

**A RE-EVALUATION OF MAGIC REALISM IN BEN OKRI'S *THE FAMISHED ROAD* AND NGUGI WA THIONGO'S *WIZARD OF THE CROW***

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**Abstract**

In literature, magic realism is an artistic technique or genre of fiction in which mysterious elements intermingle with the real world. Unfortunately, most critics of magic realism tend to ground magic realism as shallow, dangerous, primitive, a term that we ought to do away with and a term arising out of post colonial unevenly developed society as well as an expression of a particular belief system. This paper therefore, re-evaluates magic realism. It sees magic realism as not only a post colonial style of writing but a term that should not be done away with. It sees magic realism as a productive fictional mode of critique. A style of writing that includes innovation, political, literary and post modern currents. In this paper, Ben Okri's *The famished Road* is seen as a magic realist attempt at a critical presentation of the travails of life in the author's contemporary society. *The Famished Road* is seen as a graphical representation of the mysterious relationship between man and his circumstances and the nature of human existence in the author's society. Ngugi wa Thiongo in *Wizard of the Crow* uses Magical realism as a tool to mock leadership in Africa. He does this by effectively manipulating the realistic mode. Here, character representation exceeds the limits of conventional realism. The two works throws light to the fact that magic realism is not shallow but occupies a pivotal position in literature, it reflects cultural, literary and political currents. This research work is hinged on Carl Jung's Mythological criticism.

**Key words:** Magic Realism, Cultural, Post Colonial, Political, literary and Mythological Criticism

**Introduction**

The very first rudiment of magic realism can be traced shortly after the First World War in Europe. The fragile Germany, heavily defeated and coping with political violence and extreme economic difficulties, was undergoing an unstable period. The country was seriously suffering from destruction of the economic system; moreover, the post war situation burdened the republic with demands for reparation. With this constant anxiety and disillusionment an effort to find a new meaning to the unfortunate reality was attempted. The term is said to be introduced by Franz Roh (1890-1965) in 1925. He was an art critic who believed in the idea of "art attempting to produce a clear depiction of reality that includes a presentation of the mysterious elements of everyday life" (131). He presented magical realism as a reaction to expressionism's more abstract style and to mark a return to realism. Of course by the 1920s, leading art critics had determined that 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 ) by Roh, and Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) by German museum director Hartlaub.

After a famous exhibition in 1925 entitled Neue Sachlichkeit, Hertaub's term prevailed, temporary, over Roh's; Magischer Realismus did not re appear until the 1960s, during which time increased attention to German art generated many exhibitions and publications. For

Roh the key was “re-engagement” the presented surface behind which magic, in his words “hides and palpitates”. Roh expanded the essay in which he first used the term “Magic Realism” into a book, *Nach-Expressionismus, (Magischer Realismus)*. The essay was quickly translated into Spanish. In Spanish, the book’s title was *Realismo Magico, Post Expresionismo*, a positioning which gave the new term “Magic Realism” additional prominence. The book and the essay were distributed not only in Spain but in Latin America as well. Within a year the term magic realism was being applied to the prose of European writers in the literary circles of Buenos Aires.

The term’s currency was shortly reinforced by emigrants from Europe to Latin America in the 1930s and 1940s. It was adopted during the 1940s by Latin American 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. More than one –fifth of the half million persons that fled Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Austria between 1933 and 1941, including many noted artists and arts historian settled in Central and South America. Influential essays by Alejo Carpentier, “On the Marvelous Real in America” in 1949, and Angel Flore’s “Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction” in 1955, further defined both the genre’s characteristics and its pertinence to contemporary Latin American Literature. Although, Zamora and Faris points out that Magic Realism is indeed an “international commodity” (2). With important antecedents in such European modes as Pastoral, epic, Romance, it was certainly in Latin America that the term was first applied to a literary genre. 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 fame in the use of magical realism is unprecedented. Sustained interest in the novel brought about its translation into thirty seven languages and sold thirty million copies of *One*

*Hundred Years of Solitude (1967)*. His magical realism was borne out of the troubled Latin American history during the years of civil strife in Colombia. His masterful and fascinating imagination has made a name not only for himself but for his native land as well. This story about seven generations of Buendia family reads like the history of generations of Latin American people. The myths, beliefs, and traditions are given an aura of reality even though the events are extraordinary. The simple life of peasants transforms into a life of magic and enchantment that simply just happens.

