Theorizing the Àbíkú/ọgbanje motif in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*

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Introduction

Nigerian literature has recurrently portrayed perennial forms of scatology, leadership ineptitude, military coups, and disillusionment. These problems marring our progress remain extant in Nigeria and most African countries, as represented in contemporary Nigerian and African literature. As the narrator in Wale Okediran's *Tenants of the House* describes it, "nothing had changed" (71). This encapsulates the problem the African continent faces with its political class —a form of internal hegemony that one can refer to as "internal colonialism." This internal hegemony is based on the privileges that the political class enjoys to the detriment of the masses. A close examination of this relationship can lead to a comparison of the Àbíkú/ọgbanje phenomenon or motif deployed by writers like J. P. Clark-Bekederemo, Wole Soyinka, Ben Okri, Debo Kotun, among others.

The "Àbíkú/ ọgbanje motif" is described by Biodun Jeyifo as "the warped transmigration of souls" (73). It entails the recycling of souls between the spirit world and the world of the living. Jeyifo, interpreting Soyinka's works, describes Soyinka's reformation of this motif as the "Abiku occurrence of a military coup d'état in Greece, the birthplace of Western democracy" (73). He believes Soyinka suggests that the "Àbíkú/ ọgbanje phenomenon" has manifested in "different climates of art and politics in the modern world" (73). On a specific note, Mounira Soliman describes the Abiku phenomenon as "quite popular in West Africa among the different ethnic groups of Nigeria, particularly the Yoruba, the Igbo and the Ijos (sic)" (130). It is about a child's pact with the spiritual world to traumatize any family in which they find themselves. Soliman describes it as "a recurrent cycle of birth, death and rebirth" (151). Several scholars have traced the concept to different origins, but the recycling nature of the supposed spiritual child remains dominant. This Àbíkú/ ọgbanje trauma is analogous to what Ayo Kehinde delineates as the "common issues in postcolonial literary works which include tyranny, corruption and other forms of oppression" (229). African writers like Okediran and Habila utilize the Abiku phenomenon to project different sociopolitical agendas at different times in the history of their countries (Soliman 151).

Thus, the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje motif has become a prominent recurrent way of portraying the internal political hegemony that Africans endure at the hands of their leaders, and can be systematized. This model can also account for the various components inherent in the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje motif which can be replicated in the present sociopolitical order and its representations in Nigerian/African literary expressions. This is in consonance with Ademola Dasylva's argument that a "society's culture produces its own literary traditions from which naturally … evolves organic literary theory or set of theories" (10).

Examining the Àbíkú/ọgbanje motif from past to present

Myth and literature are inseparable entities as one has always been used as a vehicle for the other. Wole Soyinka explains myth as arising "from man's attempt to externalise and communicate his inner intuitions" (3). A deconstruction of Soyinka's view of myth reveals the convergence between myth and literature. Niyi Osundare connects myth and poetry to man's creativity and has shown the ability of man to "invent and construct images and beliefs to serve as an alternative reality" (91). This alternative reality is necessary in man's formulation and construction of the spiritual world which presumably has control over the physical world. Northrop Frye adds his perspective that "the structural principles of literature are as closely related to mythology" (134). Frye expounds on how myths are displaced in literature to achieve literary ends. Hence, the appropriation of myths as vehicles of literary creation has persisted in various geographical spaces, and African literature is no exception.

In Nigerian literature, one of the most utilized myths is the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje phenomenon. Soliman opines that this appropriation, which is a part of West African oral tradition, is not an "act of anthropological retrieval of culture" but "more of a sociopolitical agenda" (149, 150). This means that the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje motif has a sociopolitical implication captured in our literary imagination. In corroborating this stance, Moussa Issifou notes that "the abiku phenomenon exists in other parts of Africa but under a different name" (112). He gives the example of his ethnic group —Tem in central Togo. Chinelo Eze also states that "in Efik, it is called Mfumfum, while in Edo, it is called Igbakhun." Thus, Douglas McCabe claims that "the corpus of Nigerian literature contains at least thirty works in which Abiku or Ogbanje play some sort of pivotal roles" (45). Authors that have harnessed this phenomenon include Chinua Achebe, J.P. Clark-Bekederemo, Wole Soyinka, Buchi Emecheta, Ben Okri, and Debo Kotun.

