

**MAGIC REALISM AS A CONVERGE OF POSTCOLONIALISM AND POSTMODERNISM:
A STUDY OF SOME SELECTED WORKS**

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Abstract

Magic realism is a term in literature that combines realism and the fantastic in such a way that magical elements grow organically out of the reality portrayed. Unfortunately magic realism has become a debased term. Some critics see magic realism as shallow, dangerous, primitive and a term that ought to be done away with. Some critics see it with a little positivity; a term arising from unevenly developed society and a brand name for exoticism. Therefore these critics and many writers have failed to extend magic realism beyond postcolonialism. They tend to associate magic realism to just postcolonial countries. This paper therefore examines magic realism as a term that constitutes a point of convergence between postcolonialism and postmodernism. This paper argues that magic realism is not shallow but it is a productive, and an innovational fictional mode. Most importantly, magic realism has also contributed to the growth of postmodern literary sensibilities. Magic realism is a mode of expression worldwide and an aesthetics of necessity which has literary and postmodern currents running through it. In *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*, Syl Cheney Coker was able to oscillate between the past and present. He exposes the vanity and uselessness of power, the ultimate failure of colonizers, the futility of war and the power of love; using magic realism. Also in *The Icarus Girl* Oyeyemi Helen was able re-invent magic realism. She merges West African cultural beliefs, folklore with European Folklore and fairytale. This narrative strategy reveals Oyeyemi's ambition to position herself as a globally recognized magic realist writer. This paper while employing the postcolonial and postmodernist theory examines magical realism as a term that helps in the development of our multicultural and postmodern literary sensibilities.

Keywords: Magic realism, Postcolonialism, Convergence, Postmodernism

Introduction

Magic realism can be traced shortly after the First World War in Europe. The term was introduced by Franz Roh (1890-1965). He introduced the term in 1925. For him magical realism was presented as a reaction to expressionism's more abstract style and to mark a return to realism. Expressionism was a movement in literature and other parts of Germany which emphasized and supported arts departure from realistic portrayal or depiction of events, incidents and situation in the world by expressing their visionary or powerfully emotionally states of the mind. Expressionism which seeks to convey personal inner experience through the distortion of natural images had run its course. Several artists began to experiment with this new form, labeled *Magischer Realismus* (Magic Realism).

The term was later adopted during the 1940s by Latin authors who combined the theories of Roh to French Surrealist concepts of the marvelous and incorporated indigenous mythologies within traditional mimetic conventions in their quest for the original Latin American novel. The international success of such magical realist writers as Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel Garcia Marquez has only confirmed the association of the genre primarily with literature from the continent.

Marquez's fame in the use of Magical realism is unprecedented. His Magical realism was borne out of the troubled Latin American history and during the years of civil strife in Columbia. His sustained interest in the novel brought about its translation into thirty seven languages and sold thirty million copies of *Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). Other writers of magic realism include Salman Rushdie an Indian Briton who wrote *Satanic Verses*, *Midnight's Children* (1982) and Isabelle Allende's *The*

House of Spirits (1982). In short, magic realism is a global phenomenon found in countries such as Brazil, Columbia, India, Haiti and Nigeria. From English Canada we have *What the Crow Said* by Robert Kroetch, *The Invention of The World* by Jack Hodgkin and *Green Grass, Running Water* by Thomas King. In New Zealand, there is Janet Frame's *The Carpathians* and From Austarlia, David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*. Other magic realism writers include Gunter Grass from Germany, Italo Calvino from Italy and Jonh Fowler from England.

From the 1960's to the present, magic realism exists as a continuous presence in the twentieth century literature. Magic realism has become so important as a mode of expression worldwide, especially in postcolonial cultures, because it has provided the literal ground for significant cultural work; within its texts, marginal voices, and submerged traditions and emergent literatures have developed and created masterpieces.

According to Wendy B. Faris "Magic realism combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvelous seem to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them"(1). Mathew Stretcher a Winona State University Assistant Professor of Japanese studies, and author, defines magic realism as "...what happens when a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by something too strange to believe" (3). For Christopher Warnes, "magic realism is a mode of narration that neutralizes or normalizes the supernatural; that is to say, a mode in which real and fantastic, natural and supernatural are coherently represented in a state of equivalent" (3). M.H. Abrams opines that "These writers weave in an ever shifting pattern, a sharply etched realism in representing ordinary events and details together with fantastic and dreamlike elements as well as materials derived from myths and fairy tales" (257).

Magic realism is therefore characterized by the mingling and juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic, bizarre and skillful time shift, convoluted and even labyrinthine narratives and plots, miscellaneous use of dreams, myths and fairy stories, expressionistic and even surrealistic description, arcane erudition, the elements of surprise or abrupt shock, the horrific and the inexplicable.