Another writer Salman Rushdie, an Indian-Briton, followed the foot prints of Marquez. He wrote *The Satanic Verses (1988)* which was a highly controversial novel and banned in India in 1989. Ayoolah Ruhollah Khomeini, issued a Fatwa on Rushdie’s life after the publication of this. Rushdie combines magical realism with political and historical realism in *Midnight’s Children (1981)*. In this novel, Rushdie relates the story of a boy at the stroke of midnight, on the exact day that India gets her independence. The supernatural powers that the boy posses is combined with a mistaken identity caused by a switch at the time of his birth making it a tale of magic, self discovery and national history.

Isabelle Allende is a Chilean and has written novels such as *The House of Spirits (1982)*. This is the story of a family from prominent aristocracy in an unnamed country. Descriptions in three novels include a conservative political class, socialist class, a military regime and a revolutionary opposition. All sides of the polity are described in some details through the action, events and dialogues of the characters. Eccentric characters that display special abilities such as clairvoyance and extraordinary beauty are depicted in the novel.

Some critics identify oral traditions as the root of magical realism; therefore some peculiarities of magic realism may be identified when examined based on their geographical Origins. Magic realism is a global phenomenon found in Countries such as Brazil, Colombia, 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 Frames *The Carpathians* and from Australia, David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*. Other magic realism writers include Gunter Grass from Germany, Italo Calvino from Italy and John Fowles from England. From the 1960s to the Present, magic realism exists as a continuous presence in twentieth century literature. For 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). According to Christopher Warnes "Magic realism is a Mode of Narration that naturalizes 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 equivalence. On the level of the text neither has a greater claim to truth or referentiality" (3). For M.H Abrams "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)

The researcher was able to identify six primary characteristics of the mode, the first is irreducible element of magic; second, the descriptions in magical realism detail 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; fourth, the narrative merges different realms; fifth, magic realism disturbs received ideas about time, space and identity. The "irreducible element" is something we cannot explain according to the laws of the universe as they have been formulated in Western empirically based discourse, that is, according to "logic, familiar knowledge, or received beliefs". Therefore, the reader has difficult marshaling 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 such acceptance for their readers.

A second characteristic of magical realism is that its description details a strong presence of the "phenomenal world". This is the realism in magical 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 detail 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 contradictory understandings of events, and hence experience some unsettling doubts. The question of belief is very is 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 systems differ, 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 realms”. 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-sometimes 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.

Finally, “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 magical realist text. 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. Most critics of magical realism tend to ground magic realism as dangerous, shallow, primitive, a term arising out of post colonial unevenly developed society and as an expression of particular belief system, some even suggested that we ought to do away with the term. In response to this problem, the researcher seeks to re-evaluate magical realism in Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* and Ngugi Wa Thiongo’s *Wizard of the Crow* as a term that occupies a pivotal position, both reflecting the cultural moment of post colonialism, while at the same time reflecting literary, political and postmodern currents.

The researcher’s basic aim in this study is to re-evaluate magic realism in Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* and Ngugi Wa Thiongo’s *Wizard of the Crow*. Because Magic realism has been termed shallow, dangerous, primitive and should be done away with, this study therefore looks at magic realism not only a postcolonial style of writing, but an innovative style writing that includes literary, political, post modern currents and the emergence of submerged narrative traditions in metropolitan centers.

The term magic realism has appeared in print with increasing frequency over the last few decades. It can be found in a vast number of university course descriptions, academic articles in popular press, and is now familiar to millions. Even advertising industry has begun to take an interest in the term. But in the domain of literary studies this popularity has until recently, not been matched by any certainty over what magical realism actually is and what it does. Scholars new to the field are thus likely to be confronted with a number of contradictory attitudes. Thus we find Homi Bhabha referring to magic realism as “The literary Language of the emergent postcolonial World”. For Jean Franco it is “Little more than a brand name for exoticism” (204). According to Matei Calinescu, “ It can be a major, perhaps the major , component of post modernist fiction” some critics have suggested that we ought to do away with the term altogether (Gonzalez Echevarria Carpentier 108; Connell 95-110).