Christopher Ernest Werimo Onma's thesis "Childhood in contemporary Nigerian fiction" convincingly refers to Jones in an *African Literature Today*'s special edition:

> Jones traces the Abiku/Ogbanje motif from Ezinma the ogbanje in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart,* through the poems of J.P clark and Soyinka, to Ben Okri's Trilogy *The Famished Road, Songs of Enchantment* and *Infinite Riches*. (18)

This aligns with Soliman's historical study mentioned earlier. In consequence, this backdrop is to assert that a wide range of literature exists based on the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje phenomenon.

Àbíkú/ ọgbanje is rooted in reincarnation. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi explains that "the Yoruba refer to the denizen back from the chthonic region and born again, as, abiku, [while] the Igbo call the living icon Ogbanje" (663). This means that the Yoruba word for the child that comes, dies and comes back is Abiku, while the Igbo refer to it as Ogbanje. Sunday T.C Ilechukwu, quoting his earlier work, explains Ogbanje in Igbo further as "meaning a repeater or one who comes and goes" (239). He calls it a "malignant form of reincarnation" (240). In "Intertextuality and the Contemporary African novel," Kehinde describes Abiku in Yoruba cosmology as "a child born to die again, come again, and die again in an unbroken cycle" (380). Osundare analyzes it linguistically as

A + bi + ku

One + born + (to) die (95)

and

A + ku + bi

One + dead + (to be) born (96)

McCabe corroborates this cyclic nature. Also, Christopher Okonkwo summarizes the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje concept as follows: 'Ogbanje' and 'abiku' are Igbo and Yoruba names respectively for a spirit-child or spirit-children who are said to die early only to be reborn again and again to the same mother' (653). The conceptual descriptions of the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje by different scholars point to its tendency to reincarnate and to maintain an "unbroken cycle" (Kehinde). This cyclical reincarnation is aided by a "hidden totem that binds the spirit to earth and the family it hunts" (Eze, n. p.).

McCabe aptly describes the Abiku's existential journey between the world of the living and the spiritual world as rooted in Ifa theory. First, two factions or worlds, the Egbe (the spirit world) and the Ile (the physical world), exist. The second is the pact between the child and the spirit world. The intention of the child in the physical world and its cyclic nature to achieve its aims is the third element. This indirectly provides a template for the sociopolitical metaphorical appropriation of the concept, but it must be added that only the 'reincarnation' aspect has been deployed more for sociopolitical interpretation. Maurice

O'Connor corroborates this notion in Wole Soyinka's use of Abiku in *A Dance of the Forest* to symbolize the cyclic nature of human history and Armah's pessimism about the rise and fall of the new-colony in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Equally, Ben Okri refers to the nation as an Abiku country which we contend is a misconception.

Ilechukwu relates a similar story about the Ogbanje, quoting Chinwe Achebe. She describes the intrigues of life from heaven to earth by the Ogbanje. She also identifies "(sky or Heavens) ruled by Chiukwu (Great God); Ala mmadu (the human or physical world); and Ala mmuo (world of spirits or the dead)" (240). The pact's intrigue is established between the world of the spirits and the prospective child whose destiny is changed to become an Ogbanje. Soliman gives a similar description, quoting Chidi Maduka (18) directly.

The Àbíkú/ ọgbanje motif has been reinvented as a trope in different literary capacities. These reinventions of the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje motif have become preponderant at both the literal and metaphoric levels, starting from J. P. Clark's "Abiku" and Wole Soyinka's "Abiku" to Ben Okri's Abiku Trilogy and Debo Kotun's *Abiku*. All these reinventions are based on predestination and reincarnation. This can be compared to the Self/Other hegemonic posture; the child and the spirit world are against the *Ile* (the physical world). J. P. Clark's "Abiku" and Wole Soyinka's "Abiku" are the literary works that popularize the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje concept. This is not to underestimate Achebe's earlier creation of Ezinma in *Things Fall Apart,* but it is believed that J.P. Clark and Wole Soyinka provided a better critical background to the concept.