Unfortunately this term has become problematic and debased. Scholars new to the field are faced with a lot of Contradictory attitudes; critics feel that the term is shallow, dangerous and primitive. More positively Homi Bhabha calls it "the literary language of the emergent postcolonial world". The worst is that a critic feels that the term ought to be done away with. The problem with such a suggestion even if it were possible to implement is that this critic forgets that the tenacity of this term is due to its explanatory value. This helps researchers to highlight the characteristics of this term and with the analysis of the texts below, the usefulness of magic realism is well appreciated.

Five primary characteristics of the mode have been identified, the first is an irreducible element of magic; second, the descriptions in magical realism details a strong presence of the phenomenal world; the reader may experience some unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile the two contradictory understanding of events; third, the narrative merges different realms; fourth, magic realism disturbs received ideas about time, space and identity and finally, authorial reticence is a major characteristic of magical realism.

According to Wendy Faris The "irreducible element" is something we cannot explain according to the laws of the universe as they have formulated in western empirically based discourse, that is, according to "logic, familiar knowledge, or received beliefs". Therefore, the reader has difficulty marshalling evidence to settle questions of events and characters in such fictions. These irreducible elements are well assimilated into the realistic textual environment, rarely causing any comment by narrators or characters, who model acceptance of their readers.

A second characteristic of magic realism is that its description details a strong presence of the "phenomenal world". This is the realism in magic realism, differentiating it from fantasy and allegory. It appears in several ways. Realistic descriptions create a fictional world that resembles the one we live in often by extensive use of detail. On one hand, this attention to sensory details continues and

renews the realistic tradition. On the other hand, in addition to including magical events or phenomena, magical realism fiction includes intriguing magical details. Because these magical details represent a clear departure from realism, detail is freed from a traditional mimetic role to a greater extent than it has been before.

By “unsettling doubts” the researcher means that before categorizing the irreducible element as irreducible, the reader may hesitate between two contradicting understanding of events, and hence experience some unsettling doubts. The question of belief is very vital here, this hesitation frequently stemming from the implicit clash of cultural systems within the narrative, which moves toward belief in extrasensory phenomena but narrates from the post enlightenment perspective and in the realistic mode that traditionally exclude them. And because belief system differs, clearly, some readers in some cultures will hesitate less than others, depending on their beliefs and narrative traditions. In other words, magical realism expands fictional reality to include events we used to call magic in realism.

In magic realism we experience the “closeness or near-merging of two realisms”. It involves a confrontation between real world norms and other – worldly, supernatural norms. In terms of cultural history, magic realism often merges ancient or traditional—ometimes indigenous and modern worlds. It merges the world of ordinary people and that of witches, the land of the living and the land of the dead. In addition to merging different worlds, these fictions disturb received ideas about time and space. Magic realism not only disrupts time and space but our sense of identity as well.

“Authorial reticence” refers to author’s lack of explanation for magical events that occur in magical realist’s texts. The author gives no explanation or surprise over these events. This deliberate withholding of explanation for magical events is typical in magic realist texts. This reticence serves the purpose mainly of preventing the reader from questioning the narrated events as no attention is drawn to the strangeness of the world view of reality.

It is pertinent to recognize that post modernism and post colonialism find areas of concern where they overlap such as in the “formal thematic and strategic” areas and that magical realism is one of such area where post colonialism and post modernism find point of conjunction. For Chute:

Comics, then, in the realm of the literary place the reader within the space of narrative, amplifying post modernism’s concern with location boundaries, depth and mapping. It returns us in the arena of literature, to a site of cultural production invested in textuality and print that is yet premised on the spatial in its construction and in the act of meaning making on the part of the looker and viewer. (359)

Chute observes that in recent times the term post modernism has lost its popularity but it has mutated into different forms, reappearing in terms such as time and space, cognitive mapping. Although post modernism has outgrown its name it has not outgrown its efficacy. Korb Salmans brings this to light:

Postmodernism is a transitional period in the human search for meaning, astonishing the mind with its sober vision of the inconceivable truth, the notion of which gets completely substituted with limitless, chaotic and free floating signification. This brings one to the verge of Schizophrenic madness, with no means to enter the compulsory constructedness of existence, in which we have to be embedded so as to be called human. It is for this reason that instead of fruitless attempts to represent the world-as-it-is, one seeks to represent the world as it is not, willfully filling it with the meaning and addictively constructing its new revised maximum. (188)

The construction of alternative realities in magic realist narratives does conform to post modernism ideology. Wendy B. Faris considers magic realism “an important component of postmodernism” (163). Magical realists are replenished postmodern narrators, born out of the death charged atmosphere of high modernist fiction. They somehow have passed beyond it. Magical realism has contributed significantly to postmodernism as it is ontological, concerned with questions of being.

