

“Shine your Eyes”: A City’s Grim “Welcome” and Postcolonial Maladies in Chibundu Onuzo’s *Welcome To Lagos*

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Abstract

This paper critiques the portraiture of the postcolonial city, its maladies and maleficent post-independence governance projected in Chibundu Onuzo's *Welcome to Lagos*, within the broader context of postcolonial literature. The narrative presents Nigerian cities as symbolic representations of the dynamic complexities that define the social, economic, and political essence of the postcolonial Nigerian state, paradoxically so in more contemporary times. The study employs postcolonial literary theory to examine the novel's critique of the postcolony in *Welcome to Lagos*. The primary objective of this study is to examine Onuzo's portrayal of the postcolonial city as a site of enduring maladies and governance failures in post-independence Nigeria. Postcolonialism emphasizes the assessment of life in postcolonial societies after independence from colonial rule, with colonialism as a significant variable. Textual and content analyses are used to examine the narrative. The article reveals that the postcolonial novel not only assesses the relationship between the empire and the postcolony but also implicates the postcolony in its failure to self-govern equitably. It concludes that the novel highlights Lagos most significantly as a microcosm of a predominantly dystopian postcolonial African state, one plagued by interminable cycles of post-independence maladies, maladministration, corruption, environmental degradation, and disillusionment that erode the quality of human life and compound the country's global image of social inequality and social decay.

Keywords: Lagos, postcolonial, postcolonial city, malady, paradox, *Welcome to Lagos*

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Introduction

The dynamics of decolonisation, the establishment of sovereign nation-states, and the challenges of nation-building, cultural revival, and social transformation define postcolonial Africa. Postcolonial Africa has been characterised by a range of social, political, economic, and cultural issues that have shaped the continent's trajectory and inspired a diverse body of literature reflecting its complexities and contradictions. At the onset of independence, African literature evolved to address the challenges of nation-building, postcolonial identity, and the legacies of colonialism (Tandon, 2018). Postcolonial African literature is characterised by the challenges of decolonisation and the ongoing struggles for social justice and equality. A recurring theme in postcolonial African works is disillusionment. Tikumah (2013) states that "a great deal of post-colonial literature was devoted to expression of disillusionment with independent Africa" (p. 14). Thus, during the period of African nations' independence from colonial rule, predominantly between the 1950s and 1970s, numerous African authors began to craft literature that articulated disillusionment and dissatisfaction with the governance and development of these newly sovereign states. Furthermore, postcolonial African literature often engages with broader political and social issues, such as neocolonialism and survival amid upheaval. These writers also address contemporary challenges facing African societies, such as migration, corruption, poverty, environmental degradation, hybridity and social inequality, while also envisioning alternative futures and possibilities for change.

Postcolonial African literature has evolved from years of anti-colonial agitation to post-independence interrogation of self-governance, its attendant failures, and lingering disillusionment, and continues to do so to the present. While Onuzo's narrative has received some scholarly attention, existing studies have been preoccupied with class oppression, ideological indoctrination, and structural exploitation through Marxist literary theory (Dickson & Amos, 2025); urban infrastructure, hope, and economic and class disparity (Oh, 2023); and the concept of home and social belonging (Nyasalu, 2022). The postcolonial condition of Lagos, marked by corruption, inadequate governance, environmental degradation, and colonial remnants, has not been comprehensively examined in these studies, and it is this gap the present study addresses.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the ongoing discourse on the postcolonial state and the dynamic forms of neocolonialism that seem to sustain or mimic colonial relics depicted in early modern narratives, and in advancing dystopic global images of Nigeria and other ailing African countries. It offers insight into further research and projects that position postcolonial literature as an imperative response to these realities. This article critically examines the portrayal of postcolonial cities and their maladies in Chibundu Onuzo's *Welcome to Lagos*, with a specific focus on Lagos as depicted in the text and the maladies it portrays. To achieve this, the paper raises the following questions: In what ways does Chibundu Onuzo's *Welcome to Lagos* depict the postcolonial metropolis of Lagos, and how do these depictions relate to broader postcolonial urban experiences in Africa? Which postcolonial maladies are projected in *Welcome to Lagos*, and how does Onuzo use narrative devices to criticise the economic and sociopolitical dysfunctions left over from colonial rule? The paper concludes with a discussion of the findings.