Both poets published the first edition of their poem, "Abiku," in the "tenth number of Black Orpheus" (McCabe, 57). The two poems paint the pictures of what an Abiku is but in two different ways. J. P. Clark's poem is appealing and persuasive, while that of Soyinka is assertive and full of conceit. Osundare aptly examines the difference between Soyinka's Abiku and Clark's Abiku too. He states that "Clark presents Abiku as one that could be pleaded with … Soyinka portrays him as some anthropomorphic yet distant godling who revels in death as a weapon for human torture" (100). Osundare also schematizes the tenses Soyinka uses into past, present, and future to assert the regenerative nature of Abiku.

Jeyifo also extends the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje concept to the "politics in the modern world" in which the Abiku represents the "image … of a cruel mocking fate" (73). This brings us to the trope of the nation as an Abiku, as portrayed in Ben Okri's Trilogy. Scholars like O'Connor, Soliman, and Ikenna Kamalu have analyzed this trope which Kamalu refers to as "cultural metaphor" (21). Frye describes "myth as an art of implicit metaphorical identity." Thus, Kamalu believes Okri uses his text to create "new frames to reveal colonial and post-colonial experiences" (25).

Therefore, nations are conceived as metaphorical children in Ben Okri's texts. Okri in *The Famished Road* presents Azaro, a spirit-child, who is resolute on staying in the physical world. He presents him alongside the political decadence and the corruption that bedevil the country, presumably Nigeria. This corroborates David C. L. Lim's observation that Ben Okri pays attention to the "themes of corruption, military brutality and nationhood in his novels" (p. 60). Okri's *The Famished Road* runs a "child-nation" concurrently with a spirit-child —Azaro. He runs both a mythic space and a corporeal world of poverty, ghetto lives, political deceit and political corruption. Abiku, therefore, becomes a trope of a nation reincarnating. However, we argue that the political class is Abiku rather than the nation; the nation, on the other hand, metaphorizes the family which the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje bedevils.

In all these depictions of Àbíkú/ ọgbanje, some trends predominantly link these reinventions and portrayals to McCabe's and Ilechukwu's framework. These are the constitutive elements of the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje myth which will inform the theorizing in this study. They are first the existence of the spiritual world and the physical world, and second the oscillation of the spirit child between both worlds. These constitutive elements are necessary for constructing frames that interrogate the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje phenomenon in Nigerian literature. Equally, writers like Clark, Soyinka, and Okri recognize these two worlds.

Kamalu presents a schematization of Okri's metaphorical episteme of the nation as an abiku. From Kamalu's perspective, the West is seen as the colonial parents. Considering the etymology of the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje motif, some salient questions should be asked to deconstruct the nation as a child, perhaps to interrogate this schematization. How appropriate is the concept of the nation as a child—going and coming? Where does one place the spirit world in this metaphoric ontology? How appropriate is the conceptualization of the colonial West as the parent? Where is the place of the "national bourgeoisie" who has continued to inflict pains on the nation and is analogous to the *Ile* concept? Though the principle of reincarnation has been employed in seeing the nation as a child, how appropriate is this position considering the group behind the nation's sickness? Ernest Emenyonu asserts that African writers battle with "rulers who stole the fruit of independence and dashed the hopes of the citizenry for sustainable progress and development in their new nation" (2). Similarly, in *An Image of Africa and the Trouble with Nigeria*, Achebe states that "the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership" (22). All these will be the premise for theorizing "the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje motif."

Also, the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje motif has been employed by magical realist writers as in Okri's works. Equally, the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje motif has been deployed as a springboard for memory, migrations and conversations between West Africa and the Americas (Ogunyemi and Newgas). Abiku as a trope of memory is related to the story behind Soyinka's writing of "Abiku." Soyinka's "Abiku" is believed to have been created out of nostalgia for home while he was studying in England. McCabe describes Soyinka's "Abiku" as composed by "an unknown, homesick, twenty-three-year-old, fledgling writer living in London, writhingly encountering racism and alienation" (58). Abiku, as a motif, therefore, becomes a reminder of home for the diasporic writer. A writer in a foreign land is like the spirit-child in the corporeal world who keeps remembering his spiritual home. This parallels the experience of Blacks in the New World. The New World to them is a foreign (physical) world, while their spiritual world is Africa. Critics have read Abiku traits in characters created by Black Diaspora writers (for example, Okonkwo's reading of Sula as Ogbanje/Abiku).