In Camayd-Freixas account, magical realism is understood to be a sophisticated aesthetic expression of primitivism that served the yearnings of Latin American writers for identity and cultural emancipation. The magical realism of Carpentier, Asturias, Rulfo and Garcia Marquez is shown to develop from an urge to reclaim a space of otherness by appealing to myths of difference (49). Importantly, Camayd –Freixas’s approach differs from that of the early formalists that treats magic realism as a historical style deriving from an “ethnological version based on the presence of myth, legend, the syncretism of Indian, black and peasant from the most isolated and remote regions of the Americas”(320). His attempts to ground the mode in literary and cultural contexts from which it emerges, while productive in terms of the texts he studies, does not, however, attempt to account for the ways magic realism has

become an international phenomenon, nor how this ethnological version would apply to non-Latin American texts.

Faris adopts exactly the global perspective lacking in Camayd-Freixas's account, asserting that,

The term magic realism, coined in the early twentieth century to describe a new, neo-realistic, style in German painting, then applied to Latin American fiction, now designates perhaps the most important contemporary trend in international fiction. Magical realism has become so important as a mode of expression worldwide, especially in postcolonial cultures, because it has provided the literary ground for significant cultural work; within its texts, marginal voices, submerged traditions, and emergent literatures have developed and created masterpieces.

Here, Faris adopts a global perspective of magic realism, asserting that magic realism is a very important trend. Faris is not Anthropological, she views magical realism as something that exceeds post colonial cultures. The researcher strongly agrees with her.

The research work is hinged on Carl Jung's mythological criticism. This theory traces the presence of primordial images and repeated types of experiences in the lives of our very ancient ancestors. These are repeated experiences in myths, religion, dreams, and private fantasies as well as in the works of literature. This criticism is applied to narrative designs, character types or images which are said to be identifiable in a wide variety of works of literature as well as myths, dreams or even ritualized modes of social behavior.

### **Blending Politics, Author's Identity and Cultural Background in *The Famished Road***

*The Famished Road* was first published in 1991 and won the Booker Prize last year. Okri had lived in England since 1978, leaving Nigeria for a University education abroad when he finished secondary school at the age of nineteen. This is somewhat unusual among African writers, many of whom tended to travel to the west somewhat later in their lives, retaining stronger home bases in the countries of the origins. But at the same time of being much more acculturated by the west than some of his fellow Nigerians writers, Okri's work remain steeped in indigenous images and west African oral culture, as well as in his sense of the transformations, degradation and poverty to his native Lagos. As Biodun Jeyifo puts it, with reference to Omovo, the main character in Okri's second novel, *The Landscapes Within*, but with relevance to *The Famished Road*.

Through his art and rumination he sets down in a personal diary...the disintegrative chaos in his family, the neighborhood slum, and the whole Country. This may indeed be the quintessential contribution of Okri's fiction to the novelistic delineation of the present predicament of our society; a mostly unsentimental depiction of how the youthful generation of post-civil war Nigeria came of age through an embittering experience which leaves them lost and floundering in a world they cannot comprehend (3).

Set at the historical moment just prior to Nigerian independence. *The Famished Road* is situated primarily within three sites. There is the wild forest, in which the spirits, witches, monsters and ghosts find dark and dense safe cover. Then here is the road, which clears and encroaches on this bushes and brings western technology and 'Progress', while exposing and thereby annihilating the hiding spirits. Thriving on the borders between the road and bush is Madame Koto's bar, through which pass, new politicians and old witches, electricity and ghosts, a gramophone, a motor car and malevolent Abiku Spirits.

Azaro the main character through whose eyes the bulk of the novel unfolds, as an Abiku baby, has an ambiguous existence. Abiku babies torment their mothers by being spirits in the guise of babies, spirits who repeatedly are born, only to die and return to the spirit world. Okri's narrative stance is brought about as a response to social vices, political turmoil and spiritual decadence prevalent in his society. Okri applies magical realism in patterns that make his creativity divulge that human beings and supernatural beings intermingle in addressing the human situation. Azaro, the Abiku child, is a symbol of the incessant political odds, military odds and social injustices. The coming and going of the child represents the consistence coups and odds in African governance.