Magic realist fiction, has moved from exhausted to replenished fiction. This is because of the fact that it re-invents. For Zamora “magical realism has an important presence in contemporary world literature because they treat texts from many countries and cultures, they create a complex comparative connections, avoiding separation while at the same time respecting cultural diversity” (4). The universal presence of magical realism makes the concept all the more significant and a detailed study of magic realism become imperative to the understanding of postmodern literature.

Magical realist draw upon cultural system that are less real than those upon which traditional realism draws, often non-western cultural systems that privilege mystery over empiricism, empathy over technology, and tradition over innovation. Their primary narrative maybe in myths, legends, and rituals - in collective practices that bind communities together. In such cases magical realist works remind the readers that the novel began as a popular form with communal imperative. These cultural and communal imperatives are revitalized in magic realist fiction. Mehri and Leyri puts it thus “postcolonial literature deals with the cultural identity of the subaltern in colonial rule, these struggles of identity, history and future possibilities are present in magic realist work”...(118). Thus the mode becomes particularly useful to writers in postcolonial countries. Hallucinating scenes and events, fantastic/phantasmagoric characters are used to indict recent political and cultural pervasions.

Magic realism therefore helps in the development of our multicultural sensibilities this is because magic realism is a narrative mode that reflects hybrid postcolonial countries. It exposes the reader to different cultures, both indigenous and western. Also for one to understand magic realism he or she has to be conversant with the devices of postmodernism because magic realist writers are postcolonialists who avail themselves with the devices of postmodernism.

Helen Oyeyemi’s works are usually characterized by ambivalence. She usually combines the world of fantasy and the real creating two distinct narratives. Oyeyemi’s experimentation in her fictions and her style unambiguously sets her in the magic realist genre and without doubt in the field of postmodernism. Oyeyemi’s magical realist writings have its leaves and branches in postmodernism. For her, there is always this urge to align her writings to the genre of magic realism. Obviously her imitation of this non-European writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Ben Okri and Salman Rushdie’s draws ambivalence towards her own Britishness. She moves beyond the British writing, this is traceable her appropriation and reinvention of magic realism. African myth, ancient cultural beliefs traditions, European folklore and fairy tale intersect in her writings. This intersection creates a global literary identity and an innovative new fictional space for the 21st century. All her narrative strategies point to the fact that there is yearn to be positioned as an internationally recognized magic realist writer.

The Icarus Girl by Oyeyemi Helen centers on the life of an eight year old daughter of a British father and a black Nigerian mother, Jessamy or Jessy. Jessy lives in England but she is troubled. Her trouble is a psychological one, and this usually affects her physical and emotional interactions. This girl finds her hybrid heritage problematic, because she is in between, she cannot identify wholly to her fathers’ culture or her mothers’. She struggles for an identity. The height of the problem comes when she visits her grandparents in Nigeria. There she encounters Tilly Tilly, who may be her dead twin, the novel gets complicated when Tilly Tilly returns to England with Jessy and fights her for the possession of her body.

Oyeyemi’s *The Icarus Girl* shows the determination of a writer to see that her work is categorized as magic realism. Oyeyemi in an obvious manner includes most of the defining characteristics of magic realism. In the text *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and The Demystification of Narrative* (2004), by Wendy Faris there are five characteristics of magic realism:

An “irreducible element” of magic, second, the descriptions in magic realism detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world; third the reader may experience some unsettling doubts in the effort reconcile two conflicting understanding of events; fourth, the narrative merges different realisms; and finally, magical realism disturbs received ideas about time, space and identity (7) .

Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* is in line with Faris theory of magic realism. There is an "irreducible element" of magic and the magic is predominant and markedly self conscious. Magic events "really do happen". Obviously there is no scientific backing for this magic but the reader has no alternative but to suspend all his disbelief. For example Tilly Tilly gains access into grandpa's locked library, she reads and understands all the books on his shelves. Also on Jessamy's second visit to Lagos she is able to speak the Yoruba language.

"Ko si nkan-nkan" (309)

Oyeyemi merges the British setting with the imaginary world. This novel oscillates between recognizable world and the mystical world, she brings to light her encounter with Tilly Tilly who befriend's her during her stay in Nigeria with her grandfather. It was only Jessy that could see Tilly Tilly. "And even when Jess was with Tilly Tilly...., the most noticeable thing was that they couldn't see Tilly Tilly" (158). There Oyeyemi merges the world of the living and the dead and she distorts perceived ideas of time and identity. This is in line with Postmodernism.