The trope of memory in the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje phenomenon leads to the trope of migrations. This explores African Americans and other displaced Blacks in the New World. Ogunyemi elucidates it "as a people's nostalgia" that "reinforces their resentment at being displaced" (666). Àbíkú/ ọgbanje itself is a migratory entity between two worlds. Thus, the using Àbíkú/ ọgbanje phenomenon as a trope of migration is not out of place, especially in this global transnational world. Furthermore, Ogunyemi delineates the African American relation to Africa as the "parent-child relationship with Africa … that identify diasporas as embroiled in the abiku-ogbanje phenomenon" (668). In essence, African Americans are in exile from their home as Africa. Henry Louis Gates Jr. describes African Americans' exilic relation with their homeland in his video series *Wonders of the African World*: Episodes 1-6. African Americans continue to search for their "roots" by coming to Africa to discover its various wonders. However, this search for the "roots" is not limited to African Americans; it also extends to Afro-Caribbeans. Scholars like Kamau Braithwaite have found time to come to Africa, their spiritual home. Derek Walcott has also represented his link to Africa in his works such as *A Far Cry from Africa*. Therefore, the Abiku-Ogbanje motif has become a mode of signifying Africa in African-American and African-Caribbean works. The Àbíkú/ ọgbanje discourse has equally been used as a framework for reading characters, especially in works of African Americans. In reading Toni Morrison's *Sula* as an Abik-Ogbanje, Okonkwo calls it "a critical divination." To Okonkwo (2004), Sula exhibits some "Ogbanje-Abiku peculiarities" (652). He names some traits that characterize her as Àbíkú/ ọgbanje. They include "her birthmark, insinuated supernaturality, dogged individualism, intractability vagrancy, malignancy, ostracising naming, short life…." (p. 653).

These traits are ontological features of Àbíkú/ ọgbanje as reviewed hitherto. Sula as a character is also seen as a mockery of boundary, space, and time. These features remind one of Azaro, who switches between the world of the living and the spirit world despite his resolution to stay in the world of the living. Hence, one can deploy diverse critical readings to systematize the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje motif.

Theorizing the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje motif: A critical and conceptual evaluation for sociopolitical reading

This study reinterprets the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje motif to account for the sociopolitical relationship in post-colonial societies, based on reincarnation (recurrence) in almost identical forms and the hegemonic child-parent relationship fostered by the spirit world. Myth intersects with literature and societies; such overlapping can be conceptualized to examine the representations of sociopolitical realities in Nigerian literature. These depictions chronicle and critique the hegemonic structural relationship which exists within most post-colonial nations. The "child" that enjoys the wealth of the "family/nation" and simultaneously inflicts pains on the nation allegorizes the political class in the postcolony. Emenyonu laments that

> [W]hat is in short supply is a crop of incorruptible statesmen and stateswomen who will not sell their country and its citizens to amass wealth and property in leading capital cities of the world at the expense of the much-needed developments at home. (4)

One can therefore interrogate the perception of the nation as an Abiku child. McCabe reveals that

> *Egbe* and *ile* are loaded terms in the content of Yoruba society and political history. *Ile* means not only one's current home and town of residence, but also one's entire patrilineage past and present and the ancestral city to which the lineage traces its historical origins. (48)

As averred above, *Ile* in its metaphorical, elaborated form, signifies the nation which at the microcosm level is the family; *Egbe* (club or spirit-world) sends the Abiku errant child to pillage the family. Therefore, the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje concept conceives the national bourgeoisie and the political elite as the Abiku pillaging the nation.

Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* and the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje Motif's Componential elements

Everything Good Will Come is Sefi Atta's debut novel. A migrant/ diaspora writer, she studied in the United Kingdom and the United States. She has an Ebira paternal background and a Yoruba maternal background. Her novels are migrant novels that typify what Kehinde and Joy Ebong Mbipom describe as the "discourse of motherland from the Diaspora" (68). This section, therefore, employs the Abiku concept to interrogate Atta's *Everything Good Will Come's* sub-textual historicity of the recycling military syndrome and hegemony in Nigeria, and to present the phenomenon's theorization for apprehending postcolonial sociopolitical realities. This historicity is connected to the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje myth, which has been explained as bandits recycling themselves in different forms to plague the family-nation/motherland. The argument is to draw a link between the military-political elite and the Abiku; not only this but also to connect the woes they foist on the nation to the trauma the family that houses the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje suffers. The explication of Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (*Everything*) is a form of epistemological proposal that every Nigerian text that depicts the sociopolitical hegemony of a minority over the majority has an Àbíkú/ ọgbanje syndrome (re)presented in it.

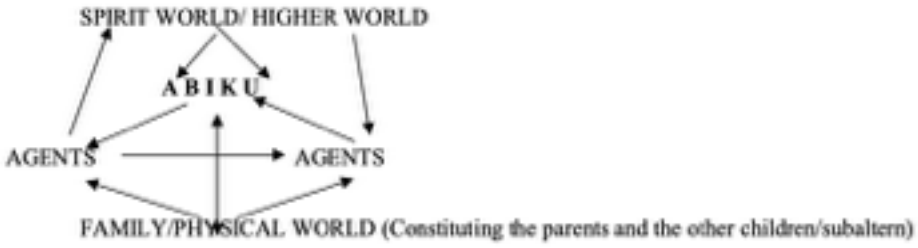
The historical background of the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje has its pattern and structural components. These are the underlying operative elements that determine the definitive use of the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje motif which is replicated consciously or unconsciously in literary works. These representations are based on the ontological events in societies. The elements include the Spirit world/the Higher World, the spirit-child (Àbíkú/ ọgbanje), the physical world/family, mediating agents like the Babalawos, and the Abiku trope which include reincarnation, predestination, errancy, among others. These elements constitute the appropriation of the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje motif, especially as relating to its sociopolitical implications in post-colonial literary representation. This theorizing which presents the constitutive elements and the re-evaluation of previous use of the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje motif accentuates Said's argument on the distinction between the "Orient" and the "Occident" (2) and the diverse deployment of the self/other binary in discourse. In the demystification of the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje motif, the higher/spirit world in the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje model metaphorically represents the West/Occident. Here, Said's position on the epistemological and powerful influence of the Occident over the Orient equals the knowledge and the influence of the Egbe (spirit world) over the Ile (Family/nation) in the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje mythology. The Egbe (Spirit-group) has power over the family (*Ile*) to send a Child (a political group in this case) to traumatize the family members.

Considering various literary and historical ontologies of post-colonial states, despots in post-colonial families/nations are most times aided secretly by the West to enjoy the natural resources of such states. This is analogous to the relationship between the *Egbe* (Spirit world), the Abiku-Child and the family/physical world.

The political class/national bourgeoisie has become the major problem that Achebe identifies as plaguing the nation and is, therefore, an ontological signification of the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje child. The political elite/national bourgeoisie are the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje that reincarnate to plunder the wealth of the nation. The political class and the citizenry's relation to it can therefore be compared to the Self/Other dialectics, which Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel conceptualizes as the Lord/ Slave bondage. The citizens are the subaltern suffering the hegemonic power/political corruption of a "minor self" –the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje. This relationship has been depicted in Nigerian literature and interrogated by critics.

In "Post-Independence Nigerian Literature and the Quest for True Political Leadership for the Nation," Kehinde enumerates some tropes which characterize the Abiku: "monumental incoherence, paradoxes, elephantine sociopolitical paralysis, corruption, intolerance, ineptitude, political subterfuge, treachery by a political elite, economic strangulation, crippling social morass and moral atrophy" (333). This interrogation establishes a nexus between the political class and the Abiku-child that dictates the Nigerian sociopolitical hegemonic structure. The citizens that suffer the reincarnation of the Abiku political class are the subaltern, while the family/physical world constitutes the parents and the other children. Equally, the image of the family projects the nation that suffers from the reincarnation of the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje political class.

