notion of "state" terms with which it has affinity or with which it may be easily confused. I am not oblivious to the quandary of definition that bedevils academic concepts including terms such as "nationalism," "nation" and "nation-state" some of which I have utilized quite liberally in the preceding paragraphs. For instance regarding "nation," Hugh Seton-Watson succinctly captures the dilemma of definition when he states: "I am driven to the conclusion that no "scientific definition" of nation cannot be devised; yet the phenomenon has existed and exists." In the same vein Homi Bhabha talks of "a particular ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write it and the lives of those who live it" (Bhabha 306). Suffice it to say that "nation" and "state" have distinct meanings and as Walker Connor correctly observes, equating nation and state has been the genesis of untold confusion.

Benedict Anderson's oft-quoted definition of nation lays emphasis on how people imagine themselves. He states, "it[nation] is an *imagine*d political *community*—and imagined as both inherently *limited* and *sovereign*"(Anderson 6). Whatever the nuances of this definition, there is no mistaking the centrality of community, the peoples in the idea of nation as opposed to a structure or geopolitical entity. Walker Connor's intervention in the debate on the problematic of definition is quite helpful as it clarifies that it is possible to have states which "contain more than one nation, and sometimes hundreds" which pose "the greatest barrier to state unity" (Connor 37). The "essence of a nation," Connor states, " is a psychological bond that joins peoples and differentiates it, in the subconscious convictions of its members from all other people in a most vital way" (Connor 36). In mentioning "peoples," Connor echoes Anderson's sense of an "imagined community." Connor's reference to the "subconscious convictions" as the glue that bonds the peoples together in a kind of solidarity is also nearly synonymous to Anderson's concept of "imagined" oneness.

I adopt Connor's definition of state as "the major political subdivision of the globe" in which case, Turkey, Nigeria and Lebanon are the political subdivisions that concern us here (Connor 36). I hesitate to refer to these three as "nation-states" because of their heterogeneity; the hyphenated phrase tends to militate against the possibility of there being more than one nation within each political subdivision, which belies the reality of the three countries. To my mind

the presence of more than one nation in each of the states affirms Connor's contention that having more than one nation within a state is invariably a catalyst for tumult and teeming disarray and ultimately disenchantment as the three novels vividly demonstrate. As Connor opines Japan, Germany and China, are the isolated supreme examples of entities whose homogeneity qualifies them as nation-states in the strictest sense. Still on the burden of definition, I loosely use "postcolonial" without a hyphen in reference to these states for purposes of general periodization. I am merely foregrounding the period when the novels were written in respect to global trends regarding the cessation of colonialism or the historical epochs that the novels address or represent rather than focusing on whether or not the states about which the novelists written were or are just emerging from colonial role.

Frederic Jameson's assertion in the epigraph that adorns this essay is particularly illuminating in our understanding of Okri, Pamuk and al-Daif's novels. All the novels belong to the rubric of what Jameson calls "Third World literature." Inevitably Jameson's use of the phrase "Third World" has never remained uncontested. Robert Stam states in his essay "Palimpsestic Aesthetics;"

If the nationalist discourse of the 1960s drew sharp lines between First World andThird World…postnationalist discourse replaces such binary dualisms with a more nuanced spectrum of subtle differentiations, in a new global regime where Firs World and Third World are mutually imbricated (Stam 60).

This response to Jameson's totalizing effort is not surprising. Other critics such as Aijaz Ahmad and Ania Loomba have also criticized Jameson the critic in no uncertain terms. Ahmad interrogates "the theoretical and political underpinnings of the term 'Third World' and riles against the homogenization of the literatures of Asia, Africa and Latin America" (Ahmad 204). Loomba concurs with Ahmad and raises the pertinent question: "How can widely divergent cultures, histories and narratives be squeezed together into a single formal pattern?" (Loomba 204) Though I cannot help but agree— to a certain extent— with Stam, Ahmad and Loomba in their critique, I am inclined to think that we may be entirely missing the point if we allow insistence on the imprecision of the expression "Third World" to blind us to the veracity of Jameson's otherwise astute generalizations. For one thing it is foolhardy not to take cognizance of how the private lives of the characters in these novels are a reflection and a refraction of the

"nations" from which they originate or operate; the wide range of cultural and social realities in the characters' private lives transcend their private spheres and take on wider "national" proportions. In another sense Jameson is right in positing that the libidinal (private) and the political (public) spheres interact in an intriguing way as these three novels testify. This interaction between the private and the public exposes the poetics and politics and the problematic of the collective; the collective tension, aporia, uncertainties, displeasure, desires, dreams, nightmares, pain, dismay, and disenchantment of the communities or groups to which the characters imagine or are expected to imagine themselves to belong.