Also Oyeyemi brings to light the cultural complexity of the mixed race individual what Homi Bhabha calls "in-between" which is usually characterized by tension and problem. Jessamy on the other hand is culturally and racially hybrid, she has an English father and a Nigerian mother. Her in-betweenness is seen when she arrived Nigeria. She is called "Oyibo" at the airport. This means that she is a stranger, during their drive from the airport her mother is able to communicate with the cab driver in Yoruba while Jess cannot understand them. She only does so when the language is switched to English. Obviously being called a stranger in ones place means that there is a recognition of something strange that conflicts within Jessy. That is why she is seen very anxious and emotional in the beginning of the novel. Tilly Tilly's appearance is worth mentioning. First, Tilly Tilly appears to be Jess's very good friend and later she becomes a threat to her very existence and even haunts her. This makes Jessamy estranged and she even suffers crisis of identity.

Tilly Tilly just like Jess's grandfather gives her friend a new name Jessy. On the other hand her grandfather calls her Wuraola. This echoes Jessamy's hybrid identity. Whether Jess / Jessamy or Wuraola, these names echo her hybrid position in the two worlds. "Wuraola" reflects her Nigerian identity, then Jess reflects her British identity while "Jessy" reflects her hybrid identity.

Also Tilly Tilly has two names too, Titiola is her Nigerian name, and Tilly Tilly a name given to her by her friend because she may not be able to pronounce her Yoruba name correctly. In the novel, cultural hybridity is evident in the use of the myth surrounding twins. In Africa, precisely in Yoruba land twins hold an ambiguous status. They are regarded as unique. They are able to transgress, between the spirit, real life and bush. Also when a newborn twin dies the other one is affected because the other one is a part of the other. There are assumptions that the living one might join the dead one, to avert this, a wooden figure called "Ibeji" is carved as a substitute for the dead twin. This figure possesses the dead twin's soul and maintains a connection between the dead and living for the living twin. In the novel, Jess turns out to be a twin. Her twin sister Fern had died at birth and Tilly Tilly herself is a dead twin. This is what Tilly Tilly capitalizes on.

"You have been so empty, Jessy, without your twin; you have had no one to walk your three worlds with you. I know – I am the same. I have been just like you for a long time! But now I am Fern, I am your sister and you are my twin..." (176). Also the relationship between Jess and her mother call's ones attention to the cultural hybridity in the novel. Hybridity create a sense of loss and even pain; nowonder, Jess's mother wants her to be Nigerian:

"[Jess] just didn't know; if she could decide which one to be [English or Nigerian], maybe she would be able to get rid of Tilly Tilly, who was angry with her for worrying about it. Ashes and witnesses, home lands chopped into little pieces – she'd be English. No – she couldn't though. She'd be Nigerian. No-" (268).

Obviously, Jess is not a Nigerian neither is she English. There is difficulty in marshalling out what she is and this leads to cultural dislocation and loss of identity. It is worth mentioning that Oyeyemi explore the limits and possibilities of language. During the first meeting between Tilly Tilly and Jessamy; Tilly Tilly appears to have a heavy Nigerian accent and is repetitious. As time goes on she begins to use the language well, she even uses idioms.

It is important to know that the beginning of the novel is symbolic. There we are introduced to the eight year old loner Jessamy, who has psychological problem. She is emotionally down and her fever attack too are a source of anger, anxiety caused by her duality. She keeps reminding herself who she is “My name is Jessamy, I am eight years old” (3).

She perceives herself as being different:

“There’s something about [them] that’s too different from me. It makes me weird and always thinking weird things and being scared and I don’t want to have something missing from me” (127).

She may be right because, she is in-between two cultures and the question becomes who is she? That is the problem of identification. Her mother wants her to be something she cannot comprehend. Hear her mother:

“It is not a matter of my wanting you to be Nigerian you are ... you are English too, duh. And it’s ok” (268).

This answer is not ok to Jessamy because she wants to be one thing, either British or Nigerian and the consequences is detrimental. She either removes or includes something from her identity and this is impossible. Jess identity becomes questioned in her meeting with her grandfather Gbenga and this is the first time Jessy hears her Yoruba name.

“Who?...Wuraola sounded like another person ... not her at all. Should she answer to this name and by so doing steal the identity of someone who belonged here? Should she Become Wuraola? ” (21)

These two names suggest her imposed binarism. Not belonging here nor there fully. But with time she becomes aware that this is her heritage and for real she is Wuraola. Hear Gbenga even emphasizing that a name can reveal some characteristics about its bearer. “Oyegbebi” grandfather Gbenga says, means kingship lives here, he tapped his breastbone. Here is where kingship lives. I am a princely man, and my children therefore should be proud and strong. Everyone who hears my name and knows my people should know that” (30).