In the physical realm, Azaro symbolize poverty stricken Nigerian children struggling to survive in the midst of agony and misery in Nigerian slums. These slums are places where infant mortality is a common occurrence. He feels the pang of the harsh realities of hunger and want. The wretchedness is overwhelming. Steadiness of starvation, brutality and sickness, horrid accommodation in a single room with no toilet or electricity, joblessness; violence, fraudulent politicians, the conflict between modernity and a traditional way of life. The Nigerian reality is made manifest in the lives of the majority of this ghetto dwellers. Azaro explains out his relationship to his spiritual affiliates:

There was no one amongst us who looks forward to being born. We disliked the rigors of existence, the unfulfilled longings, the enshrined injustices of the world, the labyrinths of love, the ignorance of parents, the fact of dying and the amazing indifference of the living in the midst of the simple beauties of the universe. We feared the heartlessness of human beings, all of whom are born blind, fear of whom ever learnt to see (3).

Spiritually, Azaro as an Abiku or spirit child, whose ties to the real world is weak understand the real plight of the earthly child. He is a sojourner free to return to his spiritual base at anytime and without hindrance too he explains that:

There are many reasons why babies cry when they are born and one of them is the sudden separation from the world of pure dreams, where all things are made of enchantment, and where there is no suffering/ The happier we were the close was our birth. As we approached another incantation we made pacts that we will return to the spirit world at the first opportunity. We made these vows in the fields of intense flowers and in the sweet-tasting moonlight of the world (4).

The pains of Azaro's parents lay on the fact their child has a flimsy hold of life and may at any moment heed to the call of his spirit peers. The most agonizing of having an Abiku as a child is not just the death of the youngster but the fact that the death of the child is a cyclic motion of tragedy. There is the belief that the Abiku is born again and again to the same parents, each time dying without getting to adulthood. It is not therefore far from the truth to argue that Okri's magic realism is the result of a unique fusion of the beliefs and superstitions of the author's cultural background.

An examination of the theme of hybridism and conservatism in *The Famished Road* will be of use in this study. It is a mistake to assume too readily that the road of the title of Okri's novel is a colonial symbol of western intrusion and technology. At the outset of the novel this road passed through the ancient world of the spirits and is conceptualized. Within traditional mythology, Azaro's father, a story teller, tells him that his father (Azaro's grandfather) is "head-priest of our shrines, priest of the God of Roads. Anyone who wants a special sacrifice

for their journeys, undertaking, births, funerals, whatever, goes to him. All human beings travel the same road” (70).

Azaro’s father, in the mode of hiving back to past values, emphasizes that “that our old people are very powerful spirits” and that “we are forgetting these powers. Now all the powers that people have are selfishness, money and politics” (70).

Azaro’s father went on to narrate the story of a giant monster. Okri emphasizes that the famished monster of the road is not the obvious symbol of politician. Although these are its more modern manifestation, the greed is universal and ancient- “people believed that he had lived for thousands of years and that nothing could kill him and that he could not die”(259). The story describes how the monster wreaks terrible havoc, including devouring the various delegations sent to reason and bargain with him. The ending of dad’s story reiterates the monster of insatiability and proffers a warning:

“What had happened was that the king of the road had become part of the entire road in this world. He is still hungry, and he will always be hungry. This is why there are many accidents in the world”.

This is the quite familiar tutuoalan myth of origins and warnings, set in the long past of “our great –great –great grandfather” (260), and cautioning against unbridled innovation and explorations.

Dad has other stories to tell, he has a nightmare, which he relates to Azaro and which must have autobiographical undertones for Okri, who emigrated to London at a tender age. Dad firstly dreams a continent into existence. “The inhabitants of this continent are not like us, they are white Bushmen” (436). Dad also dreams that he is on a strange island:

The people treated me roughly. They were also white unfriendly people. Unfriendly to me, at least. I lived among them for many years. I couldn’t find my way out. I was trapped there on that small island. I found it difficult to live there. They were afraid of me because of my different colour. As for me, I began to lose weight. I had to shrink the continent in me to accommodate myself to the small island (437).

Eventually, presumably as part of the degrading process of accommodation, Dad “looked into the mirror and nearly died of astonishment when I saw that I had turned white”. His shame and humiliation reach a pinnacle in “a big city on the island” where everything is cold and icy and where ice “ice turned my hair white” when Azaro appears as a young man, to buy a newspaper from his shrunken, icy white father who is a news-vendor- “when you gave me the money it burned my hand”(437). This is reminiscent of the embarrassment when Azaro sees him as the night soil man, and the lesson about race is unambiguous-the familiar warning about not straying from one’s people and culture.

