

THE “EVERYDAY FORMS OF RESISTANCE” IN BEN OKRI’S “THE FAMISHED ROAD” TRILOGY

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Abstract. This paper aims to study resistance in Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* Trilogy. It analyses diverse forms of resistance, especially those inscribed by the ordinary people to challenge the authority of the dominant structures and to transform the given order in historically specific ways. The dialectic of oppression and resistance shapes the world of Okri’s trilogy. What is of particular interest to the purposes of this paper is not the organized resistance movements but what James C. Scott has called the “everyday forms of resistance.” (Weapons of the Weak 1985, 36) Scott theorises resistance as a spontaneous act that is neither organized nor politically charged. The dialectic of oppression and resistance shapes the world of Okri’s trilogy. The paper perceives resistance as a “spontaneous overflow”, to borrow Wordsworth’s phrase, that is governed by self-interest. The “spontaneous overflow” in this context means that resistance is the expression of deep feelings of dissatisfaction and discontent with injustice, inequity, and the various forms of oppression found in a society. Resistance provides the platform to the oppressed people to express their refusal and their standing against colonialist, post-colonialist and neo-colonialist exploitation. It is a resistance to all oppressors whether they are Western colonizers or local rulers. Resistance against injustice is not calculated or planned but it may transform into an organized politically charged act that has the potential to dislodge the oppressive structures, if not eradicate them. What are the various forms of oppression Okri’s protagonists have faced? How do they respond to these forms of oppression? Does their resistance achieve its intended outcome(s)? If resistance falls short of achieving its intended outcomes, what conditions does Okri advocate for its success?

Keywords: The Famished Road Trilogy, everyday resistance, power, post-independence, oppression

1. THE EVERYDAY FORMS OF RESISTANCE

To start with, the word resistance “is derived from the Latin root word *resistē re*, meaning *to stand against*, which denotes a slow but insistent, often invisible but enduring strategy that has the potential to dislodge the dominant structures, if not dismantle them.” (Multani 2) Resistance aims to bring the oppressed people from the periphery into the centre, it opposes and challenges the oppressive forces. Jocelyn Hollander and Rachel Einwohner identify two “core elements of resistance: action and opposition.” (“Conceptualizing Resistance” 2004, 538) James Scott argues that “resistance refers to a form of insurgency denoted by the refusal of people to cooperate actively with, or express support for, the current regime or authority figures; even when this may appear passive, it is an activity, an ‘action.’” (Scott 1985)

Resistance lays bare the unjust practices, destabilizes the power of the oppressive structures in order to establish an equal place for the marginalized people. This paper explores one form of resistance: what Scott calls “everyday resistance” which “is about how people act in their everyday lives in ways that might undermine power.” It is individual and not politically articulated. Scott argues that the everyday resistance of the oppressed shows that they have not consented to dominance. He suggests that resistance is “any act” by a subordinate class that is “intended” to “mitigate or deny claims [...] by superordinate classes” “or to advance its own claims.” (*Weapons of the Weak* 1985, 290) Scott’s resistance theory is important for this paper because of the firm attention it gives to equality and justice.

Scott argues that the actions of ordinary people who intend to resist should be defined as resistance irrespective of their actions’ outcome. The outcome, for Scott, is less relevant than the intention since the resistance acts may fall short on achieving their intended results. Moreover, in “Everyday Resistance: Exploration of a Concept and its Theories,” Stellan Vinthagen and Anna Johansson understand “everyday resistance” as resistance that is done “by individuals or small groupings without a formal leadership or

organization in a non-recognized way that (has the potential to) undermine some power.” (2013, 37) Therefore, everyday resistance is a different form of resistance than the more politically organized and sustained resistance. Resistance in Okri’s trilogy is done by individuals like Dad, Mum, Azaro and the photographer or small groupings like the compound women and men without a formal leadership or organization. Okri’s characters are figures of resistance. The spontaneity of their responses to given situations is never naive, as they tend to be coherent in their overall rejection of some unjust practices.

2. COMPOUND PEOPLE: THE “SPONTANEOUS OVERFLOW” OF RESISTANCE

Ben Okri represents the political tension and conflicts between the Party of the Rich and the Party of the Poor and, for this reason, he shifts the central conflict of decolonisation from the opposition between coloniser and colonised to one between the domestic neo-colonialists represented by Madam Koto, the blind old man and the subaltern represented by Azaro’s family and the compound people. The failure of the Nigerian nationalists/neo-colonialist to integrate the demands of the marginalised into their nationalist agendas sowed the seeds of a catastrophic postcoloniality. Azaro, his parents, and the compound people struggle against and attempt to resist the new post-independence oppressive powers.