Literature Review

The Postcolonial City

The postcolonial city is an urban space that emerged after colonial rule. It is characterized by a complex mix of historical legacies (from both precolonial and colonial periods), the cultural identities of individual cities, and socio-economic dynamics. The concept of the postcolonial city has attracted numerous interpretations and sparked debate among urban and planning researchers and scholars. The postcolonial city is too complex and unpredictable to be easily classified (King, 2005). Thus, to fully classify the postcolonial city, one must understand its layered history and the ongoing processes of resistance, adaptation, and transformation. Radcliffe (1997) adds that postcolonial cities are significant because they reflect a critical engagement with the after-effects of colonialism and its construction of knowledge. This indicates that cities in formerly colonized nations hold significant meaning, as they reflect the enduring effects of colonialism, particularly in shaping systems of knowledge and information.

Postcolonial cities are widely recognized for efforts to dissociate from colonial legacies by forging new identities through urban development. The true magnitude of this transformation is debatable, as residents of postcolonial cities often perpetuate exploitative practices inherited from their colonial past. Yeoh (2001) states that the postcolonial city is “an important site where claims of identity different from the colonial past are expressed and indexed, and, in some cases, keenly contested” (p. 465). Still, in most cases, the legacy of colonization persists in these cities, as postcolonial leaders often fail to forge an identity distinct from their colonial past, leading to postcolonial disillusionment. Since the postcolonial city often reflects colonial structures and systems, it grapples with issues of identity and selfhood, as communities seek to reclaim their narrative and redefine themselves in ways that resonate with indigenous cultures and values. Matamanda et al. (2004) agree with this idea, stating that “Identity is inherent in that the postcolonial city seeks to detach from the colonial past and assume an independent identity that may be visible and tangible” (p. 120). In this regard, efforts are underway to move beyond the colonial system, and the outcome may alter urban forms so that the visible identity reflects the ideals of the new system and its independent communities. As significant as these may seem, the realities within the ‘new’ systems present complex dynamics that question the operation of postcolonial states as independent entities.

Continuous contact between various groups shapes power dynamics in postcolonial cities. Elites in politics and business often use their power to further agendas that jeopardize the integrity of urban environments. Democratic procedures introduced by decolonization enabled formerly underrepresented groups to express their opinions and priorities. However, because many groups hold divergent views on sustainability, resource use, and environmental values, this newly discovered agency has also caused problems. These conflicting viewpoints reveal bigger differences in how communities envision their urban futures. According to Yeoh (2001), postcolonial cities often depict a failure to decolonize urban spaces, so that the conditions of colonialism remain unchanged, albeit with changes in the city's appearance.

Lagos as a Microcosm of Nigeria

Nigeria's southwest is home to Lagos State. Despite being the second-most populous and economically significant state in Nigeria, it is the smallest by land area. The state, located on the Atlantic coast, borders Ogun State to the north and east, and the Republic of Benin to the west. Lagos State's history started in the pre-colonial period when the Awori people first settled there. Later, in the 18th and 19th centuries, the region became a hub of the slave trade. Lagos was conquered in 1865, after becoming a British colony in 1861. Later, in 1914, it became the nation's capital and remained so until the capital was moved to Abuja in 1991 (Filani, 2012; Uduku et al., 2021).

Lagos is widely recognized as Nigeria's center of commerce and industry. Along with a sizable number of businesses, financial institutions, and multinational corporations, it is home to Nigeria's busiest and largest seaports, and this "accounts for over 53% of manufacturing employment in Nigeria, and constitutes 7% of manufacturing's share to national GDP" (Uduku, Lawanson, & Ogodo, 2021, p. 4). Lagos is also synonymous with overpopulation, as the state remains a metropolis for both domestic and foreign migrants, resulting in rapid population growth and making the city one of the fastest-growing in Africa. Uduku et al (2021) affirm this by stating that, "The metropolis remains a major destination for economic migrants from within and outside Nigeria..." (p.6). However, this influx of migrants from rural areas or smaller cities also poses challenges for the city. The pressure on local resources and job markets remains a significant concern. With more people competing for limited opportunities, tensions can rise. Additionally, integrating diverse groups can be difficult, potentially leading to cultural and social conflicts.