This means that these names are symbols of cultural heritage and even self identity. And this is where we fault Sarah’s inability to lead her daughter through because she too is also caught between two conflicting cultures. An examination of her background will reveal the reason for this ambivalence.

Sarah, Jessamy’s mother was born and brought up by affluent Nigerian parents. Internally, there is a struggle for Sarah to reconcile herself with her intentional migration to Britain. Fifteen years back, she was sent to study medicine but she disappoints her father by studying English. This is reminiscent of Achebe’s protagonist who is faced with the same problem in *No Longer at Ease*. He was sent to study law but studies English. When he comes back, his town’s men who sent him abroad were disappointed. That is why we hear grandfather Gbenga telling Jessamy that her mother does not know what she wants, hear him.

“What job do you find in Nigerian that requires that knowledge of all these useless words?... words describing white peoples, white things, every single story spun out in some place where we don’t exist” (29).

Gbenga’s judgment reminds one of the fact that Sarah left her African heritage for the white man’s culture thereby abandoning her race and identity. Beside, her marriage to the white English man who is unaware of her culture is an evidence. Severally she demonstrates ambivalence towards her

ethnicity in the novel. Jessamy becomes the endpoint of all this; the strict upbringing which she did not take is melted on Jessamy.

“Jessamy became afraid of her mother’s almighty cuff of the back of her head” (206). She also threatens and states that: “Nigerian parents.... Could kill a child over disrespect” (120).

She refuses to teach her child Yoruba language but is seen correcting Jessamy’s English. She intentionally creates a chasm between her child and her Yoruba heritage. Contradictorily she does not tell Jessamy any Western Fairy tale but only tells her Yoruba folktales.

This brings light to the fact that she embraced an alien culture she knows nothing about and abandons her solid Yoruba heritage. Sarah comes up with reasons for her daughter’s weird and reclusive behavior: “In Nigeria Children were always getting themselves into mischief, and surely that was better than sitting inside reading and staring into the space” (6).

From the above discussion it becomes obvious that the problem of identity formation can be traced to Sarah. In the tradition of West Africa and Western, Oyeyemi finds a source. She was able to draw on both western and indigenous myths. Again the presence of twins in the novel cannot be left out. She is engaged with the indigenous oral story telling of West Africa that portrays the cultural belief in the co-existence of the real and the spirit world and in the mythical concept of the Abiku or spirit child. Oyeyemi repeatedly connects the magical and the present with the past by invoking the indigenous West African anxiety surrounding the mystery or apparent unnaturalness of twins or Ibeji and the belief that twins possess supernatural powers. Tilly Tilly’s identity throughout the novel is uncertain. This leads us again to the first meeting between Tilly Tilly and Jessmay, Jessamy observes the following: “Something about her was out of proportion was she too tall and yet too ... small at the same time? Was her neck too long? Her fingers? (46).

This is not normal, the narrator even adds the fact that she looks like someone who has crawled out of a tomb: “Her toes and feet were whitened with gravel scratches and sand, and ... chest...The skin of her knees and elbows was ashen and grayish in patches” (47). Tilly Tilly begins to mimick her friend’s voice.

In England, Tilly Tilly becomes more spiritual. The event here disorients our sense of time, space and identity. The two enter houses unseen and even unravel so many secrets. She offers to be Jessmay’s lost twin as mentioned and even offers her protection. Unfortunately as time progresses Jessamy becomes afraid of her friend. At one point Tilly Tilly takes control of Jessamy’s body. This did not go down well with Jessamy, it frightened her and she warns her friend not to do it again.

Jessamy discovers that no one else could see Tilly Tilly except her. Though her new friend Siobhan senses Tilly Tilly on one occasion. Siobhan realizes that this thing is not a normal girl ie a human being. She realizes that she was going to harm Jessamy. At this point on Tilly Tilly becomes something very wicked, a harbinger of death, anxiety and sorrow. She destroys Sarah’s only computer and bathroom mirror. She even scares the hell out of the reader in the scene where Jessamy wakes up and perceived Tilly Tilly’s skin. Her skin smelt like wet rotten vegetable, only then she finds her hanging upside down from the ceiling:

Face dangling a few centimeters a way from hers; those pupils, dilated until there was no white; those enormous, swollen lips, almost cartoonish except that they were deepest black, encrusted with dead dry skin, coated here and there with chunks of (I don’t know, I don’t know, please don’t let me know, even guess) something moist and pinky-white....