Most critical responses to *The Famished Road* have pointed to the postcolonial and postmodern elements in the novel that won him the 1991 Booker Prize.[2] Regardless of whether one stresses the postcolonial and postmodern or the New Ageism in the novel; disenchantment with the status quo is an inescapable aspect of this mythic narrative. Azaro the narrator is the unconventional *abiku* spirit-child who elects to remain existentially in the flesh, because he hopes to make a difference in the lives of people who matter to him, particularly his parents and their fellow ghetto dwellers. Azaro is dismayed by the crushing poverty and deprivation, endemic corruption, political lies, hypocrisy and violence—the endless litany of crises that engulf his *abiku* country. It is another abiku child Ade, who remarks, "Our country is an *abiku* country. Like a spirit-child it keeps coming and going." (*FR* 478). As Thomas Martinek opines, "[Okri] constructs the Nigerian nation as an abiku country, striving and struggling to come into existence and to remain"(Martinek 1).

The trials and tribulations of Azaro's parents to make ends meet while living virtually below the breadline in the ghetto are a metonymic of countless others in Nigeria to whom, as Jack Mapanje observes, independence did not translate into freedom and prosperity (Mapanje xvi-xviii). Poverty, degradation and deprivation are so ubiquitous that Azaro says of his mother that she was "merely a detail in the poverty of our area" (*FR* 238). Azaro's dismay is heightened more when he wanders up to the place where his father toiled and is humiliated day in day out for miserly wages. Azaro regrets this painful discovery: "My wanderings had at last betrayed me, because for the first time in my life I had seen one of the secret sources of my father's misery" (*FR* 149). The postcolonial situation is appallingly depressingly. And yet the struggle for the "wretched of the earth," to borrow Frantz Fanon's expression, to get out of the mire of deprivation

is undermined by needless conflicts, divisions and chasms dramatized by the duels on the road even among the underprivileged and downtrodden themselves. There is a sense in which the characters in Okri's novel fail to imagine themselves as one. As Thomas j. Davis and Azubike Kalu-Nwiwu demonstrate, the crux of the matter is that Nigeria is never indeed one nation.

When Nigeria achieved independence from Great Britain in October 1960, like other countries decolonized in Africa, it was a nation in name only. It existed as a political and legal entity, not as an effective and emotive identity…It was a state encompassing ethnic nations, each claiming their own separate heritage, language, and culture (Davis and Kalu-Nwiwu 1986).

It would seem the instability of Nigeria is predicated on the failure of the multiplicity of nations (numbering over 250 according to some sources) within it to imagine themselves as truly belonging to one entity much less one community. They are divided along class lines as they are along ethnic and religious grounds. It is instructive that Madame Koto not only rises from rags to riches through association with wily political figures and thereby introducing a class dimension to the chasms on the famished road, but she also carries triplets in her womb who are constantly fighting amongst themselves and have hence been interpreted as the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria namely the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo whose mutual rivalry is legendary. Of these major groups, Davis and Kalu-Nwiwu allege that their ethnic contentions suffuse "the pages of the new nation's history"(1). If class and ethnic differences undermine the sense of community and solidarity, religious differences are not any less significant. It does not matter that Azaro's mother prays in three languages; the bottom line is that religion is hardly a unifying factor. In the novel fanatical Christians attempt to thwart Madame Koto's bar and its espousal of apparent moral turpitude leading to another of the numerous fights that typify the novel. I will shortly return to the question of how belief in some form of religion or its lack thereof may drive a wedge between the peoples in a state in the discussion on Pamuk's *Snow* and Daif's *Passage to Dusk*.