Due to its vibrant metropolitan life, cultural variety, and social inequalities, Lagos State is frequently seen as a city of contrasts. Even though the city is home to the wealthiest and most influential people, most areas nevertheless show signs of poverty. Aliu et al (2021) state that "around 25% of residents in informal settlements are unemployed, and recent research shows that in some informal settlements the lowest-income residents were surviving on less than N5000 (approximately £9.50) per month" (p.107), depicting the alarming rate of unemployment and poverty that plague the lower class who make up the majority of residents in the city.

Akinnuga (2021) avers that, when critically examined, there is nothing to be proud of in Lagos State when it comes to housing, transportation, health, education, work, youth empowerment, and even security. The clearly defective condition of affairs cannot be justified, especially when different governments make excuses in light of these realities. However, with the wealthy and powerful living on the islands and in some parts of the mainland, the city's layout is meant to illustrate the socioeconomic division within that society. The slums of Ajegunle and Mushin are also home to low-income residents. As modern men try to thrive in a city full of options, complexity, and glaring gaps between the affluent and the destitute, a hustling culture synonymous with Lagos arises.

Lagos is often regarded as a microcosm of Nigeria, particularly in African literature, given its status as the country's political, cultural, and economic hub. Akinnuga (2021) calls Lagos a melting pot of cultures, an ideal location for learning about the nation's complex history,

diverse population, rapid urbanization, and its interactions with colonial powers. Lagos is a symbol of Nigeria's goals and problems. Lagos is a perfect place to examine the complex character of Nigeria as a whole because of its rapid urbanization, dense population, and social structure, which are emblematic of the issues faced by many Nigerian cities. Lagos' cosmopolitanism and cultural diversity highlight Nigeria's diverse population. Given that it has served as a hub for social movements, political action, and creative expression, it is an ideal location to study the complexities of contemporary Nigerian society.

Lagos also plays a pivotal role in Nigerian literature, functioning as a geographical setting, a metaphorical terrain, and a narrative device through which writers examine the country's political, social, and cultural changes. Lagos, Nigeria's former capital and commercial center, epitomizes the Nigerian experience, mirroring the nation's political turmoil, economic vitality, and cultural diversity (Mbakwe, 2022; Madhok, 2024). Lagos serves not only as a setting for narrative events but also as a microcosm of Nigeria and, by extension, of sprawling postcolonial cities in Africa.

The city of Lagos represents the battle for individual identity in a rapidly changing society and the tensions between tradition and modernity. The settings selected for these novels depict Lagos' complicated past, which is reminiscent of Nigeria's tale. Lagos has experienced significant changes in the political, social, and economic domains since it became the colonial capital and a major center of commerce and business, as well as the diversity of its population, which comprises people from various social strata and ethnic groups.

Postcolonial Malady

Maladies refer to conditions of ill health, whether physical, psychological, or social. Postcolonial maladies refer to a set of social and cultural issues that arise in postcolonial societies as a result of colonial rule. It could also be described as the ‘diseased’ state of a former colony, one sustained by the colonial experience and existing imperial structures. These issues can affect individuals, communities, and cultures. Maladies in Africa include poverty, violence, corruption, and societal disintegration, all of which impede progress and undermine the development of postcolonial societies (Adeyemi et al., 2016). The exploitative and oppressive legacy of colonialism has been challenging for formerly colonized nations to surmount.

Postcolonial leaders who prioritize personal gain over public service foster corruption, exploiting their positions to enrich themselves and their allies. This results in visible economic disparities and inadequate public services. As inequality grows, social tensions escalate, creating a vicious cycle that may lead to further social issues, such as insurgency and insecurity. The rise of postcolonial maladies created a new thematic preoccupation for African writers. Irele (2009) states that the formal end of colonialism has imprinted a striking new character on the thematic concerns of the African writer, provoked by “the pathologies of governance that have contributed so massively to the tragic unfolding of the postcolonial condition in Africa” (p.10). Post-independence writers such as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Ayi Kwei Armah, Wole Soyinka, and others captured the failure of leadership in their works, highlighting themes of disillusionment and neocolonialism. These writers highlight disillusionment, socio-