The lips, which had paused, continued to move. Transfixed she caught a glimpse as they moved over a small, manure stump, the remains of a tongue..... jess began to scream, long and loud, as the silent, never-ending torrent of reddish black erupted from that awful mouth and engulfed her, baptizing her in its madness. The worst thing is really happening (206 – 206).

This scene resembles a scene from a horror movie, before this scene Tilly Tilly's words are ambiguous and confusing. Hear her when she tells Jessamy she cannot belong because she perceives that Jessamy wants to belong. One becomes confused as this point what immediately comes to one's mind is the fact that the black man cannot be accepted no matter how he tries he cannot be white.

"There is no need to belong she say anyway there is no home and"

She dives back to the past, obviously because she shares the African heritage with Tilly Tilly but this past is recollected in fragments. "our blood". She say has been split like water for drinking, for washing and she Tilly Tilly, is a witness of the cruelty of the past (260). Obviously she must have added to Jessamy's confusion too.

Oyeyemi brings to light the dangers of not honoring old traditions. In the novel Sarah fails to perform the rituals for her daughter Jessamy because she has turned her back to the traditions of her people.

"Jess lives in three worlds....she's abiku...The spirits tell her things! Fern tells her things ...we should've. We should've d – d-done Ibeji carving for her" (181). The above show that Sarah regrets not going back to her roots and she admits this to Daniel. She equally admits being scared of her daughter hear her: "I can't mother this girl. I try, butI'm scared of her.....she is not like me at all. I don't think she is like you either. I can't even tell who this girl is" (201 – 211).

She is the hybrid. The third space, the result of intermingling of two distinct cultures. To crown it all Jessamy dreams of the same woman she saw Tilly Tilly drawing. The woman is said to be long armed and looks like an Ere Ibeji figure. It becomes obvious to Jessamy that Tilly Tilly and the woman are same "like two sides of a coin" (171).

At the end of the novel Jessamy's new friend Siobhan is pushed down from a staircase by the evil Tilly Tilly. She is surely hurt and all fingers point at Jessamy. To understand this incident one has to suspend all rational reasoning. Also Jessamy drifts into coma after a tragic accident and she finds herself in a "bush" trying to get back to the real world. She wanders through this bush trying to come in contact with her friend Tilly Tilly who is now "the Sun" as she rushes straight to her dear friend, she wakes up: "Hopped, skipped, jumped into Tilly's unyielding flesh Jessamy Harrison woke up and up and up" (334).

The title, *The Icarus Girl* is connected to a myth in ancient Greek called Icarus. This myth is about the son of Daedalus who to escape imprisonment\ flies by means of artificial wings but melts and falls into the sea and drowns when the wax on his wings melts as he flies too near the sun. His tragic flaw was hubris, because Icarus was of firm belief that he can control his destiny and because of his youth and inexperience he overestimates his powers. Obviously his youthful exuberance leads to his downfall. So the following excerpts above can be interpreted in line with this Greek mythology of Icarus Jessamy having lost control of her body and mind ends up tragically. The tragedy is that she loses her identity. Her internal conflict cannot be solved. This myth is strengthened by the Yoruba poem at the end of the novel *Praise of the Leopard*. In this poem the Leopard flings himself into dangerous situations, just like the African man who thinks he can handle two cultures.

This bush is not new to Jessamy she is familiar with it perhaps, through stories. This bush implies that her identity has come to question. She is told of her imminent death.

"You are going to die" (331). In the bush she is carried around by a silent girl. Suddenly her name is called three times "Wuraola" (332) symbolizing not only the three times her grandfather called her (Oyeyemi 313). The silent Girl brings her close and they gaze at each other's eyes. First Jessamy believes she is looking at herself but then she understands that "It's her" (333). Jessamy tells her that she can share her name after this the girl disappears into the sky. "Taken away into the sky in a stream of light" (177). This was Jessamy's twin sister who was not given a Yoruba name due to the fact that she died at birth. This is symbolic; it means that Jessamy still has the opportunity to recover.

Oyeyemi's narrator is unreliable and immature her perception of events is questionable. Oyeyemi use the third person omniscient narrative from the eye of an eight year old protagonist the events unfolds. Not only is she a child but she suffers from a sort of psychological problem. A character that is seen hiding in a cupboard and constantly tries to remind herself who she actually is. Oyeyemi's narrative technique ruptures our perception of familiar myth and literary concepts. The novel offers an ambiguous reading. Also in the novel Yoruba words and phrases are infused throughout, perhaps a way of bringing to light the cultural differences that exist in hybrid African countries. Also in the novel there are allusions to Greek myth and religious references, specifically Yoruba. She juxtaposes both mythical and Christian symbols for example when Jess's aunt is preparing a meal, her uncle asks: "Are you sure you are not preparing for a modern day feeding of the five thousand? You are only cooking for twenty people, you know" (65).