Okri's depiction of the squalor, mayhem, and apathy in the novel calls to mind Basil Davidson's ostensibly overstated grim picture of postcolonial Africa. Davidson wrote what appears to be an elegy of postcolonial African, stating, "[t]he actual and present condition of Africa is one of deep trouble, sometimes a deeper trouble than the worst imposed during the colonial years" (Davidson 9). More

specifically on Nigeria, Chinua Achebe has suggested in his famous collection of essays, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, that "The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership"(Achebe 1). Achebe argues that despite being endowed with rich natural and human resources the country has had a succession of inept leadership. He says the leaders' preoccupation with personal gain blind them to the plight of the suffering masses of the "poor and needy." Achebe therefore recommends the need for leaders who are both sensitive and attentive to the pressing needs of the populace and who exhibit a high sense of responsibility and accountability. He expresses his optimism by concluding: "What I am saying is that Nigeria is not beyond change. I am saying Nigeria can change if it discovers leaders who have the will, the ability and the vision" (Achebe 2).

Achebe does not however elucidate how the populace is bound to "discover" such leaders. In view of the implicit leadership problem in *The Famished Road*, are we to say such leaders are to be found in the narrators bellicose father, Madame Koto or the anonymous forces behind the Party of the Rich and the Party of the Poor? Is good leadership in Nigeria only a remote possibility that inspires little or no hope? Despite claims to the country I hold that Dad's grandiose promises, and phantasmagorias are at once parodic of the empty promises of the political elite in the country's tattered geopolitical landscape and emblematic of a quest after a better Nigeria that springs from the prevailing discontent. Dad's claim to visionary leadership pining to rid the road of garbage, and to build schools for the underprivileged or the "scum of society" such as the prostitutes and the crippled beggars is undermined and undercut by failure to actualize his dreams of a better life for himself and his nucleus family. At novels end, Azaro parents and the road dwellers are still "famished" mired in poverty and want, making their situation that of "deep trouble" as Davidson holds is true of most of Africa. When Azaro finally declares, "A dream can be the highest point of a life" he affirms the need for an improvement in the quality of life for the road dwellers; it is the recognition of the futility of the struggle so far (*FR* 500). Disenchantment with the present conditions; wanting to see beyond the present debacle is what inspires in Dad and by extension in some critics, optimism for a better future. It is presumably for this reason that some critics read in *The Famished Road* snapshots of New Ageism and its preoccupation with the dawn of a new problem-free Utopia. In his novel *Passage to Dusk*, Rashid Daif captures the futility of life in war-torn Lebanon. As Sabri Hafez cogently remarks, al Daif's novel

focuses on "the dubiousness of identity in a world where the war lords claim that they are so certain of identity that they allow themselves to set up barriers, to kidnap, and kill people on their identity cards"(qtd by Aghacy 193). The intensity of the identity quagmire is exemplified by the narrator's reluctance to mention his name at the hospital where he lies seriously wounded. Unsure whether the hospital personnel are Muslims or Christians, the narrator elects to be evasive and elusive about his identity, as he is keenly aware that should he give away his religious affiliation or ancestry to the wrong people his life is at risk. The hospital that is supposed to be the locale for healing has instead been transmogrified into a space fraught with danger.

The government, which inhabits the epicenter of the subdivision called a state, is in principle supposed to enable and enhance the sense of solidarity and togetherness amongst the diverse polities in Lebanon. But Abu Ali's outburst towards the end of the novel, "This government is useless…I don't expect anything to change… I'm not hopeful" (*PD* 93) is a classic example of the dwindling enchantment with the notion of a Lebanese "nation-state" if anything like that ever existed. To be sure the failure of the Lebanese to imagine themselves as one community is at the very heart of the civil war that ravages their country leading as it were to the profusion of Lebanese war literature of which *Passage to Dusk* is one. Samira Aghacy in her erudite essay on al- Daif's novel, quotes him as disavowing the tag of a writer of war novels in an interview with the *al-Safir* newspaper. Aghacy states that al-Daif views war as "a mere stimulant that bares human beings and strips them naked, and that his novels are about man in a time of war"(Aghacy 194). Daif's hair-splitting venture is synonymous to Wole Soyinka's disavowal of the theme of cultural conflict in his arguably most outstanding play *Death and the King's Horseman,* about which the Nigerian writes unconvincingly contends that such conflict is "a catalyst merely"(Soyinka 1993). Yet it goes without saying that when al-Daif as a survivor of the horrendous war experience chooses the war as the backdrop to his novels to "bare human beings and strip them naked," he is in effect expressing his "disenchantment of the world" or *Entzauberung Welt* to borrow again Max Weber's German expression.