political and economic decadence, and cultural imperialism, expressing dissatisfaction with Africa's leaders and their failure to dismantle colonial structures of injustice. The fundamental problem behind Africa's problems is ineffective governance and weak leadership (Eli, 2020). Other social problems, such as poverty and hierarchical divisions based on class, race, and gender, have been exacerbated by the crises of poor leadership. This accounts for why Edward (2017) describes postcolonial literature as "Literature that tilts more towards self-examination and evaluation of the state of affairs in the independent states after the formal withdrawal of the colonial masters" (p.136). Postcolonial literature also emphasizes self-reflection and introspection, as African writers and societies scrutinize their actions, decisions, and responsibilities. It assesses the progress of independent African nations, emphasizing introspection rather than attributing fault to foreign influences.

The long-lasting effects of colonialism are felt both institutionally and psychologically. Centuries of dominance have caused identity problems as people and communities try to reconcile historical trauma with modern hopes for advancement. This internal contradiction often fosters conflict and instability, undermining social cohesion in the postcolony. At the institutional level, independence has not always led to democratic systems or efficient government. Instead, postcolonial power structures have been infected with corruption, nepotism, and authoritarian practices, alienating individuals and creating cycles of bloodshed and civil unrest. African political elites have left ordinary people to endure economic suffering and political marginalization by appropriating state authority for personal gain (Zuhmboshi, 2018).

The contemporary African novel generally reflects the realities of post-independence Africa, with its "inherent cultural contradictions, political and economic instability, corruption, and nepotism" (Kehinde, 2005, p. 89). Thus, post-colonial maladies are deeply intertwined with the historical and social fabric of once-colonized nations. They arise from the complex interplay of psychological trauma, economic dependency, and governance failures that characterize the aftermath of colonial rule. Understanding these maladies requires acknowledging the past and committing to addressing the underlying issues that continue to afflict societies long after the formal end of colonialism. Only through such recognition can nations begin to heal and forge pathways towards equitable and sustainable futures.

Feldner (2019) argues that contemporary writing depicts Lagos as a sensorially disorienting and violent urban space that foregrounds the brutality and systemic failures of military rule. He overlooks how the characters' suffering is also rooted in personal flaws and attributes. Thus, Lagos is portrayed in modern literature as a violent and chaotic place shaped by institutional and political failures. Feldner (2019) seems to ignore the important role that personal shortcomings and unique traits play in shaping individuals' suffering, concentrating only on external factors such as institutional breakdown and military violence. A more nuanced interpretation shows that characters' problems in these texts stem not only from repressive governmental systems but also from personal moral shortcomings, psychological flaws, and poor choices as they traverse Lagos.

Theoretical Consideration

Postcolonial literary theory offers a critical examination of the novel's portrayal of urban life within a postcolonial context. Postcolonial literary theory, as discussed by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989) in *The Empire Writes Back*, challenges the dominant narratives and perspectives of colonial powers by examining the literature and cultural production of formerly colonized peoples. Postcolonial theoretical frameworks can be applied across a variety of contexts and literary styles. It provides a subversive framework that jettisons Western perspectives in order to interrogate and understand the experiences of previously colonized peoples. Thus, the (post)colonial experience, history, and reality are centralized and projected as a veritable form of resistance to Western control and expectations. Both fictional and non-fictional writings may critically engage with basic postcolonial themes, including resistance to imperial systems, cultural hybridity, and colonial aftermaths, despite their differences in depiction.

Ashcroft et al. (1989) argue that "The idea of postcolonial literary theory emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of postcolonial writing" (p. 11). Postcolonial literature undermines European conventions about language, stylistic methods, genre distinctions, and established value systems. This subversive literary practice has led to significant theoretical advances: postcolonial theory examines these alternative textual strategies, while indigenous critical frameworks elucidate the similarities and differences across various cultural expressions (Ashcroft et al., 1989).

The objective of postcolonial literary criticism is to examine specific themes that emerge in the literature of formerly colonized nations. The topics encompass: mimicry (emulating European standards to attain a sense of belonging), exile (the experience of migrants as outsiders), the quest for individual and collective identity, postcolonial disillusionment (stemming from ineffective leadership and corruption), and the notion of othering (the colonizers' devaluation of indigenous culture) (Ashcroft et al, 1982). Postcolonial literary theory addresses the unique realities of formerly colonized cultures, which are frequently ignored by European literary frameworks. This article examines the urban setting and related issues in Chibundu Onuzo's *Welcome to Lagos* through a postcolonial critical lens. This theoretical perspective shows how colonial legacies continue to influence modern urban life by illuminating the power dynamics, social injustices, and economic decline that define postcolonial cities.