The compound people are generally non-gendered since they are referred to as the ‘inhabitants’ and sometimes the ‘crowd’. Their spontaneity does not preclude their sharp sense of awareness about the situation of what is called the city but, in fact, it should be called the village seeing the narrow horizon of the geographical perspective of the setting. Taken as a compact group, they are referred to in gendered terms as the women like in what the narrator came to consider as the “way of the women”: “The ways of women: I learned a lot about what was happening in the country through them. I learned about the talk of Independence, about how the white men treated us, about political parties and tribal divisions.”

(*TFR* 1992, 76) Everything about this situation is briefly summed up. They know the whole of it, in details. They know what the situation entails from change to implications to the rotten state of their nation.

Elsewhere, the compact group returns as made up of inhabitants englobing males and females, mature and young, independent of their differences. What unites them is their common hunger and misery and their common enemy, the politicians, especially the representatives of the party of the Rich as in the narrator's summary: "The inhabitants of the street crowded round the van, hunger on their faces. Their children were in tattered clothes, had big stomachs, and were barefoot." (*TFR* 1992, 123) Their common condition is the source of their unison and their refusal of politicians and their empty promises. The following is explicit about their spontaneous sense of awareness. There are the crude facts, the explanations, and a sense of common resolutions as to declining the politicians' offers:

'What is it?' someone asked.

'Politicians.' 'They want votes.'

'They want our money.'

'They have come to tax us.' (*TFR* 1992, 123)

The short statements are supposed to be made by different inhabitants. They are complementary, coherent and cohesive and list whatever the compound people have gathered from facts they have lived through. This is further exemplified by the following exchanges, which is meant to reproduce reflections that have matured long enough to become wise comments shared by the masses: 'I saw them when I went hawking. They keep giving reasons why we should vote for them.' 'They only remember us when they want our votes.' The man in the van spoke for himself. 'The poor have no friends,' someone in the crowd said. 'Only rats.' (*TFR* 1992, 123). The reactions point to a sense of unified vision the inhabitants have come to possess. They reflect indirect forms of resistance to politicians' lies and promises they will never keep.

Serious and tragic as the post-colonial situation may seem, Okri employs the technique of playfulness and punto ridicule the colonial experience and its neo-colonial and post-colonial fallouts, as well as the displaced and eternally wandering post-colonial man. For instance, there is an element of playfulness in the way the people react to the political campaigns of The Party of the Rich. This is seen in the mocking comments that are made following each of the amplified utterances of the Campaign Manager. The stylistic device used by the writer is drawn from drama as a statement is made, is interrupted and commented upon in the manner of a repartee. A repartee is “a quick and witty reply, a succession or interchange of clever retorts: amusing and usually light sparring with words and adroitness and cleverness in reply.” (Merriam- Webster online dictionary) Indeed, all the ingredients of the concept delineated by the Meriam Webster Dictionary are there: amusement, lightness, and skill or wit as in the following excerpt:

‘IF You VOTE FOR US...’
 ‘... we are finished,’ someone added.
 ‘... WE WILL FEED YOUR CHILDREN...’
 ‘... lies.’ ‘... AND WE WILL BRING YOU GOOD ROADS...’
 ‘... which the rain will turn into gutters...’
 ‘... AND WE WILL BRING ELECTRICITY...’
 ‘... so, you can see better how to rob us!’ ‘... AND WE WILL BUILD SCHOOLS...’
 ‘... to teach illiteracy! (TFR 1992, 123 emphasis in original)

Here, the mocking voices of the people that count the promises of politicians suggest the insincerity of the promises given. What the excerpt conveys is a determination on the part of the inhabitants never to take what politicians say for granted, experience has shown them the truth and they will stick to it. Their scepticism is not just expressed verbally as they tend to fight back if they are provoked physically. There is a first case in point where they react to aggression by defending themselves. One is reported by the photographer about how women in the market are capable of

fighting back assault. The photographer immortalizes that moment of instinctive everyday resistance when he recounts his artistic exploits to Azaro saying that he “took photographs of women at the market being attacked by thugs.” (TFR 1992, 232) The thugs in question are the mercenaries hired by the politicians to subdue the population.