Unlike Azaro's Dad in *The Famished Road* who sustains himself and his fellow sufferers by inventing impossible and improbable dreams, Daif's somewhat paranoid and nihilistic protagonist states;" My dreams can't save me from the present."(*PD* 93) Why can't the dreams save him from the present? The present realities are so

depressing that they render entertaining any dreams misplaced and mistimed. (That is not to suggest he does not dream and fantasize). Al-Daif's novel is set during the Lebanese Civil War that claimed some 100, 000 lives when individuals were killed on account of their names, because those names gave away their religious, or ethnic identity. The explosion of Civil War, which forms the background against which the novel is written, is a symptom of the failure by the different groups in the state to come to terms with their differences and sameness. In its quest for national form, or as Timothy Brenan would put it, in its "longing for form" Lebanon has to grapple with deep-seated religious, sectarian and ethnic differences(see Brenan 1989). The sameness expressed through a Lebanese identity is complicated by loyalty to the various other identities that fracture and fragment this collective Lebanese identity. The division of seats in the Lebanese parliament between Maronite Christians, Sunni Muslims, and Shia Muslims is a vain attempt at bringing sanity to a state that is undecided as whether to be secular or religious. The unease and mutual suspicion between the fractious and divided entities obfuscates the possibility of there being a stable religious State as each of the groups jostles and fights for supremacy.

The novel exposes the vanity and futility of war and negates the claim that male writers necessarily glorify war. Propounding such essentialized view, feminist critic Everlyne Accad in particular in her essay "Sexuality War, and Literature in Lebanon," insists that novels of men exalt war, seeing it as unavoidable, inevitable, and part of destiny. She adds that while showing war as bleak and ugly, men writers are still fascinated with it and like Frantz Fanon, they tend to regard violence as "cathartic." That is hardly true of al-Daif, in view of the heavy sense of guilt with which he imbues the protagonist. Recalling his involvement in the poisoning of the spring and the killing of Muslims after the desecration of a Christian cemetery, the narrator and protagonist admits:

> I don't deny the incident. But I've changed, and so have my thoughts and convictions. I was young and reckless back then. How else could I have done what I did?
> Who in his right mind would poison a spring and kill all people in a village? It wasn't me who did that; it was the reckless boy who did it (23).

As the above excerpt testifies, the narrator first points the accusing finger at himself. His worldview has undergone a

metamorphosis. He does not perceive killing and plundering as necessary and inevitable undertakings anymore. What is more he savagely indicts the various factions in Lebanon for fanning a needless bloodbath. As Aghacy rightly concludes, it never eludes the narrator's cognition that "the only solidarity and compatibility he encounters with [his compatriots] is the identical atrocities committed on both sides— Christian and Muslim, in East as well as West Beirut" (Aghacy 198).

His surrealist narrative is itself a subversion of the binarisms that form the bedrock of internal conflict in Lebanon. Aghacy aptly postulates that in crossing the green line that divides the city of Beirut into East and West, as was the Germany city of Berlin before the fall of the Soviet Union, the narrator engages in "an act of defiance, an undermining of the newly installed authorities. His is a shift away from the logocentricism, a subversion of binary oppositions"(Aghacy 195). The narrator further subverts the binary between males and females when he assumes the persona of the pregnant woman and exposes at length her female desires and feelings. There is little doubt that in subverting the ethos of the forces that perpetuate war, al-Daif's narrator is in essence expressing his disavowal of and disenchantment with the specter of war. This is a case of a male writer whose writing on war runs counter to Accad's overly simplified conclusions.