To understand the *Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* by Syl Cheney Coker of Sierra Leone one has to be conversant with the middle passage and how it affected sierra-Leone. Perhaps an understanding of the Creoles of Sierra Leone will be useful. Sierra Leoneans are the syncretized result of cultural mingling between African, American, Caribbean and European cultures. These liberated slaves who had been exposed to Western culture brought these creoles. Obviously one of the characteristic hybridity is tension. This transition is never smooth hear Cheney – Coker himself:

If you have read my poetry, and of course my novel, it is clear that. I am a sierra Leonean with roots in the history of the middle passage. Initially I think I was trying to come to terms with defining what that history has meant for me and how in some ways it makes me slightly different, or so people feel from other West African writers. It is clear that if you are dealing with other West African writers who write in English, their mindsets, the traditional norms and forms that make themselves known in their poetry now and then, image clusters so to speak which they have inherited, remained intact. But in my case its quite different because I'm having to contend with the admixture for an African life and the history of slavery what does two have meant for us sierra Leonian Creoles. (11 – 12)

Obviously, this is a cultural crisis, and this crisis has to do with people who have lost their pride and heritage and the only resort will be to regain their self respect and dignity. Cheney Coker using Magic Realism travels through time and space, from the imaginary to the magical, from the living to the dead. He oscillates between the past and present. This brings to light the negative effects of slavery and the wickedness of the colonizers. He even brings to light the corruption and the dictatorship that plague the present day postcolonial Africa.

The story is very complicated it traces generations, the families of Cromantines and the martin who were the founders of the malaguelta. And later Thomas Bookerman the leader of the new wave immigrant, Phyllis Dundas and the farmer brothers. These people who were originally slaves only to return to Africa to face the worst kind of humiliation.

Their fight for justness and freedom reverberates throughout the novel. These families have blood link with the magical Suleiman, who is also known as Alusine Dunbar. He has a daughter called Fatmatta who he conceived through magical powers. His daughter is also known as Bird woman and she possesses supernatural powers too. She is encountered in a boat returning to Africa from America by the Cromantines. At her death she relieves the burden in her heart to Jeanette Cromatine. Jeanette was a proud and free young African American slave who is married to Sebastian a slave. They were all in the boat returning to Africa to find their roots.

Coker brings to light the kind of tyranny and leadership in Africa, most of these people have bloodlines with these founders i.e. malaguelta and chromatins. He exposes the corruption during the military regime and also during the civilian regime, malaguelta grow and changes, these grandchildren of the chromatin sow the seed of anticolonialism. These Arabs and British decide to withdraw because of the pressure. Alibaba and "the forty ministers took over the reigns of malaguetta (381). These people are more corrupt than their predecessors. They are later overthrown by masimiara

the head of the Army. Sanka Maru the new civilian assumes leadership but tyranny and opposition continues. Magically the magical Suleiman files in a carpet to get him:

President Sanka Mani walked to a window, pushed the curtains aside and saw a magic carpet flying in the air, not knowing that it had come a long way and that its arrival had been predicted by an albino afraid of light, mesmerized by the occurrence maru thought he was seeing things when an old man lowered himself from the carpet, waved him, and disappeared under a tree. (395)

The above is laughable, the meaning is also ambiguous, first coker exceeds the limits of reality distorting our sense of space. This could mean that it will only take a supernatural intervention to stop the corruption that exists in the African society. Syl Cheney Coker is a postcolonial writer on the margin he shares common characteristics with the magical realist cosmopolitans of the Latin American variety; he also has preoccupations in common with the cultural nationalism of some of the African decolonizers. His precise location and its political and narrative implications are revealed in the major themes of the novel, and its narrative points of view.

These slaves are rootless and they are haunted by their rootlessness for example Sebastian Cromantines, dreams about his father telling him that he is restless and that his only peaceful place will be in Africa, where his origin lies hear Sebastian's father:

"A rootless man burdened by his inability to find a resting place" (9).

After this dream Sebastian decides to embark on a dangerous mission to return to Africa to find his father's origin and perhaps bury his bones there. Fatmatta the Bird woman is burdened with this same vision. She is being drawn to Africa by a vision. This Africa is where her umbilical cord is buried. Thus:

She saw a long ancestral bridge with a lot of people crossing from one end to the other, and suddenly everything was clear to her, cut off from that coalescence of man and spirits, burdened by servitude, she had merely been fulfilling a destiny circumscribed by fate, by an old animated life rhythm that went round the universe like a great flame and then she knew that she would not die in the land of leeches but that she would return shed all signs of degradation and abuse. Because by the persistence of its looks by the grave and reverential distances it put between itself and other turkey, the great bird had come to take her home to that land where her navel string was buried (67).