The second instance occurs when a woman among the crowd is knocked over by the politicians’ van. The spontaneous reaction of the crowd is immediate as they started to throw stones and got ready to punish the doers in a collective movement that displays human instinct and a common unplanned reaction as the following passage clearly demonstrates:

The crowd surged to the front of the van, preventing it from moving. The thugs jumped down and whipped the people, the photographer frenziedly took pictures, and the people went on stoning the side windows till they gave completely and then they threw rocks at the men handing out garri. The men shouted; blood appeared on their faces; the politician appealed for calm; someone in the crowd cried;

‘Stone them! Another said:

‘BURN THE VAN!’ (TFR 1992, 154 emphasis in original)

Another instance of playfulness and pun is seen in the chants of the political thugs who unleashed mayhem on the neighbourhood at night:

‘Kill the photographer’

‘Beat the photographs out of him!’ ‘Finish him off!’

‘Bind him.’

‘Blind our enemies!’ ‘Destroy them!’ ‘Teach them a lesson.’ ‘Show them power!’ ‘Break their fingers.’ ‘Crack their heads!’

‘Crush the photographer.’

‘And leave his body in the street.’ ‘For mocking our party.’

‘Our power!’

‘Our Leader!’ (TFR 1992, 179)

The counter-chant and the attack of people are also very humorous:

'Fight them back!
'Fight for your freedom!' 'Stone them!
'They poisoned us with milk.' 'And words'
'And promises!
'And they want to rule our country!' 'Our lives!' 'And now they attack us!' 'On
our own street!
'Fight them without fear!' (180-181)

Though one is prompted to laugh at the comic way it is related, the seriousness of the incident is, nevertheless, foregrounded. To a large extent, it reflects the neo-colonial domination tendency of African leaders who practice leadership by force, and the revolutionary tendency of the masses of postcolonial societies. What the passages quoted above further show is the unrelenting will of the crowd to refuse subjugation and therefore to display a courageous form of physical resistance that remains instinctive and an example of a common destiny. The van is destroyed we are told, burned down completely by the inhabitants. Beyond their victory over the politicians and their intimidation, there is the ultimate regaining of the self and the territory. This is expressed poetically in the narrator's concluding remark on the sense of ending of the bloody episode when he says, "[t]he inhabitants of the street regained the night." (*TFR* 1992, 182) The regaining of the night is symbolically the regaining of their voice, the voice of the people, or as the narrator says elsewhere, the inhabitants of the compound.

The burning of the politicians' van has become a symbol of resistance as it is watched, scrutinized, weighed by the people. It has become their badge of resistance and the token of a gained tenacity, one that has been built up instinctively, in unison rather than by planning.

For the first time in our lives *we as a people* had appeared in the newspapers. We were *heroes in our own drama*, heroes of our *own protest*. There were pictures of us, *men and women and children*, standing helplessly round heaps of the politicians' milk. There were pictures of us *raging, attacking the van, rioting against the cheap methods of politicians, humiliating the thugs of politics, burning their lies*. The photographer's pictures had been given great prominence on the pages of the

newspaper and it was even possible to recognize our squashed and poverty-ridden faces on the grainy newsprint. There were news stories about the bad milk and an editorial about *our rage*. We were astonished that something we did with such *absence of planning*, something that we had done in such a small corner of the great globe, could gain such prominence. Many of us spent the evening identifying ourselves amongst the welter of rough faces. (TFR 1992, 156 - *emphasis added*)

Okri's people act as one in times of crisis with no prior planning. Men, women and children of the compound, with "such absence of planning" have gained prominence because of their fierce resistance against "the cheap methods of politicians." What has to be emphasized in this instance is the sense of resistance, resilience, fortitude and the sense of humour and positivity while facing life's calamities.

In "The Famished Road After Postmodernism: African Modernism and The Politics of Subalternity" Mark Mathuray focuses on the unplanned riots Okri presents in the first two books of the *Famished Road*; riots, which he argues "in Fanon's terms, represent the manifestation of the spontaneous rebellion of the lumpenproletariat." (Mathuray 2015, 1114) The lumpenproletariat refers to "that horde of starving men, uprooted from their tribe and from their clan, [which] constitutes one of the most spontaneous and the most radically revolutionary forces of a colonized people." (*The Wretched of the Earth* 2001, 129) Fanon also argued that the lumpenproletariat could not be excluded by the revolutionary movements in colonized countries, because it constitutes both a "counterrevolutionary" and a "revolutionary potential." However, being ignorant and desperate class, the lumpenproletariat is liable to be co-opted by counterrevolutionary forces. Therefore, he argued, education is "a historic necessity" for the dispossessed masses and it is central to revolutionary strategy. "Now the political education of the masses is seen to be a historic necessity." "To hold a responsible position in an underdeveloped country is to know that, in the end, everything depends on the education of the masses, on the raising of the level of thought, and on what we are too quick to

call ‘political teaching’.” (*The Wretched of the Earth* 2001, 137;196)