Mum has a similar story about whites, for all its apparent plot differences with dad’s tale. This time, the whites come to Africa, an Africa, which is more advanced in all spheres of knowledge than the west, an Africa from which these whites come to learn. This is an Africa of idealized negritude tradition, a homogenous, intrinsically generous continent that shares what it has, only afterwards to be cheated and robbed. Essences, generalization and bitterness stalk this story:

When white people first came to our land; she said, as if she were talking to the wind, we had already gone to the moon and all great stars. In the olden days they used to come and learn from us. My father used to tell me that we taught them how to count. We taught them about the stars. We gave them some of our gods. We shared our knowledge with them. We welcomed them. But they forgot all of this. They forgot many things. They forgot that we are all brothers and sisters and that black people are

the ancestors of human race. The second time they came they brought guns. They took our land, burned gods, and they carried away many of our people to become slaves across the sea. They are greedy. They want to own the whole world and conquer the sun. Some of them believed that they have killed God. Some of them worship machines. They are misusing the powers God gave all of us.

Mum's story is more nuanced towards its end, but the "us" and "them" polarity is not really mediated by her rather peculiar – "They are not all bad. Learn from them but love the world" (282).

Having said that we should now assume that the road is primarily the symbol of colonialism, it is true that it partly has that significance. And that role, the road functions in the familiar way to contest the desirability of the modernization it brings- "steadily, over days and months, the parts had been widening, Bushes were being burnt, tall grasses cleared, tree stumps uprooted". There is the loud noise of engines and road builders. Houses take the place of trees etc. This colonial, modernizing road does not necessarily bring progress. On one of the occasions when Azaro is abducted, he is taken along an "endless" road and develops "a terrible hunger for a destination" (113). Like the wild bush, in which a person can most easily lose their way, the new uses can be wild and terrifying leading to nowhere:

All the roads multiplied, reproducing themselves, like snakes, tails in their mouths, twisting themselves, into labyrinths. The road was the worst hallucination of them all, leading towards home and then away from it, without end, with too many signs, and no directions. The road became my torment, my aimless pilgrimage, and I found myself merely walking to discover where all the road lead to, Where they end (114-115).

The recent colonial road has brought crisis of identity and direction. But it gives way to a more universal and allegorical road. The road of life subverting the image of back-breaking colonial road gangs, into which Africans were hijacked, by one means or another, at the hands of the colonial authority. What is clear, notwithstanding the labyrinth within which the road symbolism is constructed, is that Okri's society is the bizarre product of both new and old, tradition and burgeoning change. It is one of the unevenly developed societies that spawns magic realism.

Azaro observes the hybrid cacophony of African culture, of old and new co-existing, typical of magic realist's contexts:

One road led to a thousand others, which in turn fed into paths, which fed into dirt tracks, which became streets, which ended in avenues and cell-de-sacs. All around a new world was being erected amidst the old skyscrapers stood high and inscrutable beside huts and zinc abodes. Bridges were being built, flyovers, half finished, were like passageways into the air, or like future visions of a time when cars would be able to fly. Roads, half constructed, were crowded with heavy machinery. (113)

The theme of hybridity will take us to the site of madame Koto's bar, where spirits and politicians mingle. It also takes us to the mythical madame herself. The spirits are everywhere, but they are extraordinary present in madame Koto's bar:

It seemed that I have walked into the wrong bar, had stepped into another reality on the edge of the forest. On the floor there were eaten bits of chicken and squashed jollof rice paper plates. The walls were full of almanacs with severe faces, bearded faces, mildly squinted eyes, pictures which suggested terrible ritual societies and secret cabals. There were odd-looking calendars with goats in transformations into human beings, fishes with heads of birds with the bodies of women. (271)



The bar is another site of multiple meanings, the most obvious of which is the bar's own spatial positioning of the border between road and bush, at the gateway to the spirits, who enter from the bush and haven to the new politicians, who enter from the road. As in Bhabha's border interstices this is the zone of the mutant the hybrid, women-birds and bird fish creatures, half woman and part spirits etc. The bar is a barometer to the nature of the modernizing, westernizing changes. Here electric light will astound the people:

"The most extraordinary things were happening in madame Koto's bar. The first unusual thing was that cable connected to her rooftop now brought electricity. Illiterate crowds gathered in front of the bar to see this new wonder. They saw cables, the wires, the pylons in the distance..." (373).