Methods

This study employs postcolonial literary theory in content analysis, utilizing a qualitative, descriptive approach to examine Chibundu Onuzo's novel, *Welcome to Lagos*. The analysis explores the representation of the postcolonial city in the novel, emphasizing the material conditions, power dynamics, and quotidian experiences that shape urban life in postcolonial Nigeria. The study conducts a critical textual and literary analysis of Onuzo's narrative, examining the intricacies of postcolonial city life, urbanism, and the socio-political deficiencies that define governance in Africa. The primary data for this study is drawn from a contemporary Nigerian novel, *Welcome to Lagos*. Secondary sources are previous studies that examine

aspects of postcolonial existence in Nigeria and Africa and are considered significant literature for the study. The study uses textual and content analyses to arrive at its results and conclusions.

Analysis

A City's "Welcome": Lagos and its Maladies

Chibundu Onuzo's novel, *Welcome to Lagos*, captures the contemporary realities that define life in Nigeria. This narrative follows the experiences of five central characters who, driven by various circumstances, migrate from South-South Nigeria to Lagos, undertaking a difficult journey in pursuit of freedom and opportunities for reinvention. These protagonists, all runaways, include Yemi (a Private soldier), Oma (a housewife), Chike (a Military officer), Fineboy (an ex-militant), and Isoken (a young girl), who travel from Bayelsa to Lagos in search of a better life. They have lofty ambitions but are ill-prepared for the city's harsh realities, which ultimately expose their vulnerability amid the complex sociopolitical realities and personal moral dilemmas that could define life in Lagos and Nigeria at large. Thus, the depiction of Bayelsa, Abuja, and Lagos, postcolonial urban environments, shapes how the characters develop and who they become before the socio-economic and political dynamics that embroil the country seem to overwhelm them.

These urban settings deny the protagonists a genuine sense of belonging or integration due to systemic flaws in postcolonial Nigeria. The realistic description of Bayelsa State at the narrative's opening highlights the Niger Delta's failing social and economic infrastructure. Onuzo depicts Bayelsa as a place where significant oil wealth strangely coexists with compounded ills, including widespread poverty, military tyranny, and economic exploitation. The military canteen is described in the novel's first chapter as a "low, squat building" with crumbling walls, where staff members wear mismatched attire that denotes a lack of resources and organizational disorder (Onuzo, 2016, p. 11). Onuzo highlights major issues that plague this oil-rich Niger Delta city, Bayelsa City, thus:

The air was warm and heavy, almost too thick to breathe. It was the flaring that did that, great bonfires of gas burning night and day like stars. The oil companies worked at all hours, filling and floating barrels of oil to overseas markets that decided what they were worth: fifty dollars today, a hundred tomorrow and the whole of Nigeria's fortunes rose and fell on what foreigners would pay for her sweet crude. Chike had seen the spills, black poison running over the waters, fish gone, fishermen displaced, flora destroyed. Who was to blame? Not for a soldier to answer (Onuzo, 2016, p.12)

This sheds light on the postcolonial situation in the Niger Delta, particularly the adverse effects of the oil economy and politics on security. As the people in the Delta region fight to drive polluters and exploiters off their land, the "warm and heavy" air serves as a metaphor for both the environment and society. The "great bonfires of gas burning night and day" attest to Western corporations' relentless resource extraction, exposing a fundamental paradox in which oil produces significant wealth while also seriously harming the environment. This paradox highlights how, despite petroleum wealth flowing to external markets, local inhabitants remain impoverished.

The novel's allusion to fluctuating oil prices underscores Nigeria's unstable economy and ongoing subordination to external powers rather than to independent local governance, revealing the postcolonial city's continued reliance on former colonial powers. Chike's view of "black poison running over the waters" highlights the disastrous effects of industrial contamination and oil spills. Once self-sufficient, fishing villages now face starvation and uncertain futures as environmental degradation destroys their traditional means of subsistence. The Bayelsa ecosystem is systematically destroyed by these oil leaks, endangering the basic survival of local inhabitants; this is compounded by the devastating consequences of military interventions sponsored by Western oil corporations and by government officials in Nigeria who must protect their interests. The army massacres innocent civilians, hired to quell any uprising and maintain control over potential militant reactions.