In one of the riots, the landlord, who represents the Party of the Rich, “like a magician” hands out bowls of milk “to the great surging mass of people” of the semi-urban slums. The action quickly descends into complete chaos: [T]he crowd converged round the van, arms outstretched, and the rush for free milk broke into a frenetic cacophony. The crowd shook the van, voices clashed in the air, children cried out under the crush, hands clawed at the sacks, and the frenzy became [...] alarming. (*TFR* 1992, 146) The object of Okri’s narrative is “the wretched of the earth” to borrow from Fanon or the ordinary people, how they suffer, what they do to survive, and how they inscribe their resistances are the major concerns of his trilogy. Like Azaro’s mother and father, the *lumpenproletariat*, are, as Fanon claims in “Spontaneity: Its Strength and Weakness,” “landless peasants [...] who leave the country districts, [...] rush toward the towns, crowd into tin-shack settlements, and try to make their way into the ports and cities founded by the colonial domination,” and it is “within this mass of humanity, this people of the shanty towns, [...], that the rebellion will find its urban spearhead.” (*The Wretched of the Earth* 2001, 110, 128) Mathuray argues that Okri attempts “to find another source for the potential realization of the dreams of decolonization, *i.e.* in the spontaneous rebellions of the subaltern, the only form of political intervention available to them.” (Mathuray 2015, 1116) Although the politics of nationalism and the hopes embedded in the compound people’s spontaneous rebellion, collapse, their collapse is not permanent, there is always light at the end of the tunnel. Eventually, Okri, through Dad’s visions, seems to opt for the utopian promises of justice, beauty and truth. In Book Eight, we are told that a great transformation is going to take place and “that new forces were being born to match the demands of the age.” (*TFR* 1992, 496) The compound people should not lose hope, they should “[r]esume [their] struggle” (*TFR* 1992, 500) and fight the oppressive forces so that they can change their harsh reality and carve out space for themselves.

3. MUM: FROM OBEDIENCE TO RESISTANCE

Mum has transformed from an obedient and subservient to a resistant and protesting character. She plays a central role in her small family. She is constantly seen as working at home and the market. She makes unrelenting efforts to comfort her husband and son and to help provide them with whatever they need. The fact that she is portrayed as a calm, self-confident character implies that she has principles and abides by them. Her resistance turns around the vicissitudes of life, a self-conscious and firm belief in the potential of the individual to clear a space for him/ herself in the turbulent moments of the various stages the nation has gone through. Her attitude towards politics is mixed with carelessness and wise interaction. Her silence is indicative of her sense of indifference vis-à-vis what her city is going through as when the landlord threatens to throw off tenants who do not share his political bias. “I have told this to all my tenants. Anybody who wants to live in my house, under this roof that I built with my own hands, should vote for my party. Did you hear me?” (*TFR* 1992, 198) The reader is told that “Mum did not nod. She stared grimly at the twitching candle.” (*TFR* 1992, 198) Her coldness and irresponsiveness do not betray her fear. In fact, they may be interpreted as a self-contained indifference akin to refusal rather than acceptance of the diktat of the landlord.

Mum is the wisest character in the trilogy. Her measured actions and words single her out as a pragmatic strong and wise character much needed in the tumultuous events the trilogy is representing. When in front of the landlord’s threats of using his guys to intimidate them and even put their lives in danger, Azaro urges Mum to run away, first she laughs. Her laughter sums up a whole attitude culminating in her serenity and resilience. She sees the futility of their enterprise and sarcastically says “The worst they can do is kill us.” (*TFR* 1992, 228) Come what may she seems to be saying as one cannot run from ones’ destiny. Her readiness to die is in no way synonymous with despair. It is rather her wise preparedness for the worst rather than blind submission to the

whims of corrupt politicians. Resistance is not a matter of words that oppose the enemy. It is a way of life.

The sense of resistance displayed by Mum and the compound women is subtle and seemingly simple, but it is what Scott has termed the ‘everyday’ form of resistance, one that does not rest on abstract thoughts. It is everyday ordinary forms of asserting the will to live, which is the greatest form of resistance to despair and subjugation. In *Ben Okri: Towards the Invisible City*, Fraser observes the significance change Mum has gone through from “subservient and maternal in volume one” she turns into “the mainstay of the family.” (Fraser 2002, 75) Her development is followed along with several episodes in *The Famished Road* and *Songs of Enchantment*. Ben Okri marks the apex of her existence: the strike for Independence that she organizes soon after Dad is released from prison.