The relationship between the different constitutive elements of the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje model is represented graphically as



The agents above can be described as the babalawos who mediate between the physical world/family and the Abiku for the destruction of the pact between the Abiku and the Spirit-world. The mediating agents in the world are those elements in post-colonial societies that

champion the course of the people to make the political class serve the family rather than serve itself and the "higher self" of the West. The presentation above re-evaluates the sociopolitical hegemonic situation in post-colonial Nigeria, and we will seek to justify this in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come.*

The historicity of the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje as a subtext in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*: The political class and the throes of the subaltern/family-nation

Sefi Atta's *Everything* is a novel of growth that describes Enitan's experiences in a family torn apart and a nation in shambles. Some critics, like Kehinde and Mbipom, Juliet Tenshak, among others, have interrogated the novel as a bildungsroman. Though much attention has been paid to the growth of Enitan from innocence to self-assertion, the tacit description of the historicity of a military-political group that recurs in different forms, but with the same motive, has received less attention. This historicity is done in tandem with the throes of the Subaltern. It thus becomes imperative to examine the Abiku subtext in Atta's *Everything* concerning the family-nation that suffers the pains of the milito-political corruption.

The military as a theme is not exclusive to Sefi Atta's narration. Writers that have interrogated the military and its political rule include Chinua Achebe, Helon Habila, and Debo Kotun. Tenshak describes the military as a subject that serves as "a recurring theme in Nigerian literature" (38). These representations have accentuated what M. Fadakinte describes as the force theory in the movement of thoughts relating to the concept of states. Fadakinte expounds the force theory as seeing the state "as the means by which a small number of people impose their will on a most reluctant majority" (565). The small number of people, allegorically, represents the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje that ought to serve the family-nation but suckles its milk dry and leaves its body fatigued. This picture is portrayed by Sefi Atta in *Everything*. Atta depicts subtextually the coming and going of the military-political class (Àbíkú/ ọgbanje) and the throes of the Subaltern/family-nation, namely the Nigerian state. The novel is divided into four parts: 1971, 1975, 1985 and 1995. These periods also mark the growth of Enitan from whose perspective a reader mostly views the nation. Enitan grows with the recycling of different military-political classes in different forms but with the same motive —to plunder the nation and leave the nation in disillusionment before the birth of another Àbíkú/ ọgbanje group.

Atta presents the first military coup her character remembers: "There was a military coup." This period signifies the death of an Àbíkú/ ọgbanje and the birth of a new one. As Enitan describes it,

"[o]ur head of state was overthrown. I watched as our new ruler made his first announcement on television" (69). The overthrow signifies death, while the enthronement of the new leader is similar to the birth of an Àbíkú/ ọgbanje to a family-nation that has been in dire need of a child to replace the dead one. The death of the child in this sense does not translate only to its physical death or overthrow; the death translates to the day it starts dashing the hope of the family by plundering it of its wealth. The plundered or stolen wealth of the family ought to be channelled to other sectors of the family. The birth referred to comes with new hope as Enitan's mother opines: "Let us give him a chance. He might improve things" (p. 69). This is the beginning of the historicity of Àbíkú/ ọgbanje in Atta's *Everything.* Will the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje stay, serve and save its Nigerian family-nation? No, it will not, because the situation persists till the end of the novel. Enitan's father comments: "that is what they do. The army have no place in government" (p. 69). Whether the army or the democrats, it is nearly the same Àbíkú/ ọgbanje changing forms to perpetrate the same evil.