All of this is in the mode of the magical ironic inversion of reality, where spirits are a routine part of the mundane every day, and electric light and sound constitute the awesome and unbelievable. Okri's *The Famished Road* manages to present a view of the Nigerian contemporary life that exudes a sense of energy and vitality in an environment that promises not only ethereal delight and a fair share of mystery but as well the intricacies of the author's societal identity and cultural inclinations. In effect, his reader is rewarded with the author's point of view on a society that would have naturally given more to its inhabitants in the real sense of life and existence. He presents a society where the most potential can instantaneously be exchanged for the most probable as he drifts with ease from the domain of the real to the magical realm by the similarity, yet, unfamiliar device of the magical artistic imagination. Madame Koto's new car must undergo the rituals of washing. The following funny tragic portrayal is a quintessential instance of African intellectual's perception of the culture's patchworks:

When they arrived for madame Koto to wash her new car, many people came to celebrate the ritual with her. Our landlord was present. People brought their bicycles and scooters. Many came on foot. There were old men whom we had not seen before. And there a lot of powerful strange women with eyes that registered no emotion. We saw chiefs, thugs, and there were even herbalists, witch-doctors and their acolytes. They gathered in the bar and drank. They talked loudly. Eventually everyone was summoned for washing. They formed a circle round the vehicle. The great herbalist among them was a stern man with face so battered and eyes so daunting that even mirrors would recoil and crack at his glance. He uttered profound incantations and prayed for the car (380).

However, as the rituals degenerates into tragic ambiguity is created regarding the desirability of the changes. The great herbalist prophesies that the car will become a coffin, as indeed it does. Our faith in him is stretched when he drunkenly attempts to use his prophecy to grab a prostitute: "But if you give me one of these women", the herbalist said lunging at one of the prostitutes and missing, "then I will drive the coffin away from the car" (381). But the ominousness of his prediction is powerful and when he focuses his bleary eyes, it is eerily on the forest and the wind howls and whistles 'along the electric cables'. The elements are at war with the new technology and the birds abandon the car top. Shortly thereafter, the driver loses control of the car, smashing into a beggar and the Abiku, Ade, and horribly wounding himself. This leads to Azaro's mournful observation:

I think most of our real troubles began that night. They began not with the devastation of voices and chairs and the car, but with the blood mingling with rain and flowing right into the mouth of the road. I heard the slaking of the road's unquenchable thirst. And blood was a new kind of libation. The road was young but its hunger was old. And its hunger had been reopened (424).

Nigeria's libations are in blood. Its road is an untraveled one, but the monster is ancient and sleeping and awakened by the blood, taking the society into a new era of terror- "our road as changing. Nothing was what it seemed anymore" (428). The whole incident is dominated by Okri's perceptions of strangeness and change, by the acceptance of the power of the old man, whose predictions are not contested.

Simultaneously, however, the car ritual in *The Famished Road* is pervaded by Okri's consciousness of the changing times and the fidelity of the libations in the face of the evil with which the society is about to be overtaken.

### **Satirical Magic Realism in Ngugi Wa thiongo's *Wizard of the Crow***

*Wizard of the Crow* is an ambitious, magisterial, comic novel set in the fictional Free Republic of Aburiria. Ngugi demonstrates his use of satirical magic realism; here character representation exceeds the limits of conventional realism. Ngugi Wa Thiongo mocks leadership in Africa through manipulations of the realistic mode, which helps effectively in representing political issues in Africa. The work is critical, insightful and inspiring. Describing the fictional place Ngugi writes:

In Aburiria, wild animals were becoming rare because of dwindling forests and poaching, and tourist pictures of beggars or children with kwashiorkor and flies massing around their runny noses and sore eye were prized for their authenticity. If there were no beggars in the streets, tourists might start doubting whether Aburiria was an authentic African country (35).

This is the state of most African countries where the poor get poorer and the rich get richer. The streets are filthy and filled with beggars in rags. There is no hiding that Aburiria is probably a parody of sorts of Kenya and the "The Ruler" of Aburiria is Moi. Aburiria is an absurdly bureaucratic and oppressive post-colonial state. The protagonist of the novel is Kamiti, who ostensible is the *Wizard of the Crow*. Folded into this spoof on modern day political corruption is the magical love story of Kamiti and Nyawira, who inadvertently become the oracle of hope amidst ongoing authoritarian oppression.