Colonel Benatari, an Ijaw man from Bayelsa, holds a military position meant to safeguard his community, yet he plans the murder of his own people. He embodies the exploitative processes that define Nigeria's postcolonial state and exemplifies neocolonial leadership that upholds oppression against indigenous communities without moral remorse. This portrayal sheds light on military persecution in Bayelsa State, particularly when he orders Chike's troop to slaughter local civilians, thereby continuing the cycle of colonial atrocities. Onuzo reveals governmental corruption and dysfunction through Benatari's actions, exposing a state apparatus that is essentially unconcerned with its citizens' well-being and functions as a tool of neocolonial domination rather than of popular sovereignty. At this point, the narrative emphasizes a crucial aspect of postcolonial urban oppression: the internalization of colonial hierarchies, in which the colonized become agents of their own subjection rather than merely victims of direct colonial domination.

Militancy appears to be an imperative response to the malaise and oppression in the Niger Delta region. When Chike challenges the rationale for abducting oil workers to protect infrastructure, asking, "How will kidnapping oil workers bring roads to the Delta?" (Onuzo, 2016, p. 21), Fineboy, a young militant, stands up to the injustice of the oil companies and the military who oppress the people of the Niger Delta. He sheds light on the structural injustice that has prompted armed rebellion in his neighborhood. Fineboy's response is not merely a counter-response; it illustrates the inherent inconsistencies of Nigeria's resource economy. Thus, he counters:

How will soldiers here bring peace? Money from our oil has built every infrastructure you see in Nigeria, and yet we, the owners of the oil, do not have hospitals, schools, or roads. When I was a child, you dipped your hand in the water, and you plucked out fish. Now everything is destroyed due to the oil spill. We did not start with violence but no one wants to hear the way of peace so the people have chosen war. (Onuzo, 2016, p. 21)

This conversation presents militancy as a desperate reaction to ongoing oppression and a last resort for people seeking to recover exploited natural resources, rather than as ideological fanaticism. Fineboy's position illustrates the cruel paradox: petroleum riches extracted from the Niger Delta finance national infrastructure elsewhere, while local inhabitants face deprivation, environmental damage, and official neglect. Given the gradual ecological and social collapse

brought on by oil pollution, Fineboy leaves Bayelsa when he has the opportunity, because militancy is ultimately hazardous, making resistance both perilous and unproductive. He ‘escapes’ to Lagos in pursuit of other possibilities beyond the cycle of violence and oppression that characterizes Bayelsa's postcolonial state. Nevertheless, the crises in the region prompt the migration of Chike, Yemi, Isoken, Fineboy, and Oma to Lagos, revealing systematic governmental failure in Nigeria's extractive periphery.

Abuja, Nigeria's capital, is another critical location in the narrative. Abuja symbolizes postcolonial state authority, elite corruption, and the source of Nigeria's systemic dysfunction, including the Niger Delta issue. In Abuja, Nigeria's main resource, oil blocks, are distributed as personal favors rather than as a state resource, through presidential patronage. The Head of State, his ministers, and associates bask in corruption without being accountable to anyone; thus, ministers in the president's cabinet banter carelessly about oil blocks: “I was speaking to Mallam the other day about giving my friend an oil block...I know Mallam wants to give him, but that witch he married is stopping the deal” (Onuzo, 2016, p. 52). This casual negotiation over oil blocks, a nation's commonwealth, and the conversations of the political class and elite expose the banality of corruption in governance. Onuzo vividly portrays bad governance and leadership failure as a malady of the postcolonial state. She uses the Abuja setting to shed light on the corruption within government. The conversation between Chief Sandayo and Odukoya (Onuzo, p.52). The result of these indiscretions plays out grievously in Bayelsa, as the masses are massacred by the same people in power who exploit their resources.