I hear of Mum leading an organization of women, gathering them from the streets. The women drew other women, all of them lean with undernourishment, their children ill, their husbands listless under the pressures of the days. I heard that Mum led the women from one police station to another, with newspaper photographs following them everywhere they went. At bus stops and market-places Mum called on the women of the unborn nation to stage a mighty strike, and to protest for Independence. (IR 1998, 34)

Mum assumes the legendary status by fighting the police in a clash between them and the slum dwellers. Azaro’s mother’s violence is directed at an oppressive system.

Mum’s photograph is paraded in the newspapers as an enemy of the postcolonial powers. For this reason, she is constantly harassed by thugs. But she puts up a bold resistance. In one instance, she beats up three thugs. She was ejected from her stall in the market because of harassment. Mum and the women of the compound are poor but honest, fighting against corruption and injustice. Their spiritual integrity is not affected by their economic circumstance.

Mum’s has mixed feelings towards the beggars: she pities them for their wretched lives and is willing to help them somehow but

she is disgusted by their filth, do not prevent her from taking a firm stand in Helen's favour when Madame Koto accuses the girl of being a thief and has her flogged:

Mum went to [Madame Koto] and said:

'Tell them to stop. You don't know who that girl is.' 'She is a thief.'

'She is not a thief.'

Anca Maier argues that "Mum's courage to confront Madame Koto, and through her, the ruling class that she represents directly shows the resourcefulness that lies in the marginal." (*Ben Okri: Between Reality and Fantasy* 2013, 141) Mary Rogers claims that our identity "comprises inconsistencies and paradoxes. Such lapses of consistency, inevitable in the selves we fashion, are the stuff of resistance. In those inconsistencies are the resources for choosing marginality." (*Contemporary Feminist Theory* 1998, 372) Maier argues that "Mum's marginality means her refusal to conform to the requirements of a Centre, whether that Centre is the colonial power, the ruling class or a corrupt regime." (*Ben Okri: Between Reality and Fantasy* 2013, 142) She goes on to argue that through her protest and resistance, Mum, the marginal, brings marginality to life. "By throwing away the wig and the blue glasses that she wears at Madame Koto's party, the signs that place her within the circle controlled by Madame Koto (the Centre), Mum deliberately disobeys the rules of the Centre. Now, she is free to make her own choice." (Maier 2013, 143) This reflects Mum's way of leaving behind her dependence on a regime that oppresses her and ventures towards autonomy that "concerns self-governance; it requires getting clear about what one wants and then acting on that clarity." (*Contemporary Feminist Theory* 1998, 365) This episode reflects Mum's resistance in words and action. Okri, through Mum, Dad, and Azaro, denounces the corruption of politicians and reinforces the idea that it can be fought back despite the risks by those who are honest and hope that, one day, justice will triumph.

4. DAD: THE CHAMPION OF THE PEOPLE

Dad has tremendous importance in Okri's trilogy as the champion of the people. His new boxing profession has a symbolic meaning. "He is literally the champion of the people, fighting against all the forces of corruption, exploitation and evil." (Emenyonu 2011, 16) Dad is very articulate about the sense of resistance to all sorts of things. He says no to poverty, humiliation and passivity. At times, he is represented as a bully, a "trouble-maker" when he is exasperated by some people's attitudes. Overall, his sense of resistance stretches over almost everything in his life. When the Landlord comes, with his three muscular men, to take rent from Dad, he described Dad as a "trouble-maker" but Mum defending her husband responds "[m]y husband is strong, but he is not a troublemaker." (*TFR* 1992, 198) To the landlord who wants to impose the subjugation of every tenant in the compound, he is the one who does refuse any form of despotism and he is adamant about affirming his opposition. In a conversation between him and Mum, Azaro tells about Dad's position. He does not only have a clear position, but he also wants to declare it bluntly saying that he is not a "coward." When his wife tries to reason with him over keeping what he thinks for himself, he curses the landlord and his spies repeating that "there is nothing to fear" (*TFR* 1992, 203) from anyone.

His most articulate pronouncement in relation to the threats of the landlord is faced by a clear-cut stance: "What right has the landlord to bully us, to tell us who we vote for, eh? Is he God? Even God can't tell us who to vote for. Don't be afraid. We may be poor, but we are not slaves." (*TFR* 1992, 203) the issue is not just about the political question of who to vote for. It is more about resisting views, ideas, suggestions, advice, and diktats in the boldest manner. Dad follows a logic that is special to his character and which consists of obeying only what he thinks is right and resisting and rejecting that which he sees as wrong. His resistance finds its origins in his dignity and courage.