In the opening pages one is exposed to the insatiability of African leaders. They cling to the throne as if it is their birthright, hear Ngugi in Page five:

"He sat on the throne so long that even he could not remember when his reign began. His rule had no beginning and no end... children had been born and had given birth to others and those others to other and so on, and his rule had survived all the generation" (5).

Here Ngugi distorts time, which is one of the major characteristics of magic realism. This is done to show that African leaders see leadership as a birth right. They impose themselves on the masses. They become life presidents and dictators. This is a very sad development. One can imagine a rule that has no beginning and no end.

Again, Ngugi defies time by telling the reader that the date of the Ruler's birthday was a subject of heated debate in the parliament thus:

"The date of his birth and the manner of its celebration had been subject of a heated debate in the parliament that went on for seven months, seven days, seven hours and seven minutes..." (12).

One can imagine debating a birthday date and celebration for seven months. Are there no better things to talk about, such as the level of poverty in Aburiria? Devoting so much time to a birthday date and celebration is unpatriotic. Today in Africa the house of reps devote so

much time in looking into things that will be of no benefit to the common masses. They sit for hours discussing irrelevant matters.

The reader is opened to the paragraph where he is presented with a special birthday cake which the entire country had made for the ruler:

That particular year the stadium was almost full because the curiosity of the citizens had been aroused by a special announcement, repeated over and over in the media, that there would be a special birthday cake, which the entire country had made for the Ruler and which he might make multiply and feed the multitude the way Jesus Christ once did with just five loaves and two fishes. The prospects of cakes for the multitude may explain the more than usual presence of victims of kwashiorkor (12).

It is said that individual can cook for a community but a community cannot cook for an individual. One begins to doubt the reality of this cake. The cake incident brings to light the fact that the citizens are hungry and poor. No wonder the glaring image of “victims of kwashiorkor”. In the pages that follow, an amazing project is announced in the occasion of the ruler’s birthday. Aburiria is launching the “Heaven Scrape program” or “marching to heaven” as it is informally called a construction project based on the biblical towers of Babel.

The resulting aims to reach heavens and allow the ruler converse directly to God:

The whole country, the minister of foreign affairs was saying that the entire Aburirian populace, had decided unanimously to erect a building such as had never been attempted in the history except once by the children of Israel, and even they had failed miserably to complete the house of Babel. Aburiria would now do what the Israelites could not do: raise a building to the very gates of heaven so that the Ruler could call on God daily to say good morning and good evening or simply how was your day today, God? (6).

One begins to wonder how the Ruler will ascend such a large tower. Fortunately a sycophantic minister has a solution. Aburiria will build a personal spaceship so that the ruler can pilot to reach the heavenly gates:

He suggested that another committee under his chairmanship be set up to explore the possibilities for the construction of a space luxury liner called the Ruler’s Angel... something simpler bigger than the one the Americans had once launched to Mars, to be called Star Rover or simply Rock Rover in Heaven. Armed with personal spaceship, the only leader in the whole world to possess one, Ruler would make pleasure trips wherever and whenever he fancied, hopping from planet to planet... (18-19).

This is a satire on African leaders who surround themselves with nothing but sycophants who weave white elephant project. Meanwhile, the elites are left behind the scene. They are either languishing in prison or ex convicts. The free republic of Aburiria is neither free nor a republic and its very name is an assertion of a myth. The Ruler announces a new kind of democracy in which he is the head of every party. Crooks are appointed as upholders of the law and their criminality praised as a virtue. One is exposed to characters like Machokali who went to a London hospital:

Not because he was ill but because he wanted to have his eyes enlarged, to make them ferociously sharp...so that they would be able to spot the enemies of the Ruler no matter how far their hiding places. Enlarged the size of electric bulbs his eyes were now the most prominent feature of his face, dwarfing his nose, cheeks and forehead. The Ruler so touched by his devotion and public expression of loyalty that even

before the MP returned home from England the Ruler had given him the Ministry of Foreign Affairs... (12).

Another sycophant who heard of the good fortune that befell Machokali followed suit:

He did not have much money, so he secretly sold his father's plot and borrowed the rest to buy himself a flight to France and a hospital bed in Paris, where he had his ears enlarged so that, as he also put it in press statement, he would be able to hear better and therefore be privy to the most private of conversations between husband and wife, children and their parents, students and teachers...All in service of the Ruler. His ears were large than a rabbit's and always primed to detect danger at any time from any direction (14).