It is also in Abuja that Chief Sandayo, the Education Minister, embezzles \$10 million. Chief Sandayo's theft of the Basic Education Funds highlights leaders' neglect of the public's interest, further exemplifying how corruption and misappropriation perpetuate poverty and inequality, depriving citizens of essential services, education, and opportunities. Abuja captures the wide gap between the governing class and ordinary citizens by contrasting Abuja's opulence with the poverty of Bayelsa and Lagos. Consequently, Abuja, the capital, appears not as a solution but as the source of postcolonial crises and tension in Nigeria.

Lagos, the third and most significant setting of the narrative, is portrayed as a city that has adapted to its postcolonial condition. It is a city that has evolved into a blend of bureaucratic decay and corruption, as seen in Abuja. However, the runaways from Bayelsa arrive in this booming city in search of survival and better opportunities. Nevertheless, Chike's preconceived idea about Lagos remains a central image for every newcomer:

It was like London, they said, everything was new and expensive. Big cars, models you would never see anywhere else in Nigeria. Large houses, money everywhere. And under these fantastic stories of riches, always a layer of unease: of daylight robberies and mysterious disappearances. (Onuzo, 2016, p.57)

Chike's idea of Lagos helps categorize the city as a place of contrasts, where the most beautiful houses stand and the rich dwell in affluence. However, right on its outskirts lie the humbling realities of poverty. Thus, some thrive, while others strive daily to survive. This is strategic, as Onuzo places the five characters in this setting, with a warning in the form of a welcome, as seen in the excerpt below:

The men stared away from the city towards the newcomers, menace in their stance. “Who are they?” Chike asked the driver. “We call them Aro Męta. The three wise men of Lagos.” “What are they saying?” “Shine your eye.” (Onuzo, 2016, p.62)

“Shine your eyes” is a widely recognized Nigerian Pidgin term signifying vigilance or wisdom. This state of restless alertness is not only strategic; it is also implicated in the rationale for pursuing and eventually attaining survival in Lagos. This welcome is fundamental to the group’s sense of suspicion and survival, whether under the bridge in Lagos, in Sandayo’s abandoned basement hideout, or in the comfort of Mr Bakare’s quarters. It is also significant for situating the characters’ experiences within Nigeria’s bizarre metropolitan areas. The new arrivals, Yemi and Chike, look for jobs daily, hiding their military training and identity, just to survive in Lagos:

His search for a job had become frantic, almost panicked. He and Yęmi ranged the city, tramping where they could, taking buses when they could not, riding into the financial district with its glass buildings that distorted reflections, stretching them into thin, long, powerless creatures. They stood in queues, watching others ushered forward because they bore the right talismans, runic Mercedes symbols sketched on conspicuous keys, chunky gold watches, no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous cash payment. Marx was writing of Lagos, surely. (Onuzo, 2016, p. 86)

The poor are made to stand in queues for long periods. As a result, in Lagos they are alienated from employment opportunities, leaving them with no option but to live in substandard housing or anything close to a home. Thus, unemployment remains a major reason for poverty as depicted in the text. According to Chike, “Lagos was a jungle, an orderly ecosystem with a ranked food chain, winners and losers decided before they were born” (Onuzo, 2016, p. 86), which suggests that their destiny is predestined. The jungle imagery Onuzo uses to describe Lagos symbolises the harsh conditions faced by the poor. As in a jungle, those deemed kings trump the powerless. This is a concrete reference to how the poor suffer while the rich and powerful in Lagos exploit them. When the novel delves into the intricacies of power dynamics within the city, where corruption and exploitation are rife, the characters encounter various individuals and institutions that exploit their vulnerabilities emphasising the pervasive lack of morals in the postcolonial city. The fact that such heinous acts are depicted as commonplace within society underscores the normalisation of corruption and moral degradation. Also, when Onuzo presents Lagos’s ambivalent nature, she shows that the city is not always populated by corrupt and manipulative individuals. Notably, Ahmed’s father, Mr Bakare, an elite, offers the fugitive a warm welcome, a stark contrast to the animosity the group had faced in the city:

.... They saw the cream sheets and felt the Cool air blowing from the AC vents: three large rooms between five of them. For the first time in years, Chike had a room to himself, the smallest of the three. Their meals came on silver trays, bought by a maid who lived off the premises. On their first evening, they had all crowded into Chike’s room, Oma and Fineboy bundled in the white towel robes they had found folded on their beds. (Onuzo, 2016, p. 272)

Using this story, Onuzo recreates the postcolonial as a hybrid space punctuated by both the merciful and the unmerciful. The fact that Mr Bakare, despite not personally knowing the five runaways, still offers them a warm welcome because of his son, Ahmed, shows that not everyone in the city upholds the corrupt values that trample on the marginalized.