McCabe illuminates a similar Àbíkú/ ọgbanje concept. Quoting Babalawo Ifatoogun, a senior Ifa diviner from the Oyo-Yoruba town of Ilobu, he explains that

> More precisely, abiku are an *egbe ara orun*, a "club" egbe of "heaven-people" (ara-orun) whose founding purpose is to siphon off riches from ile araye, the houses (ile) of the "world-people" (ara-aye). Abiku further the aims of their robber-band by using children as a cover for their criminal operation. Each abiku is born into an ile and poses as a child that is either sweet-natured and beautiful (and therefore likely to be lavished with good things) or sickly and disturbed (and therefore likely to be the beneficiary of expensive sacrifices). In such a way, the Abiku quickly accumulates money, cloth, food and livestock. Then, at a certain time and by a certain method prearranged secretly with its egbe, the abiku dies and takes the spiritual portion of its loot back to heaven. After dividing the spoils with its egbe, it prepares to re-enter the world and fleece the same or another ile. (46)

Hence, the military-political class torments the nation by siphoning its wealth to foreign lands.

For Atta, the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje is the military-political group or elite. The throes of the subaltern are inherent in the various sectors that constitute the organic body of the Nigerian family-nation. These include its people that are excluded from the "political game," a stifling economy, and decaying infrastructure, among others. All these sectors comprise the organic system of the family-nation that Atta describes in her novels. The depiction continues in the section "1985," with Enitan's narration:

> We had had two military governments since the summer of 1975. The first ended with the assassination of our head of state;

> the second in a transition to civilian rule still the news from home has not improved. (79)

The excerpt above stamps the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje on the political class, whether military or civilian, whom Enitan describes as "nothing but thieves" (79).

The depiction or historicizing of the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje continues as Atta presents "another military coup" (80) in 1983. The economy which is a sector in the family-nation is in a dire state, while members of the subaltern who have been excluded from the political circle bear the brunt. There are "those who were finding it difficult to pay their school fees" (81); the economic crisis "had become a recession" (81), among others. This is not different from the military picture painted by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in *Americanah*. A selected few enjoy the wealth of the nation at the expense of the majority. The political class enjoys "parties, embezzlements" (81) at the expense of the subaltern and the family-nation. This brings to mind Timothy Mobolade's explication that "it is the intention of every Abiku … to return affluent to its abode after having turned its parents into wretched couple" (62).

The Abiku, therefore, becomes the spoilt child on whom the family lavishes all its cares, but the Abiku still dashes the family's hope through its individualism, greed, pillage, and errancy. Mobolade refers to the Abiku as "recalcitrant, callous and inexorable" (62). The political class epitomizes this as depicted by different African writers, ranging from King Baabu in Wole Soyinka's *King Baabu* to General Bukha in Debo Kotun's *Abiku*. These literary military-political leaders represent the military leaders that have ruled different African countries at various periods.

Thus, it is not surprising that the city with its infrastructure that forms part of the organic whole of the family-nation also suffers greatly. The neglect of the city by the military-political class is obvious in Atta's description of potholes, and stinking gutter, among others. Atta paints Lagos as consisting of "the surly clerks, lazy air-conditioners, power cuts, traffic we called go-slow, water shortages, armed robbers, bribery" (83). The family-nation is neglected because the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje child does not serve the family nation and the primary attention is paid to servicing the perpetual existence of the political elite (Àbíkú/ ọgbanje) at the expense of the family.

The historicity continues with another "military coup" (84) in 1985, but nothing has changed. The family-nation still suffers the throes of sociopolitical corruption, infrastructure decay and "gross inhumanity to people by the military" (Tenshak, 40). The neglect of infrastructural development includes dismal power supply and poor street lights. The city becomes a space of "dystopia," as used by Rita Nnodim. This is analogous to what Kehinde, in "Narrating the African city from the diaspora: Lagos as a trope in Ben Okri and Chika Unigwe's short stories," describes as "a pervading metaphor for insecurity, neglect,

anonymity and perversion of the ideal" (231). He adds that the city is depicted as a space of "decadence, poverty and inhospitality" (233). The city which is part of the organic whole of the family-nation body has been neglected to service the needs of the political class. Atta captures the neglect thus:

> Most days it felt like billion people walking down the labyrinth of petty and main streets: beggar men, secretaries, government contractors (thieves, some would say), area boys, street children. You could tell how well they ate by the state of their shoes. Beggars … Bare foot … din of cars propping exhaust pipes, and engines commuters scrambling for canary yellow buses… countless billboards. (101)

Atta comments through Enitan that "it was a hard city to love, a bedlam of trade" (101). These are the effects of the military-political elite's neglect; this class care only about their "self" without the "Other." All this leads to "dirt, piles of it, on the streets, in open gutters, and in the marketplaces" (Atta 101).