The fragmentation of Lebanon is epitomized by the narrator's fragmented identity and dismembered body. He is a narrator whose name remains unknown until almost the end of the narrative when his father comes looking for him in Beirut and upon meeting him yells "Joseph!" At the same time he talks of his amputated arm and the scattering of his body particles after his murder; "My body was already scattered…All was left of me was my front side, thin like a pencil sketch" (*PD* 33). It is difficult not to see his dismembered and scattered body as an allegory of the disintegration of Lebanon. Strictly speaking Lebanon is not a nation, but is reducible to a mere erasable and ineffectual "pencil sketch" or impermanent map, suggesting its ephemeral or transient properties. Lebanon is not a nation; it is nothing but a constellation of warmongers, kidnappers, plunderers, and extortionist including the now reformed narrator who comes across as both a villain and a victim. The connection between the narrator and his country, his wider society is not at all implausible. It lends credence to Frederic Jameson's assertion that the individual in "Third World literature" is an allegory of the entire society.

The affinity between the private and the public sphere is further dramatized in the narrator's unfulfilled sexual desire, as he becomes a prisoner in his own house. For one thing, the metaphor of his own home as a prison suggests the repression of freedom in Lebanon that reduces the country into a prison-like entity. Moreover, like the literal prison, the prisoner is subjected to deprivation, including sexual deprivation. The narrator has a burning desire for the pregnant woman in his apartment but ultimately he cannot and does not have his desire fulfilled. He narrates; "Desire burned in me, and desire burned in her, but the door stood between the joining of our desires. Our desires couldn't burn the door down" (*PD* 37). Abu Ali and the pregnant woman's brother-in-law constantly police them, subjecting them under watchful surveillance that calls to mind Michael Foucault's theory in which he posits that surveillance is a significant characteristic of disciplinary institutions such as schools, barracks, hospitals and prisons (Foucault 486). Yet it would be insufficient to end the discussion on the narrator's arrested sexual expression without transcending its fleshly or bodily implications. I am not sure that the author brings in sexual desire gratuitously. It seems to me that the denial of sexual fulfillment in the novel is symbolic of the unrealized and unrealizable dreams and the attendant frustration in war-torn Lebanon. War is about shattered dreams, unfulfilled and unattainable private and public promises, demands, desires and hopes. There is such an overwhelming sense of disenchantment toward war in al-Daif's novel *Passage to Dawn* so much so that it may be appropriate to read it as anti-war.

One of the differences between al-Daif's *Passage to Dawn* and Orhan Pamuk's *Snow* is that in the latter there is a degree of sexual fulfillment for Ka, the protagonist. Ka comes to the Turkish city of Kars from exile in Franfurt, on the pretext that he has a journalistic task to investigate the series of suicides by girls opposed to baring their heads. But the real impetus behind his tumultuous sojourn in Kars is his strong attraction to newly divorced Ipek. Despite initial inhibitions on her part particularly her reluctance to have sex with him while her father was in the hotel, Ka finally fulfills his heart's desire by having intercourse with Ipek. But his ultimate goal of moving to Frankfurt with Ipek comes to no fruition after she suspects him of betraying Blue, the mysterious Islamicist lover she shares with Kadife her sister. If al-Daif's protagonist suffers completely from unquenched "sexual" thirst, Pamuk's protagonist is fortunate to have one or two sips of water but it is spilt before he fully quenches his thirst—his thirst for love or is it his

lust for sensual pleasure? Perhaps we should not let the distinction between love and lust or even sex detain us here. Suffice it to say in the novel chapter 30, which contains the lovemaking scene, is curiously entitled "A short spell of happiness." The fulfillment is too transient to be meaningfully perceived as plenitude. It is no wonder that as Orhan the narrator states; "Ka knew very well that life was a meaningless string of random incidents" (*SW* 239). But in both Ka's and Joseph's cases frustration at individual level is allegorical. The failure or thwarting of the fulfillment of dreams and desires should be interpreted beyond the individual level. Charles Strohmer aptly sums up Ka's predicament when he observes in his review of Pamuk's novel; " [N] either romance nor poetry can save Ka from the crisis of faith that becomes as disorienting as the city itself amid the interplay between religious radicals and secularists"(Strohmer 39). Strohmer's linking of Ka's crisis with the city is significant. We can add that indeed the "crisis of faith" in Ka and Kars encompasses the crisis of faith among all Turks with regard to the ontology of the Turkish State and what it stands for or should stand for. That there is a "crisis of faith" in the state is amble evidence of the overriding trope of disenchantment that is inescapable in the three novels under review.