Dad often uses force either to make a point or to defend his principles and interests. He is ready to fight the police over the payment of the rent and to cause a riot in the opening page of the trilogy. He is behind the fight that grew into a riot as the compound inhabitants had to face the police, fought them fiercely with Dad as the deliberate non-appointed leader of the pack. We are told that he “was such a dervish of fury that it took six policemen to subdue him.” (TFR 1992, 10) Dad will be often seen fighting to survive. He fights thugs, the landlord, Madame Koto’s girls, politicians, would be boxers, and members of his own family. One may argue that Dad is the symbol of physical and material resistance or it may rather signify armed resistance.

He is inclined to wrestle and to punch, to bully and to look for trouble. Dad uses force to enforce a worldview where fairness and the sense of justice prevail. For him, boxing is just not a sport, although he seems to enjoy it. He trains quite hard to win because to win is to secure a decent living for his family. Dad becomes the only man in the ghetto to openly oppose the Party of the Rich. This opposition angers his landlord and store owners affiliated with the Party of Rich.

In the third most important and deadly phase, and amidst these battles, Dad has already become a boxer and taken the symbolic name of Black Tyger; his first fight opposed him to the ghost of Yellow Jaguar, a famous boxer who died three years before. Dad defeated the Yellow Jaguar. The fame Black Tyger earns after defeating the Yellow Jaguar lifted him to the status of an old African hero who turned defeat into victory for the community. His fight against the Green Leopard is communal because the latter is a fearful thug used to spread terror in the streets of the ghetto and is said to be on the payroll of the Party of the Rich. Dad’s victory over the Green Leopard is celebrated as the victory of the poor and oppressed over the self-serving politicians. Dad goes through a psychological transformation in the final phase. He becomes aware of his aloneness; he realizes that an individual alone cannot defeat the corrupt and greedy politicians of postcolonial Africa: “But it was

when people took to bringing their problems to him, when they asked him for money, for advice on everything from how to get their children admitted to hospital to how to get books for their youngsters, that Dad realized he couldn't be a visible or an invisible Head of State just by himself." (*TFR* 1992, 411) Through Dad's awareness of the inability of an individual to change the conditions of people, Okri is appealing to all the oppressed people to rise and unite against their oppressors, because the *status quo* will not end on its own. For him, no oppression ends unless the oppressed rises against his oppressor.

5. AZARO'S RESISTANCE TO THE VOICES FROM THE SPIRIT WORLD

In the trilogy, we see Azaro actively resisting the voices from the spirit world that would summon him back. Eustace Palmer shows the importance of "demonstra(ing) the narrator/protagonist's (Azaro) gradual development, particularly as he struggles to resist the attempts of his spirit companions to entice him to return" when teaching Okri's trilogy. (*Teaching African Literature Today* 2011, 11) The father, mother, and spirit-child Azaro act as figures of resistance to the political and social oppression happening around them. The bonds between Dad and Mum and Azaro grow tighter—and in many ways, what follows in the rest of the trilogy is a concentrated and often successful act of resistance. Azaro is the embodiment of almost all types of resistance in the trilogy. He resists the wish of the spiritual world to snatch him back from the earthly life he is intent on living. He sometimes resists his family's wishes, Madame Koto's exploitation and the rest of the compound people whenever he does not feel they go along with his desires.

Everything is told from Azaro's perspective like the rotten politics in the city and the ensuing violence. The resistance of inhabitants is described through the measures they have taken to protect themselves and therefore to resist the invasion of the thugs:

We knew that the troubles were incomplete, that the reprisals had been deferred to another night, when we would have forgotten. The inhabitants of the street, frightened and angry, set up vigilantes. They were armed with knives, clubs, and dane guns. We waited for new forms of iron to fall on us. We waited for a long time. Nothing happened the way we expected. (TFR 1992, 182)

The passage may be read as a form of organized resistance, but it is one without leadership. It is a small compound with some families whose main drive is to protect themselves against invaders. It is a collective social instinct of survival and remains part of what Scott has called “the everyday forms of resistance.”