The sociopolitical hegemony of the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje inflicts pain on the family nation, and this is portrayed with the growth of Enitan in Atta's *Everything*. The military-political class through their profligacy and errancy inflicts pain on the subaltern. They include "drivers, sellers, shoppers, loiterers, beggars. Madmen" (102). They find themselves outside the political circle of the military-political elite and its agents. Enitan's father complains that "twenty-five years after independence …. no light, no water, people dying all over the place, before their time, from one sickness or the other" (110-111). These are symptoms of the pains and disillusionment foisted on the family-nation by the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje. This can be compared to Clark's description of the mother of Abiku possessing sour milk and a tired body.
The throes of the subaltern include extreme poverty, underemployment, poor salaries like that of Dagogo and Enitan who complain that "you graduate and you're privileged to live off your parents, or some old sugar daddy or government contract" (119). They further include poor health conditions, a deteriorating educational sector with "underfunded schools … teeming with children and lacking teachers" (131); jungle justice: "on a Lagos street, justice happened straight away" (149); poor judiciary system among others. These complaints are in converse with Brigadier Hassan who belongs to the military-political class and its agents. He has several girlfriends, plays polo, travels around the world with women, and sends his children abroad for schooling. Atta does a tacit description of the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje group who enjoys wealth at the expense of the majority (the family members). This brings to mind the lifestyle of Aunty Uju's General in Adichie's *Americanah* and the expensive lives of military-political rulers in Kotun's *Abiku.*

The historicity of the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje syndrome continues in the section: 1995. The situation has not changed. The different coups have

only birthed a different Abiku-political class with the same motive. This is analogous to the story of the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje that dies and reincarnates in another form with traits of its past life/lives. The existential motive is to steal/pillage the wealth of the *Ile*/family-nation that houses it.

In the 1995 section, the interplay between different agents and the military-political rulers is depicted. Subaltern agents like Peter Mukoro and Sunny Taiwo are arrested; people are killed through unseen potholes, fake malaria medicine, contaminated water; "hardship: no water-no light" (189), ghettoization, impoverishment, among other deplorable conditions. Also, Atta chronicles the Abacha era which was not different from the previous military regimes that have bedevilled Nigerian society. A few "Self" dominate the majority "Other." Sunny Taiwo, Enitan's father, explains it as "less than ten thousand of them and they want to run this country … like … a club that belongs to them?" (192). This is analogous to the imperious attitudes of the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje towards the family. Members of the family, in most cases, suffer the brunt of the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje's imperious proclivities. Thus, there can be a scarcity of fuel, but the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje continues to enjoy a glut of resources. The subaltern can suffer "high rubbish dump" (202), poor power supply, pothole roads, poor health facilities, unnecessary imprisonment, like Grace Armeh and the other inmates of the cell, but these do not perturb the milito-political class.

Conclusion

In the main, this study has deconstructed the underlying historicity of the births and deaths of the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje class and its effects on the subaltern/family-nation, in this case, Nigeria. We contend that the subtextual description of the recurrent birth of different military-political rulers signifies the birth of different Àbíkú/ ọgbanje into the Nigerian family-nation since Independence. Coups after coups do not change anything but only leave the family-nation more traumatized and disillusioned. The subaltern and its agents suffer the cruelty of the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje military-political class who only comes to suckle the milk of the mother and family dry.

In conclusion, the different sectors that make up the organic whole of the family-nation suffer because of the recurring birth and death of the Àbíkú/ ọgbanje and its "SELF"-ish motives. This underlies the thesis that a few enjoy at the expense of the Other —the majority. Sefi Atta, in *Everything*, therefore (re)presents the sociopolitical hegemony of this Àbíkú/ ọgbanje—the political class—and the pains it inflicts on the family/nation. Hence, the veritable Àbíkú/ ọgbanje is the political class that inflicts pain on the Others in any family/society.

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