Pamuk's Kars (and by extension Turkey) is as divided as al-Daif's wartime Lebanon or Okri's populous and precarious Nigeria. In his incredibly enthralling novel Pamuk ingeniously captures the wrestling between secularism and religion in modern day Turkey. Pamuk clearly shows how the problems of Turkey are complex, confounding and mind-boggling. The story opens with the disturbing increase of Muslim girls who elect to take their own lives instead of succumbing to the secular government's decree to remove their scarves. This is paradoxical since suicide is perceived as sin in Islam, making the girl's actions the commission of sin in order to avoid sin. While exposing the extreme measures the girls take against themselves in response to the secular states radical match toward modernization (read westernization), Pamuk also paints a disturbing picture of intolerance and bloodthirstiness on the part of the reformers. The secular theater coup plotters initiate an escalation of violence, wanton murder, incarceration and torture of Islamicists, particularly the recalcitrant boys from the Islamic school, casting upon themselves in very negative light. The murder of Necip, the aspiring first sci-fi Muslim writer, is one of the most heart-wrenching episodes in the story and comparable only to that of Sunay and Ka himself towards the end of the novel. As in the other two novels, the internal friction that

culminates in conflict and fighting is an expression of author's disenchantment with the state of affairs in his country.

For a "nation" like Turkey grappling with an elusive sense of oneness in an imagined community, there is nothing as crucial as comprehending what "we" and "us" connote. This problem is poignantly brought to the fore in the episode where various factions attempt to write a unified press statement to a German newspaper. In that bizarre and hilarious press briefing in which the press is conspicuously missing (Ka the journalist who is supposed to convey the statement to the German publisher is making love to Ipek at the time), the notion of a nebulous Turkish oneness is compellingly vivified. A "passionate youth" belonging to the Kurdish association proclaims; "We're not stupid, we're just poor! And we have a right to insist on this distinction." The question that an old man raises following this outburst is especially pertinent to the seething unease, anger and angst in the collective Turkish identity much as it goes largely ignored and unanswered by the enthusiastic young man: "Who do you mean, my son, when you say *we*? Do you mean the Turks? The Kurds? The Circassians? The people of Kars?" (SW 275). It is quite apparent that when the Kurdish boy talks about "we" and insists on the distinction, he is alluding to the Kurdish identity. The Kurdish peoples are scattered in Iraq, Syria and Turkey and yet it would seem they share a certain sense of "stateless nationhood," a distinction that negates their oneness within the states in which their populations are scattered. Like the Nigerians and the Lebanese, Pamuk's Turkish peoples have difficulties imagining themselves as a unified political community within the confines of an established political state. The parody of the press statement to the German newspaper exposes the chinks in the "national" armor and exhibits the impossibility of their being one voice with which Turkey can speak to itself much less to the world.

In sum the three authors express their discontent with the lack of cohesion, coherence and concord in their respective native countries. In all the three novels, the idea of one "nation" is interrogated and subverted. In exposing the violence, expropriation, deprivation, and corruption that typify the postcolonial realities of their countries, Okri, al- Daif and Pamuk raise disturbing questions; in varying degrees of optimism and skepticism. Moreover, they show how disingenuous and fallacious it would be to talk about the existence of nation-states in Turkey, Nigeria and Lebanon. These writers indict the State and expose its limitations with a vigor that amounts to disenchantment. One of the most salient features of these three novels is the overwhelming sense of

loss and melancholia. In keeping with Jameson's astute characterization of "Third World literature" all three novels have protagonists whose private lives are allegories of the public or wider realities of the countries in which they are set.

Notes

[1]. In this essay I use the following abbreviations: *FR* for *The Famished Road*; *PD* for *Passage to Dawn;* and *SW* for *Snow*.

[2]. Douglas McCabe in his "Higher Realities: New Age Spirituality in Ben Okri's The Famished Road" however presents an atypical interpretation of The Famished Road in a by his insistence that the novel advances a certain New Ageism. See *Research in African Literatures.* 36.4 (2005): 1-21.

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Ken Walibora Waliaula
Ohio State University