Azaro cannot separate himself from the rest of the community or the photographer. His description of the violence puts him in the middle of all of it as when he recounts those moments of confrontation:

And words.’ ‘And promises.’ ‘And they want to rule our country!’ ‘Our lives!’ ‘And now they attack us!’ ‘On our own Street!’ ‘Fight them without fear!’ Machetes burst into flame. Chants were reversed in syllables. Spells were broken on the jagged teeth of night. The antagonists attempted a last desperate rally. ‘Pour petrol on the house!’ ‘Burn it down!’ ‘Burn out the photographer!’ ‘Burn out Azaro!’ (TFR 1992, 181)

The confrontation is unavoidable between the forces of evil and the courageous people of the compound. Azaro’s narrative does not strive for objectivity as much as it points to the question of what is right (people defending their compound) vs what is ugly because it is wrong: the burning of the photographer’s dwelling and even of Azaro himself). Resistance is legitimized by self-defence as in someone’s rallying cry “‘Fight them back!’” “‘Fight for your freedom!’” “‘Stone them!’” “‘They poisoned us with milk.’” (181) Self-defence is mingled with the right to be free which elevates such acts to the status of noble ones.

The greatest form of resistance on the part of Azaro remains his stubborn rejection of going to live in the spiritual world. He calls it rebellion which rebellion implies transgression of authority: “I was

a spirit- child rebelling against the spirits, wanting to live the earth's life and contradictions... I wanted the liberty of limitations.” (TFR 1992, 487) On the one hand, the very act of rebelling against superior powers is an act of courage that sends the reader to the deeds of great rebels. On the other hand, the stature of Azaro as a rebel can only match that of a mythical figure like Prometheus. In the two cases, there is a war between the world of the superior spiritual powers (Greek Gods and Zeus,) and the world of the mortals. Keywords turn around defiance, love of humanity, suffering, life and death, and endurance. Azaro is the child “who didn't want to be born, but who will fight with death.” (TFR 1992, 8) Like Prometheus, he made a choice.

Azaro's choice has led him into trouble as the spirits played several tricks on him trying to kill him. We are told that one day they called him using his mother's voice and when he crossed the street he was almost killed as a car was next to running him over. They also caused him to fall in a gutter and was lucky to be saved by a bicyclist passing by. Despite all this, he persisted till the end defying death which he calls the dread as when he says, “the visitation of the dread didn't change our lives in any particular way.” (TFR 1992, 187) Azaro explains the nature of spirit children. The first quality is their resistance to being born and their capacity to will their own death. This is especially clear with Ade whose slow death is witnessed throughout *The Famished Road* and is finally completed in *Songs of Enchantment*.

Azaro explains the reasons for choosing to stay on in the world of the living despite the suffering that awaits him. After being shown images of the dread and suffering that awaits him in the earthly world, Azaro remains adamant: “Then they showed me images which I couldn't understand. They showed me a prison, a woman covered with golden boils, a long road, pitiless sunlight, a flood, an earthquake, death. ‘Come back to us,’ they said. ‘We miss you by the river. You have deserted us. If you don't come back, we will make your life unbearable.’” (TFR 1992, 7) However, Azaro starts to shout daring his companions to do their worst. Indeed, he remains

resilient in most of his encounters with his spirit companions who try their utmost to lure him back to the spirit world.

6. ADE: THE EPITOME OF ARMED RESISTANCE

Ade seems to advocate armed resistance. The conflict between good and evil is declared through Ade, who dares to challenge Madam Koto and her voracious powers alone. His resistance to Madam Koto's evil powers is best manifested in his constant refusal to ride in her car. Moreover, Ade is the only child who schemes and dares to stab Madam Koto with a knife in an attempt to kill her and her wicked abiku triplet, which, as it has been stated previously, represent Nigeria's self-division. Ade's stabbing of Koto's belly with a knife is an act that symbolizes armed resistance.

At this historical moment, which can be considered as a turning point in Okri's trilogy and an epiphany, Azaro realizes Ade's patriotism and sees it as "large and brilliant, distinct in the effulgent shape of a diamond lion." (*SOE* 1993, 193) Although Ade failed to kill Madam Koto and her abnormal "abiku trinity", he can still be considered an icon of armed resistance of various forms of oppression. Trying for Ade is half the battle or maybe as he says, "my destiny was not to be an assassin, but a catalyst. The tears of a child dying of hunger in a remote part of the country can start a civil war. I am the tears of a child. I am the country crying for what is going to happen in the future. My new life is calling me. I will always be your friend and helper, but you won't recognise me." (*SOE* 1993, 196) his "destiny was not to be an assassin, but a catalyst." (*SOE* 1993, 195) A catalyst is a person that triggers an event and stimulates people to act. Later, we learn that Ade was run over and killed by Madam Koto's car. Ade's death can be explained as an act of resistance in the Living world but as a return to the world of spirits and a reunion with his spirit companions. Ade's scheme to assassinate Madam Koto is an unprecedented act of resistance and bravery because the ghetto people have been traumatized by Madam

Koto who keeps haunting them in their dreams and nightmares. Ade, through his valiant act of resistance, was able to bring change to his oppressed people by assaulting the epitome of evil, Madam Koto.