In Africa the umbilical cord which usually connects the mother while in the womb to her unborn child. This umbilical is buried after the birth of the child this symbolizes the baby's link to earth. A times where this is buried a beautiful tree is planted and this tree grows with the child. Thus the above creates an image of return to the source. Unfortunately Fatmatta does not return home. She dies on the boat to be buried along with her umbilical cord in Africa. This means that the journey of freedom is not going to be an easy one. But when they return to their homeland, they become aliens who are ignorant of the customs. Sebastian on returning home asks the king for land.

"Which they were prepared to farm and pay him back from the harvest" (69).

Obviously, this may be the practice where he comes from but the king quickly warns him that "Here, no one owns anything, not even the stones" (69).

The king quickly reminds them that they are strangers:

"Keep off our women" (70).

This is very painful. The people ascribe all negativity to these returnees. Coker explores the superstitious belief in Africa using the malaria incident.

"But when their children succumbed to death soon after eating the sweet potatoes which the foreign woman had planted, they deduced with an age old logic, contrary to reason, that the seed of settlers misfortune had been planted in their world, which not even the totemic powers of the gods could halt" (101).

Again corruption is one Cheney-Coker's thematic concern in this work hear him:

We have just changed the government in Sierra Leon where there have been some of most corrupt politicians imaginable (there, of course, corrupt politicians every where from New York to Istanbul). These are the chaps I went to school with, who had the finest education, who went to Oxford and took Ph.Ds. They have no business being corrupt. I have come to the decision that the last people you want to put in government in Sierra Leone are people who are educated. They make the worst criminals. (16)

As generation pass, and the search for freedom has become a thing of the past, the next problem becomes the leaders. These ruling classes are even more violent and brutal than the old slavers. They too resort to the same barbarity they accuse of the colonial masters of. It is an Irony that masimiara was thrown into the same dungeon where they had put past slaves during the slave trade:

“Where in centuries past, the blood of his countrymen and women had mixed with their own excreta and vomit, before they were transported across the treacherous sea to die in the swampy bleakness of another world” (vii).

These leaders have become more corrupt than their predecessors. The bribery, corruption and nepotism in these countries are unequaled. The worst is that these colonial masters still interfere in the affairs of the people.

“Us company to dump under waste off African coast. It was his country, all right; there was no doubt about it. He read how for the sum of twenty five million dollars the president had agreed to have the toxic waste dumped in the waters of his country, and kill off all the children” (xi).

As time went on the gap between the rich and poor kept growing. The rich keeps getting richer and the poor, gets poorer. This greed does not emanate from history but it is something that is innate. Thomas Bookerman is disappointed and cries out:

“Men who only yesterday were shop keepers with bad teeth and could barely read, now ordered evening jackets in black venetians and hopsacks; women who only yesterday were content to wear hand-men-downs and keep clean houses had taken to buying gold and parading in silk and brocade at church services” (213).

This is oligarchy at its peak Coker in this novel emphasis that literature is the only tool that can call these sycophants to order. He sees it as a weapon to fight this hydra headed problem, thus:

“Poetry was a much more dangerous weapon than a whole army”. It cannot be denied that the writer is the conscience of his society. He is just like the biblical voice crying out with the sole aim of change. The novel like all magic realist novels is not an easy one. There are many story tellers who all want to tell the history of Malagueta. These include Alusine Dunbar, Thomas Bookerman and even Coker Cheney at who becomes a poet as manifested in character of Garbage. Cheney ironically distances himself from the magical happenings, as it is done in most magical realists' texts. The work is also filled with ambiguities; the tone of the novel is poetic too. The authors' voice may be seen as omniscient but at the same time it is filled uncertainties. The structure of the narrative is fragmented and dispersed. Again, its narrative voices is multiple and complex.

Conclusion

So far this paper has strived to argue that magic realism constitutes a point of convergence between post modernism and post colonialism. Magic realism becomes an important mode of expression worldwide, especially in post colonial cultures, because it has provided the literary background for significant cultural works. At the same time magic realism has also contributed to the growth of post modernism literary sensibility. Cheney Coker's *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* tells the story of the transatlantic slave trade and its horrors. He also presents the political situation in Sierra-Leone using magic realism. Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* possesses all the defining characteristics of magical realism. She was able to incorporate Yoruba folklore into her novel. Her experimental style indicates that her work should be categorized as post modernism. The two works bear testimonies to the fact that magic realism is not shallow or a term to be done away with. Magic realism is a resourceful literary tool that a writer could use to create a unique work.

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