Benjamin Mambo equally toed the footsteps of Machokali and Sikiokuu. As a young man Mambo has failed to get into the army because he was small, the only avenue that will earn him the minister of defense was elongating his tongue:

"He chose to have his tongue elongated so that in echoing the Ruler's command his words would reach every soldier in the country...and the tongue, like a dog's now hung out way beyond his lips rendering speech impossible" (14-15).

Indeed, Ngugi uses magical realism as an effective platform for political discourse. It reaches into the essence of abusive governments, which are based in every case on an imposed fantasy, on a subjugation of real in favour of the Ruler's imagination. In the novel there isn't much difference between the lies published every day in the newspapers and the attempt to build a tower of Babel. In the midst of this turmoil, a mysterious figure arises, sorcerer known as the wizard of crow. His real name is Kamiti Wa Karimiri. He struggled as an unsuccessful job seeker reduced to beggary but in his new guise gradually gain acclaim as one of the most powerful and respected people in the country. But it is not a fraud, The wizard of the crow discovers, even to his own surprises that he has genuine divine powers. He can cure ailments, predict the future and even transfer his spirit to the body of a bird:

"He could not tell whether he was in a temporary coma or deep sleep, but when a slight breeze blew it lifted him out of himself to the sky where he now floated...This is really funny, he said to himself when he saw that he looked like a bird and floated like a bird; ne enjoyed the rush of cold air against his wings" (38).

Like a magic realist Ngugi refused to explain to us this mystery of a man leaving his body and becoming a bird. Ngugi carries on his story as if it was a normal happening. Kamiti sets up a shrine where he is assisted by Nyawira, a leader of an underground movement seeking change and stirring up riots. For Kamiti individual transformation through spirit reality is very important while Nyawira aims for widespread social change through group action. But this is perhaps the kind of marriage required to transform Aburiria. Over the course of the novel, the two rebels move close together, both ideological and emotionally, and manage to shake the foundation of the regime. Much of the novel is given over to political intrigue, and Ngugi shows endless enthusiasm in charting the rise and fall of various ministers and hangers on. In a built on backstabbing and abuse of power, those who rise up to the top, turn into targets for others even more ruthless. It's survival of the fittest, but in a kind of reverse revolution where the worst traits and action prevail.

Those half-dozen satirical story links to meet, merge and intertwine and one comic misadventure follows another. Nyawira becomes Aburiria's most wanted criminal; Kaniuru is promoted for his unparalleled ability to steal from the state; Tajarika takes a military base hostage with a bucket of shit; and the wizard of the crow travels to America, to treat a strange illness that befalls the ruler and becomes the key to all their futures.

The supernatural elements, which Ngugi uses in *Wizard of the Crow* is a blend of fantasy and magic realism. Kamiti's magic is sorcery like we might find in a fantasy novel, with regimented rules and limitations, but he lives in a magic-realist world, with neither rhyme nor reason to its supernatural. Though Kamiti is only masquerading as a wizard, he is gifted with a divine ability to smell a person's true character. He says "there are times when the foul and fresh appear to struggle for the right of passage into my nostrils, like evil and good spirits fighting for the dominations of soul" (59).

The novel contains a recipe of ingredients which makes the experience of reading it a kind of phantasmagoric dream. *The Wizard of the Crow* reminds us that magic realism is not just a story telling device but a tool of oppression. Ngugi mocks national leadership in Africa and elsewhere through manipulations of the realistic mode, which has also been very effective in representing political issues in Africa.

### Conclusion

So far this paper has strived to argue that Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, is a magic realist's attempt at a critical presentation of the oddities of life in the author's contemporary society. Okri believes that his works are true portrayals of his society. His works imbibe the basic principles of magic realism as a literary genre that has the capacity to enrich ideas of what is 'real' by incorporating all dimensions of the imagination, particularly as expressed in magic myth and religion.

Ngugi in *Wizard of the Crow* satirizes leadership in Africa through the manipulation of the realistic mode. He uses magical realism to bring to light the greed, idiocy and sycophancy of our leaders. The two works therefore are testimonies of the fact that magic realism is not primitive or a term to be done away with. It is a vital device to the writer who knows how to manipulate reality.

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