Onuzo critiques postcolonial leadership's prioritization of self-interest over public welfare, exposing the deep-rooted governance failures and disillusionment that plague the postcolonial city. The novel serves as an indictment of the endemic corruption and greed that stifle progress and perpetuate social injustices in the postcolonial era. The consequences of postcolonial leadership failure and poor governance create space for other societal issues to thrive. The text's foundation in bad governance and leadership failure vividly depicts the issue of inequality and class stratification against the backdrop of a postcolonial cityscape. The novel explores the lives of various characters as they navigate the complexities of Lagos, a metropolis marked by stark socioeconomic differences and power imbalances. The text highlights inequality and social class divisions as direct consequences of poor governance and failures of postcolonial leadership. As a result, the postcolonial city becomes a microcosm of broader societal inequities, with wealth and opportunity concentrated in the hands of a privileged few while the majority struggle to survive. Thus, Onuzo describes Lagos as "a carnivore of a city that swallowed even bones" (Onuzo, 2016, p.253).

Through systemic injustices across the nation, Onuzo also captures the severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education, and information. The depiction of corruption in the text doesn't just highlight corruption in governance. It also highlights micro forms of corruption. The typical individual in the postcolonial society is trying to outsmart and cheat their fellow citizens. Chief, the head of the bridge touts, charges Chike and his friends money to sleep under the bridge. The text effectively conveys that, in this society, individuals are driven by self-interest and personal gain. Under the bridge, Emeka confirms that their new 'home' is usually attacked by armed robbers and other bad people, and that they must pay for their own security. Lagos is dangerous; despite paying for their security, it is not guaranteed. The issue of insecurity keeps them homeless, rootless, and unsettled. Onuzo, also born in Lagos, which she describes as a "city of delusion" (Onuzo, 2016, p. 82), underscores the significance of relationships in combating feelings of dislocation and alienation from one's family and home, as the five fugitives remain a family throughout the narrative.

Onuzo's narrative presents a stark portrayal of how power imbalances and systemic corruption have created morally bankrupt cities in Nigeria. Thus, Chief Sandayo is also centralized as a character and prime example of a man who is a product of a corrupt society. However, his story raises the question of what comes first: the corrupt leader? Or the corrupt nation? What is clear, though, is that Onuzo tries to highlight how individuals lack moral and ethical awareness regardless of their social class. When Chief Sandayo is assassinated and beheaded after his release from prison, the text confirms the society's perversion.

Conclusion

This study has focused on the literary examination of the postcolonial city and the image of maladies in Chibundu Onuzo's *Welcome to Lagos*, within the broader context of postcolonial

literature. The narrative presents Nigerian metropolitan areas as offering an unusual welcome. Nigerian cities symbolize the dynamic complexities and paradoxes that define Nigeria as a postcolonial state. In *Welcome to Lagos*, Chibundu Onuzo explores the concept of the “postcolonial city” through three Nigerian states, each highlighting distinct issues: Bayelsa is portrayed as an oil-rich region ravaged by economic exploitation, social inequality, military oppression, and environmental harm, leaving its indigenous residents impoverished and neglected by the government. Conversely, Onuzo depicts Abuja, the capital, highlighting how its corrupt leadership causes dysfunction that affects smaller regions. The five main characters experience Lagos, a city marked by vivid contrasts, vibrant yet troubled by insecurity, homelessness, corruption, and moral decline, which demands that postcolonial citizens remain alert, unsettled, and restless.

The paper concludes that Onuzo's critique projects postcolonial maladies that widen the divide between the elite and the common people, significantly implicating the failure of governance in shaping harsh, complex postcolonial environments. The study's engagement with postcolonial literary theory thus emphasizes the assessment of life in postcolonial societies through self-introspection. Ultimately, Nigeria's leadership failures turn its cities into complex, often hostile environments for its dwellers.

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