7. JEREMIAH: PHOTOGRAPHY AND RESISTANCE

Jeremiah, the photographer, is the embodiment of a complex form of resistance and opposition. He is rather a form of artistic affirmation of the self and the rejection of injustice by the constant search for truth through documentation. Jeremiah's role in Okri's trilogy is significant because of his recording of historical reality through the eyes of a first-hand witness. He is a "complex and challenging figure who shares with radical postcolonial the perception of oppression and a commitment to resisting it." (Cooper 1998, 98) When he was beaten up by the politicians' thugs, he wisely reacts to Azaro's enquiry about his condition when he says, "nothing that a man cannot bear." (*TFR* 1992, 189) He also affirms that he will continue to fight for truth and justice. Truth is conveyed to the eyes of the beholder of the photographs he takes which documents the inhabitants' resistance to the unmerciful assaults of the politicians.

One of the rallying cries against the photographer calls for blinding him: "Kill the photographer!" "Beat his photographs out of him!" "Finish him off!" "Blind him." "Blind our enemies!" (*TFR* 199, 179) He is the enemy because he stands witness to their atrocities. The call for blinding him expresses the wish to eradicate a dark page of the history of the nation and the photographer is that embarrassing truth-teller that corrupt unmerciful politicians want to eradicate. One is tempted to see the historian in him, one who fills in the gaps in the national narratives of post-independence. His testimonies are recuperated by national newspapers, we are told, and his fame has grown well beyond the compound. He is one of his own people, a symbol of their resistance and a son who finds refuge

in the narrator's home. Jeremiah's resistance to the forces of evil is endorsed, shared, and finds recompense in the friendly hospitable manner of welcome he is offered. His resistance is recognized as their "everyday" form of resistance the ordinary people are displaying on common everyday occasions.

8. CONCLUSION

To conclude, this paper has explored the everyday forms of resistance in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* trilogy. It is found that the tradition of resistance is carried by the ordinary people, Okri's protagonists like Dad, Mum, Azaro, and the photographer. Their resistance is best shown in their persistent struggle against all oppressive forces and their refusal to conform to the requirements of a centre, whether that centre is the colonial power, the ruling class or a corrupt regime. Their resistance is what James Scott calls the "everyday forms of resistance", which means that the characters themselves are not necessarily regarding it as "resistance" at all, rather a normal part and way of their life and personality. These acts of resistance, in action and words, are part of the characters' ordinary everyday life – in the sense of being integrated into their way of life. Therefore, the paper has analysed everyday resistance as being part of the everyday, and that part as being an expression of resistance to power. Although these everyday acts of resistance fall short on achieving their intended outcome, for Scott the intent is a more relevant indicator than the outcome. The protagonists' lack of education, the fact that their acts of everyday resistance lack organization and planning and that they are not politically articulated can be reasons why they failed to achieve their intended outcome. This is evident, in Dad's thoughts, about the future country, which might reflect Okri's own imaginations about Nigeria. Although some of them sound too idealistic, the Nigerians should consider what Okri offers seriously. In Dad's conjured Nigeria of which he is the "invisible ruler", everyone would have

the highest education, [...] everyone must learn music and mathematics and at least five world languages, [...] every citizen must be completely aware of what is going on in the world, be versed in tribal, national, continental, and international events, history, poetry, and science; [a country] in which delegations from all the poor people would have regular meetings with the Head of State; and in which there would be elections when there were more than five spontaneous riots in any given year.” (TFR 1992, 409)

Such meditations send the reader to what the colonial period has denied to Nigerians and which the latter seems to be bent on reclaiming. Okri advocates the idea that successful resistance must be led by educated people, it should be well organized and politically articulated. He declares these ideas in an interview with Priyanka Dasgupta by saying “It doesn’t take much to give someone education. I was thinking about what is it that society needs most to transform itself. I would say that every single person should know how to read, write and think logically. They should understand their history, geography, basic biology and mathematics. Everyone should have education to a certain acceptable standard. Then, it is possible to raise people up to become decent citizens. (*Times of India* n.p.n) Like Okri, Dad talks about “becoming a politician and bringing freedom and prosperity to the world and free education to the poor” (TFR 199, 467). Although Dad’s achievements are meagre, he demonstrates some progress within a limited period.

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